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## INTIMACY TRANSFORMED? PERCEPTIONS OF LOVE, INTIMACY AND PARTNERSHIP AMONG ON-LINE DATERS IN SLOVENIA

*Tina KOGOVŠEK*

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
e-mail: tina.kogovsek@guest.arnes.si

*Alenka ŠVAB*

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities Koper, Titov trg 5, 6000 Koper, Slovenia  
e-mail: alenka.svab1@guest.arnes.si

*Roman KUJAR*

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
The Peace Institute – Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, Metelkova 6, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
e-mail: roman.kuhar1@guest.arnes.si

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates attitudes of internet daters in Slovenia on relationships, love and monogamy. Assuming that internet daters represent the so-called »dating avant-garde«, significance of gender and sexual orientation in predicting the internet daters' attitudes on the key concepts in Giddens' theory of transformation of intimacy were tested. Internet daters' attitudes are not as »revolutionary« as originally assumed. The long-term emotionally and sexually exclusive relationship remains the norm, although a higher acceptance of mutually agreed open relationships was found among homosexuals. Despite the fact that internet daters aim at »traditional types« of relationships, these are not based on traditional ideas of romantic love, but rather on the postulates of confluent love. In this sense internet daters in very general terms hold views in accordance with the theory of transformation of intimacy.*

**Key words:** intimacy, love, partnerships, internet, internet dating, attitudes, heterosexuals, homosexuals

## TRASFORMAZIONE DELL'INTIMITÀ? PERCEZIONI DI AMORE, INTIMITÀ E RAPPORTI DI COPPIA TRA UTILIZZATORI DI PORTALI INTERNET PER LA CONOSCENZA DI PARTNER IN SLOVENIA

### SINTESI

*L'articolo presenta i risultati di uno studio sugli atteggiamenti di alcuni utilizzatori di portali Internet per la conoscenza di partner in Slovenia per quanto riguarda i rapporti di coppia, l'amore e la monogamia. Lo studio si basa sul presupposto per cui gli utilizzatori di tali portali costituiscono un'avanguardia, per questa ragione gli autori hanno inteso controllare l'influenza esercitata dal sesso e dall'orientamento sessuale sugli atteggiamenti di tale gruppo, in riferimento alla teoria di Giddens della trasformazione dell'intimità. Gli atteggiamenti degli utilizzatori di portali Internet per la conoscenza di partner non sembrano essere così 'rivoluzionari' come ci si attendeva. Un rapporto di coppia stabile ed esclusivo tra due persone, dal punto di vista sia dell'emotività sia della sessualità, continua a essere la norma, anche se dei rapporti concordati e aperti tra partner sono considerati più accettabili tra gli omosessuali che tra gli eterosessuali. Benché gli utilizzatori di portali Internet per la conoscenza di partner desiderino »forme tradizionali« di rapporti di coppia, il fondamento di questi ultimi non è costituito dagli ideali dell'amore romantico, ma dai postulati dell'amore confluyente. In questo senso, i loro atteggiamenti si accordano in termini molto generali con la teoria della trasformazione dell'intimità.*

**Parole chiave:** intimità, rapporto di coppia, amore, internet, internet dating, atteggiamenti, eterosessuali, omosessuale

