



## The Swedish Theory of Love Discussion Guide

Director: Erik Gandini

Year: 2015

Time: 90 min

### You might know this director from:

Videocracy (2009)

Gitmo (2005)

Surplus: Terrorized Into Being Consumers (2003)

## FILM SUMMARY

As of 2016, 9.9 million people call the country of Sweden home and 86% of those people live in cities. In 2015 alone, the population grew by another 103,662 people thanks to ever increasing migration. And there is a reason for this: migration. The country is seen from the outside as an ultra modern, forward-thinking utopia with nearly free healthcare, 480 days of parental leave, and 52 percent of its energy coming from renewables. Yet there is more to Sweden than meets the eye from the outside. In 1972 Swedish politicians wrote the radical manifesto “The Family of the Future: A Socialist Family Policy” which arguably has shifted the country’s core values about one’s self, family, and our place in society by emphasizing equality, autonomy, and self-sustainability above all else.

With THE SWEDISH THEORY OF LOVE, director Erik Gandini sets out to examine this cultural shift by taking up the question: Has all this state promoted individualism unintentionally fostered a deep-seated sense of loneliness amongst its citizens? One-quarter of Swedes now die alone, yet despite this rather grim central fact, Gandini keeps it light. He visits sperm banks whose biggest customers are strong single women, and talks to overly friendly hippies in the Nordic woodlands. Yet, the mood settles as we meet with a Swedish doctor who has abandoned his homeland to work in the tight-knit communities of Ethiopia and a team of social workers who track down the relatives of the recently deceased.

Is Sweden—a nation built upon an ideology of collectivist semi-socialism—secretly a hyperindividualist country? THE SWEDISH THEORY OF LOVE aims to parse this very question with humor, humanity, and a handful of startling statistics.

## FILM THEMES

With dry humor and swaths of statistical data, director Erik Gandini paints a portrait of the Swedish utopia that isn't as rosy as it may at first appear.

### THE NUCLEAR FAMILY IS NO MORE

Gandini's film begins in one of the many sperm banks that provide single women the opportunity to become pregnant without the need for a partner. It's becoming increasingly common for single woman in Sweden to long to start a family without wanting the burdens and semi-permanence of romantic and sexual partnership. With financial self-sufficiency and gratifying solitude in one's singleness, why not?

### INDIVIDUALISM CAN LEAD TO LONELINESS

In the 1970s, the Swedish government promoted a manifesto titled "The Family of the Future," calling for a shift away from traditional households toward personal independence. Today, that trend has resulted in a society in which 47.5 percent of households consist of a single adult with no children, while 1 in 10 deceased citizens of Stockholm are now laid to rest with no family or friends present at all.

### CULTURAL INDIVIDUALISM SACRIFICES COMMUNITY VALUES

In the film, Gandini contrasts the sterile existence of "perfect" modern Sweden with that of a field hospital in Ethiopia and a doctor who long ago abandoned his cozy, lavish life in Sweden. As a doctor, he could be making a significant amount of money, pampering himself and those he loves. Instead he feels that living with those who desperately need medical attention, but cherish the social aspects of living that they share together as part of the community, is invaluable. Gandini makes it seem as though many Swedes only leave their house for food or to partake in group activities like watching their kids play sports or joining a social weekend searching for missing persons.

### HAPPINESS IS NOT HAVING A PROBLEM-FREE LIFE

At one point the film presents a chart depicting the types of worries people in certain areas of the globe deal with. Tellingly, there are no parts of this chart that depict a worry-free portion of society. Everyone has problems, but as the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman states, this is not a problem. A key to happiness, and what makes life emotionally fulfilling, is confronting and overcoming problems. Without some form of strife, we would all be somewhat miserable.

**“Love is something far more than desire for sexual intercourse; it is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their lives.”**

Bertrand Russell

**“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”**

Kurt Vonnegut



## FILM FACTS:

- Erik Gandini's film was an official selection of IDFA, the largest documentary festival in the world, and CPH:DOX, where it won the Politiken Audience Award.
- In 2014, 47.5 percent of Swedish households consisted of a single adult with no children, by far the highest percentage of single households in Europe.
- THE SWEDISH THEORY OF LOVE was partially based on the arguments made by Lars Tragardh and Henrik Berggren in their 2006 book "Is the Swede a Human Being?," which contends that Swedes are the opposite of collectivists: they are deeply individualistic.
- In 2015, Sweden grew by 103,662 people, a record mainly due to immigration. Contrastingly, from 1850 to the 1930s, only 1.5 million people emigrated.
- At opposite poles of the Modernity and Individualism vs. Traditional Values scale lies Survival vs. Self Expression Values and Traditional vs. Secular-Rational Values. Sweden rests at the extremes of Self Expression and Secular-Rational Values.
- When modern medical supplies are unavailable, doctors in Ethiopia make due with common household items like bicycle spokes, plumping clamps, hair clips, zip ties, and power drills, as is evidenced by the film.
- "The Family of the Future," the 1972 manifesto that set this Swedish cultural shift of independence in motion, hoped to untether women from men, the old from the young, and teens from their parents.
- While having gained notoriety on the film festival circuit with documentaries like "Gitmo" (2005) and "Surplus: Terrorized into Being Consumers" (2003), it was the Sheffield Doc/Fest Grand Jury Award winner "Videocracy" (2009) that really put Erik Gandini on the map.
- The head of the largest sperm bank in Denmark started his company by performing his own experiments at home, freezing his sperm, and storing it in his and his parent's freezers.
- Half of the customers from this aforementioned Danish sperm bank are Swedish women.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film! Others would surely love to see from a Swedish perspective.
2. **Read** Lars Tragardh and Henrik Berggren's 2006 book "Is the Swede a Human Being?," from which THE SWEDISH THEORY OF LOVE took much inspiration.
3. **Take part** in your community! Get out of your house and take advantage of the many social activities your community has to offer.
4. **Donate** time to help support new immigrants in your community. With an increase in migrants around the globe, there are plenty of people in need of a helping hand.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**