Romantic Love in Heterosexual Relationships:  
Women’s Experiences

Gabriele Schäfer

School of Social Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Private Bag 92006, 
1020 Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: 64-9-9219999 Ext. 8410; Fax: 64-9-9219598;  
E-mail: gabriele.schaefer@aut.ac.nz

KEYWORDS Romantic love; qualitative research; intimacy; commitment; heterosexual relationships; 
power

ABSTRACT Narratives of romantic love pervade Western culture. However, the complexity of the 
lived experience of romantic love is not reflected in many of these. Qualitative research that addresses 
this complexity is largely absent in the psychological and anthropological literature. My research is an 
attempt to redress this oversight. Utilizing a qualitative framework and individual in-depth, semi- 
structured interviews with eight heterosexual women of European descent, it examines women’s lived 
experiences of romantic love. The findings are discussed in the context of a broad range of academic 
theories and research on romantic love. My results indicate that romantic love has affected women in 
both positive and negative ways, and that the interviewed women were far more ambivalent about 
romantic love than popular culture would have us believe.