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing popularity of internet dating – i.e. using internet dating sites for meeting potential sexual or romantic partners – creates an impression that technology has finally succeeded in conquering human intimacy and has become its constitutive element. However, a brief look at the history of dating shows that technology has played an important role in dating activities from the early twentieth century on. As reported by Lawson and Leck (2006) in the USA a practice of organizing private face to face interactions for romantic activities at scheduled times and places emerged in the 1920s among middle class teenagers. »These practices developed alongside new technologies such as telephones, automobiles, and drive-in theatres, which allowed teenagers to become more independent from their parents.« (Lawson, Leck, 2006, 190). Later paper and magazine personals emerged, followed by telephone and video dating ads, personals on TV and Teletext and so forth (Hardey, 2002). Technology has been used as a mediator in romantic and sexual endeavours long before the rapid spread of the internet and its broad availability in the nineties significantly changed the relations between public and private. While internet dating is in many ways reminiscent of the old-fashioned newspaper personals, important specifics can be outlined. Several authors (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2006; Baker, 2005; Brym, Lenton, 2001; Uslaner, 2004; Kuhar et al., 2010) report that the wide circulation of internet dating abolished stigma once attached to those who were (desperately?) using newspaper ads for meeting a potential partner. Furthermore, internet dating – unlike the »old« technological mediators – broadened the marital and partnership markets, which include people who are generally outside one's social networks in real life due to spatial, social, cultural and other reasons. In such a way normative pressures, steaming from these social networks, become less important and enable people to explore new areas of sexuality and intimacy with a greater extent of anonymity and privacy (Barraket, Henry-Waring, 2008) and avoiding social stigma.

However, internet dating has also become a »mainstream« activity, which does not necessarily supersede non-virtual dating, but exists alongside off-line (traditional) marital and partnership markets. Internet also functions as a *supporting* marital and partnership market for possible later off-line dating as a lot of internet daters date on-line with the intention to find partners for a future intimate relationship.

As the internet is a specific medium of communication (i.e. computer-mediated communication), this also affects the process of searching for, contacting and communicating with potential intimate partners in on-line and (eventually) off-line settings (e.g., Walther,

1992; 1996; Merkle, Richardson, 2000; Turkle, 1995). It therefore creates a new social context in which intimate partnerships are perceived, created and sustained. It also creates new meanings of partnership itself and its various aspects, such as intimacy, sexuality, trust, fidelity and so on. The phenomenon of internet and computer-mediated partnerships should be understood in the context of broader processes such as globalization and individualization. In such a way internet dating is also a constitutive element of late-modern transformations of intimacy and sexuality (Giddens, 2000).

In the past few decades important changes have taken place in the domain of the social organisation of *intimacy* and *sexuality*, and wider in inter-gender relationships (e.g., Bauman, 1998; 2003; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2006; Giddens, 2000; Schmidt, 1995; 1998; Weeks, 1995). In the sphere of partnership and sexuality changes are shown in the emergence of a new type of partner relationships, *pure relationships*, a new type of love, *confluent love*, and a new type of sexuality, *plastic sexuality* (Giddens, 2000). While modern partnerships, love and sexuality have been characterised by the hierarchical sexual organisation and heteronormativity, their late-modern versions are typically based on partner equality. Furthermore, late-modern partnerships are not limited to heterosexuality and are no longer grounded in the institution of marriage (Weeks, 1995). According to Giddens, the »changes taking place do not only announce the transformation of intimacy, but also a new way of creating intimacy« (Giddens, 1998, 118). In late modernity, privacy has become ever more defined from 'within', by the individuals who live in it, rather than by social norms, values etc. Giddens (2000) believes that a pure relationship no longer depends on external conditions of social or economic worlds, but is instead free-floating.

Similar changes and transformations can be traced also in the sphere of sexuality. Through the phenomenon of plastic sexuality, sexuality is experiencing its final separation from reproduction (Giddens, 2000) which, however, is not the only aspect of the »emancipation« of sexuality in post-modern Western societies. What seems to be a more important phenomenon is the isolation of sex from other spheres of life. Sex is expected to be »self-sustaining« and self-sufficient, to »stand on its own feet«, and to be appraised according to the satisfaction it is supposed to bring (Bauman, 2003, 45).

The aim of this article is to test the key concepts transformation of intimacy theory, i.e. to investigate whether internet daters are a population whose perceptions and attitudes toward intimate relationships and sexuality are in accordance with Giddens' theory of transformation of intimacy. We predict that the new technology (internet) and the on-line marital and partnership markets as a new social place for meeting potential intimate partners, established by the internet dat-

ing sites, are attracting primarily the so-called »dating avant-garde«, which is the bearer of the late modern changes in intimacy and sexuality (cf. Giddens, 2000). Our assumption is that internet daters hold progressive views regarding love, partnerships and intimacy, i.e. views which are characteristic for the model of pure relationships. However, it should be stressed that since there is no data available on changes in the sphere of intimacy in general population in Slovenia, direct comparisons are not possible.<sup>1</sup> Gross and Simmons (2002) tested some aspects of Giddens' theory of transformation of intimacy, but focused mainly on (negative psychological) side-effects of pure relationships.<sup>2</sup>

In the study we have focused on the internet daters' attitudes regarding the key concepts in the theory of transformation of intimacy, i.e. attitudes on (pure) relationships, decline of romantic love and monogamy (or openness of relationships). Following the main characteristics of the transformation of intimacy we furthermore expect to find differences in the views according to gender and sexual orientation. One of the key arguments in Giddens' theory of transformation of intimacy is that heterosexuality is no longer a standard by which everything else is judged (Giddens, 2000). In this context a new form of (pure) intimate relationship is characteristic of all partnerships, regardless of sexual orientation, although gays and lesbians are more likely to form pure relationships in comparison with heterosexuals as they are not affected as much as heterosexuals by the pressure of the traditional social expectations and norms regarding (heterosexual) partnership and marriage. In this respect, we expect that homosexuals hold more progressive views regarding relationships, love and monogamy. Furthermore we expect that heterosexual women, in comparison to heterosexual men, are more likely to strive for the pure relationship as women are seen by Giddens (2000) as the bearers of the transformation of intimacy.

#### METHODOLOGY AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The aim of the survey was to collect general data on the phenomenon of Internet dating in Slovenia, including data on the prevalence of internet dating, practices, dynamics and forms of using internet for dating. In addition we were interested in attitudes internet daters have

(measured by the Likert type scales) regarding on-line dating, intimate relationships, romantic love, fidelity, open relationships, sexuality and homosexuality, gender roles and family life, pornography, and sexual practices.<sup>3</sup>

#### Sample

The sample consists of respondents who use or used Internet dating web sites in Slovenia. The sampling was done through e-mail alerts and banners on the Internet dating sites. The questionnaire was available on-line from 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007 to 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007. 1,334 current or former internet daters participated in the study. Out of all respondents 86% filled in more than 90% of the questionnaire. Those who completed less than 90% of the questionnaire answered approximately 77% of the questions asked.

The sample consists of 40.3% male and 59.7% female respondents. 69.6% of respondents stated their sexual orientation was heterosexual, 13.7% homosexual and 11.2% bisexual. 5.5% respondents said that they were not sure what their sexual orientation was or that they could not decide upon it.

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) were between 21 and 30 years of age, followed by a little more than 20% who were aged between 31 and 40. These two age groups represent the majority of our respondents and the results primarily reflect the experiences and attitudes of these internet daters. The respondents had been using the internet for various periods of time: almost 40% were users for a year or less, 36% of respondents from one to three years and 24% had been using the internet for more than three years.

As Slovenia has no major urban centres – the capital has 350,000 inhabitants – it is difficult to talk about major differences between urban and rural centres. How the Internet reduces or perhaps sharpens these differences, remains to be researched. In our sample, 42% of respondents reside in urban centres, nearly 40% in small towns and 17% in rural areas.

The educational structure of the sample differs from the general population. In our sample the most outstanding group with respect to the education level is a group with higher or university education (nearly 27%), while 2002 Census showed that 12% of Slovenian population hold a university degree. Still, similarly as in

1 Changes in the sphere of intimacy and partnership in general population can be observed only through official statistical data which show a decline in marriage rates, increase in divorce rate, increase in cohabitation and the similar. Švab (2010) reports for female students who participated in a qualitative research on views regarding sexuality that they hold liberal views in accordance with permissive sexual culture and have reflexive demands for romantic relationships.

2 One of their hypothesis was that »people in pure love relationships are more likely to support egalitarian political arrangements« (Gross, Simmons, 2002, 542). Results show that being in a pure love relationship is positively associated with measure of political egalitarianism (Gross, Simmons, 2002, 548) which is relevant information also for our discussion.

3 All scales were tested in pilot study (in November 2006), carried out with an online questionnaire including nineteen sets of questions. The primary goal was to test the comprehensiveness, effectiveness and validity of the scales for the actual research.

the general population, there are nearly 51% of respondents who finished secondary school.

There are two large groups in our sample employment-wise: 48% of respondents were full-time or part-time employed, 40% of respondents were students. The remaining respondents were mostly unemployed or they did not provide information on their employment status. 17 respondents in our sample stated that they were retired.

As the questionnaire was intended for those who use Internet dating sites, one would expect that most of them are not in a relationship, looking for one. However, the sample consists of 53% of respondents who are momentarily not in a relationship and are looking for one – be it long term relationship or different kind of temporary relationships. The remaining respondents are in a relationship. They might be looking for contacts with other persons for different reasons or they participated in the study as those who used Internet dating sites (and have experiences in this field), but are not dating on-line at the moment. Our sample therefore consists of the »virtual internet dating community« regardless of whether one is a past or present member of this community.

### Method

The analysis was done by the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA). MCA (Andrews et al., 1973) is a multivariate method, by which relationships between multiple independent variables (or predictors) and dependent variables are analyzed. It is similar to multiple regression, with the advantage that nominal measurement level variables need not to be dichotomized.

Multiple classification analysis gives us the following information:

(1) the overall (grand) mean and group means of the dependent variable for each combination of categories of predictors;

(2) tests of significance of the whole model, the effects of single predictors as well as of interactions between them;

(3) the effect of each predictor is shown by parameter  $\beta$ , which tells us the effect of the predictor if other predictors are held constant; the rank order of  $\beta$ s shows us the relative importance of a single predictor in explaining the dependent variable;

(4) deviations from the grand mean of the dependent variable for each category of a predictor (i.e. how much would the grand mean of the dependent variable increase or decrease as a result of the effect of a certain predictor), and

(5) the percentage of explained variance for all predictors included in the analysis ( $R^2$ ).

In the analysis, the dependent composite variables, measured on a 5-point scale (1 - completely disagree; 5 - completely agree) were attitudes about relationships, love and monogamy (the key concepts in the theory of transformation of intimacy). The higher the value of the variable the more respondents agree relationships are difficult to sustain, the more they value romantic love and monogamy and the more they are open to occasional extramarital affairs.

Attitudes were measured by the following scales:

(1) *The scale of relationships*, measured by six items (e.g., Today it is difficult to sustain a relationship in the long run). The scale of relationships measured Internet daters' opinions regarding today's relationships. We focused primarily on negative aspects of relationships in the long run and obstacles that might be created by being in a relationship compared to being single or having short relationships etc.

(2) *The scale of (romantic) love*, measured by three items (e.g. Marriage is a confirmation of true love). With this scale we wanted to test the hypothesis that romantic love is in decline, being replaced by the so-called confluent love (Giddens, 2000), which is based on equality between partners. The scale is comprised of the views that include characteristics of romantic love. We presumed that both, heterosexuals and homosexuals, as Giddens would claim, do not agree with the ideas of romantic love as being characteristic of today's intimate relationships (especially regarding the duration of the relationships (temporality) and the connection of love with the institution of marriage).

(3) *The scale of monogamy*, measured by four items (e.g. An open relationship is only acceptable if both partners agree to it) and

(4) *The scale of extramarital affairs*, measured by two items (e.g. It is better for a relationship if one partner does not learn about other partner's cheatings).<sup>4</sup>

The scale of monogamy (split into two factors: monogamy and extramarital affairs) measured attitudes on monogamy and open relationships, which represent the type of relationships opposite to traditional, monogamous, long-lasting relationships of two persons of the opposite sex. Attitudes on monogamy were measured in connection with the issues of exclusivity of partnership relation and in connection with sincerity, if the transgression of the rule of exclusivity occurs. Consisting of five items, the first three statements measured attitudes on exclusivity of sexual partners in a relationship, while the remaining two items measured attitudes on cheating.

4 Unidimensionality of all composite variables was tested by factor analysis. All items within a scale loaded on one factor except attitudes toward monogamy, which split into two factors, named here monogamy and extramarital affairs. Reliability of all composite variables was (with regard to the number of items in each scale) relatively high – Cronbach's Alphas were .78 (relationships), .63 (romantic love), .68 (monogamy) and .53 (extramarital affairs).

The effects of several predictors (independent variables) were tested. According to the theory on intimacy transformation the most important ones are gender and sexual orientation. However, to be sure that this is really the case, we included several possibly relevant control variables that could also be correlated with the tested attitudes: relationship status (being or not being in a relationship), religiosity and age. For instance, it could be expected that older respondents would agree more with monogamy and romantic love and would disagree about difficulty of sustaining relationships and having extramarital affairs. The same could be expected for religious people.

## RESULTS

In Table 1 results of several MCA analyses are presented. Since there is a relatively small sample for testing

the effects of all possible relevant predictors, two MCA analyses were done for each of the dependent variables. In the first model the predictors are gender, sexual orientation, relationship status and religiosity. In the second model religiosity was substituted by age and other three predictors are the same. All models as a whole are statistically significant at  $p < .001$ . In the models 5 to 14% of variance is explained by the predictors included in the models.

If we look at the results more broadly, it can be seen that gender and sexual orientation have a statistically significant effect in all cases, but they are not in all cases the strongest predictors (see  $\beta$ s in table 1). It seems that how strong the effect of these two predictors is is mediated by the dependent variable we study and other predictors included in the models. For instance, in attitudes on the difficulty of sustaining a relationship, relationship status and age seem to be more important than gender

**Table 1: MCA coefficients for attitudes on relationships, romantic love, monogamy and extramarital affairs.**

**Tabela 1: Rezultati multiple klasifikacijske analize za stališča do zvez, romantične ljubezni, monogamije in varanja.**

		Relationships				Romantic Love				Monogamy				Extramarital affairs						
		Grand mean = 2.57				Grand mean = 2.16				Grand mean = 3.28				Grand mean = 2.68						
	N	multivariate				N	multivariate				N	multivariate				N	multivariate			
			$\beta$	devia- tion			$\beta$	devia- tion			$\beta$	devia- tion			$\beta$	devia- tion				
GENDER		**				***				***				***						
male	510			.09	510			.14	504			-.10	511			.24				
female	743		.099	-.06	743		.136	-.09	735		.101	.07	738		.198	-.17				
SEX. ORIENTATION		**				***				***				*						
heterosexual	916			.002	924			.08	915			.12	923			.01				
homosexual	183			-.13	182			-.29	181			-.31	181			-.20				
bisexual	145		.093	.14	147		.171	-.15	143		.255	-.41	145		.093	.16				
RELATIONSHIP STATUS		***								***										
yes	594			-.14	596			.002	586			-.10	591			.04				
no	650		.186	.13	657		.002	-.002	653		.119	.09	658		.042	-.04				
RELIGIOSITY						***				***				*						
religious	319			-.07	320			.38	316			.18	320			-.13				
cannot say	395			.03	401			-.02	393			-.08	397			.05				
not religious	530		.057	.02	532		.287	-.21	530		.177	-.16	532		.072	.04				
MODEL 1: multiple R <sup>2</sup>		.054					.129				.141				.046					

GENDER		**				***				**				***						
male	512			.07	512		.15		506			-.08	513			.17				
female	735		.077	-.05	744		.154	-.11	736		.081	.05	739		.146	-.12				
SEX. ORIENTATION		*				***				***				*						
heterosexual	918			-.002	926		.10		917			.14	925			-.003				
homosexual	183			-.09	182		-.39		181			-.38	181			-.11				
bisexual	146		.079	.13	148		.210	-.13	144		.281	-.41	146		.068	.15				
RELATIONSHIP STATUS		***								***										
yes	594			-.14	596		.001		586			-.10	591			.04				
no	653		.185	.13	660		.001	-.001	656		.115	.09	661		.035	-.03				
AGE		***				**				***				***						
≤ 30	755			-.06	766		.06		753			.07	761			-.20				
31+	492		.100	.09	490		.091	-.09	489		.110	-.11	491		.249	.31				
MODEL 2: multiple R <sup>2</sup>			.059				.056				.122				.099					

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*  $p < 0.05$

and sexual orientation. Regarding attitudes on romantic love and monogamy, religiosity also plays a very important role and regarding having extramarital affairs age seems to be the most important predictor.

The multiple classification analysis showed that attitudes on relationships and the potential difficulty of sustaining a relationship depend primarily on the relationship status. Being (or not) in a relationship is the most important predictor in both models. It is interesting that respondents who are in a relationship perceive relationships as not so difficult to sustain, compared to those respondents who are not in a relationship. In the first model gender and sexual orientation are the next two most important predictors of the attitudes on relationships. Males, heterosexuals and bisexuals perceive relationships as difficult to sustain, but if religiosity, which does not seem to be an important predictor in this case, is replaced in the model by age, the latter comes out as the second most important predictor. With older respondents the average slightly increases, which means they perceive to a larger degree that relationships are difficult to sustain, compared to younger respondents.

With regard to the attitudes on romantic love and monogamy sexual orientation and religiosity seem to be the most important predictors. Heterosexual and religious respondents tend to be more in favor of these two concepts compared to homosexual and bisexual and non-religious and religiously unsure respondents. However, if religion is replaced by age in the model, gender becomes more important regarding romantic love (males tend to value it more) and relationship status regarding monogamy (those who are not in a relationship value it more).

Gender and sexual orientation are the most important predictors of attitudes on extramarital affairs in the first model. Females and homosexuals are less in favor of extramarital affairs compared to males, heterosexuals and bisexuals. If religion is replaced by age in the model, the latter comes out as the most important predictor and gender the second most important. Younger respondents are less open to extramarital affairs than older ones.

## DISCUSSION

As internet dating is a relatively new phenomenon we expected that those who are using this technology as a means of finding potential sexual or romantic partners, represent a »dating avant-garde«, a group of people,

who are seen by Giddens as the bearers of the late-modern changes in intimacy. Furthermore we expected that internet daters also hold progressive and permissive attitudes about love, partnership and intimacy which correspond to the Giddens' theory on late-modern intimacy transformation – the latter being true especially for homosexuals who are not under pressure of the social expectations about partnerships and marriage.<sup>5</sup> However a brief look at the respondents' standpoints on romantic love, monogamy and relationships reveal that their views are not as revolutionary and extreme as one might assume.

Both MCA models implied that attitudes towards relationships are best explained by one's partnership status rather than gender or sexual orientation. Those who were not in a relationship held more negative attitudes towards relationships in general. The »negative attitudes« might be linked to their expectations or fears that it is hard to sustain relationships; that relationships sooner or later tend to become a routine and that they take away personal freedom. There are at least two possible explanations for these. On the one hand such »negative« perceptions of relationships (i.e. relationships demand (too much) work, they are difficult to sustain, individuals are themselves responsible for a »successful« relationship etc.), can be traced to numerous representations in popular culture, where one's individualism, independence and freedom are highly valued and appreciated (the sex-in-the-city syndrome). It can be assumed that such imagery has its effect on people's standpoints and expectations, albeit limited. In this context, age – which also figures as a relatively important predictor – can also be explained. Younger people (from 21 to 30 years of age), who have less real life experiences in relationships and are primary consumers of popular culture products, express more negative attitudes towards relationships. These attitudes are congruent with the images created by mainstream popular culture. However, it cannot be unconditionally claimed that these representations are turning people away from wishing to be in a relationship – after all, our respondents used the internet to search for a relationship online – be it romantic or sexual. Interestingly enough those who seek sexual engagement online (one night stand, swinging, sexual partners (the so-called »fuck buddy«) etc.) held more positive attitudes on relationships compared to those who are looking for a romantic partnership.<sup>6</sup>

5 This is not to say that gays and lesbians in Slovenia face no social coercion; in everyday life they are faced with homophobia and heteronormativity which affects also their partnerships (cf. Švab, Kuhar, 2005).

6 A paired-sample t-test was performed, comparing those who meet people on-line in order to form a relationship, and those who meet them for sexual activities. Results are not presented here, but are available from the authors on request.

The negative attitudes could also be related to the respondents' previous experiences with relationships. Those who are not in a relationship might express more negative attitudes towards relationships precisely owing to their previous negative experiences. Age can also be a factor here. Younger people might have more idealistic expectations about relationships which dissolve once they enter into their first relationship; the incongruence between the expected and the experienced can result in holding more negative attitudes towards relationships.

Although there are some minor differences in attitudes towards relationships among men and women in our sample and among heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals, the proportionally largest share of our respondents nevertheless believe that it is not difficult to sustain a relationship in the long-run (44%). They do not believe that partnerships represent an obstacle to personal freedom (68%) and that it is difficult to be in a relationship (72%). Still, the majority (58%) states that people have too high expectations about relationships today. They also give priority to long-term relationships in comparison to short adventures (70%).

While heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual men and women hold similar attitudes towards relationships in general, they differ in their perceptions and understandings of love. Most generally one could say that religious heterosexual men hold the most traditional (i.e. romantic as opposed to confluent) views regarding love.

The first MCA model implied that religiosity is the strongest predictor of the attitudes towards romantic love. The latter was measured through statements that the only true love is the one which lasts forever, that marriage is a confirmation of one's true love and that partnership can be successful only if partners get married. Both MCA models also outlined sexual orientation as an important predictor of the views towards romantic love.

As religiosity is typically linked to traditional values, it is not surprising that those who express religious beliefs also hold more traditional views on love and marriage. Religious teaching – in Slovenia the predominant religion is Roman Catholic – is based on the inseparability of marriage as a holy institution. Furthermore, marriage is considered to be the final confirmation of one's romantic relationship, which is based on the expectation that love will last forever. Although official statistics clearly run against such expectations – there is a trend of increase in divorce rates and marriage is losing its social significance in favour of informal cohabitations and other forms of intimate relationships, such as LAT relationships (living-apart-together) – it seems that at least for some people such interpretations remain the mode of life they ideally wish for themselves. These views are not reinforced only by religious institutions but also by popular culture and traditional cultural norms. The latter, as expected, have no real effect on the homosexual

community. Despite the fact that gay marriage is on the top of the political agenda of the gay and lesbian movement (also in Slovenia), the cultural normative expectations for same-sex couples do not exist and therefore do not represent a cultural pressure, which would affect gay and lesbian partnerships. These partnerships are faced with a different »pressure« – that of heteronormativity. Nevertheless – as shown in our research – homosexuals (and bisexuals) can be seen as the bearers of the new, non-traditional concept of love, which Giddens calls »confluent love« (based on equality and not limited to heterosexual population). Confluent love is an opposite to romantic love (based on traditional patriarchal gender relations, presupposing emotional equality with material gender inequality).

Furthermore, women are bearers of these changes to a greater extent than men as the latter on average hold more traditional attitudes on romantic love than the former. There is also a statistically significant difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals in their attitudes towards romantic love. Heterosexuals in general hold more traditional views on romantic love while homosexuals do not see love forever as the objective they would strive for. They also do not relate it to the institution of marriage. The latter is also increasingly true for heterosexuals. The majority of heterosexuals (88%) and homosexuals (92%) namely disagree that marriage is a necessary condition for a successful relationship, which is also an indicator of a decline in the social importance of the institution of marriage in Western countries as well as in Slovenia. Nevertheless, it seems that for heterosexuals the institution of marriage still has some (romantic) meaning, while for homosexuals it has practically no meaning in romantic terms – also owing to the fact that marriage was never open for homosexuals in Slovenia. The latter was also confirmed in the research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005) in which a majority of gays and lesbians surveyed reported they would not marry (if this institution was available for them) for romantic, but rather for practical reasons (inheritance rights, social and economic rights, health issues etc.). Such an approach to marriage and love is to a large degree shared by our respondents – almost half of them disagree that the only true love is the one that lasts forever. Today's relationships are viewed by them as temporary, with the assumption that the relationship might end at some point in the individual's life course.

To a certain extent views regarding romantic love are reflected also in our respondents' attitudes towards monogamy and extramarital affairs. Most heterosexuals in our sample hold traditional views on relationships – for a majority of them (76%) there is only one type of true partnership – a monogamous relationship between two individuals. For these reasons, having extramarital (sexual) relationships is not acceptable for most of them

(66%). Similarly, most of them (60%) do not believe that extramarital (sexual) connections are helpful in maintaining the primary relationship. While fidelity seems to be of a high value for heterosexual respondents, they have less clear standpoints on the »nature« of fidelity. While most of them (46%) believe that people are monogamous by nature, there is a considerable percentage of those who have doubts about it (30%) or do not agree at all (24%) with such a statement. This also explains the non-unified opinion on what to do if cheating – which for most of them (nearly 66%) is not acceptable – occurs. Proportionally the biggest percentage – over 41% – believes that it is better for a relationship if the partner does not learn about cheating, nearly 35% thinks the opposite, while nearly 24% cannot decide what is better. These data imply that despite the radical changes in the sphere of intimacy, monogamy remains the prevailing institution in views and practice.

While similar standpoints can be traced also in the homosexual and bisexual groups, there are some important differences in opinions on the exclusivity of the relationships. In the homosexual group there is a much clearer support for open relationships (78%) – where both partners agree with such an arrangement – than in the heterosexual group (58%). It seems that in the latter the concept of open relationship is to a much lesser extent a valid relationship option.

Both MCA models showed that sexual orientation is the strongest predictor when it comes to the attitudes towards monogamy. It is even more important than religiosity, which nevertheless plays a role in what one's attitudes on monogamy are. According to the American research (Christopher, Sprecher, 2000) permissive attitudes towards extramarital affairs are linked to higher education, lower religiosity, being male and being sexually permissive. The latter – sexual permissiveness – might be typical especially for male homosexuals, as previous research has shown (e.g., Kurdek, 1991) that in gay relationships there is generally a higher acceptance of non-monogamy compared to heterosexual or lesbian relationships. However, according to our research, this acceptance is linked to the reflexivity of such relationships. Non-monogamy is acceptable in the event an open relationship is considered by the partners as a valid option. Partners may be non-monogamous if such an arrangement is agreed upon beforehand. This also explains why sexual orientation is not the strongest predictor of internet daters' attitudes towards extramarital affairs. Although in the homosexual and bisexual groups extramarital affairs are acceptable to a higher degree (27% and 34% respectively) than in the heterosexual group (12%), generally all three groups are critical to-

wards it. It can be assumed that such »non-monogamy« is not acceptable for the gay and bisexual groups as it is considered as a deceit and not an agreed upon partnership arrangement. Age seems to be the strongest predictor here – younger people find extramarital affairs less acceptable (67% are against them) than older people (51%).

In conclusion, a long-term emotionally and sexually exclusive relationship between two persons remains the norm most of the heterosexual (and to a certain extent also homosexual and bisexual) respondents strive for. However, these respondents are also aware of the fact that exclusivity of the relationship is hard to maintain – although they do not appreciate extramarital liaisons (unless both partners agree to it) – they are well aware of the fact that such liaisons may occur and have a different opinion on what extent one should discuss it with his or her partner. In general extra-relationship contacts are more acceptable and more openly discussed in the homosexual group (47%), while the heterosexual group (35%) still seems to be under the pressure of the traditional (romantic) images of exclusive monogamous long-lasting relationship. Nevertheless there is one thing that stands out in the internet daters' attitudes: the fact that romantic love is being more and more replaced by the postulates of confluent love. Although monogamous and exclusive intimate relationships are the predominant form of intimate relationships internet daters (regardless of sexual orientation) strive for, such relationships are nevertheless different from the traditional understandings of intimate relationships. Perceptions of late-modern (pure) relationships are based on a new concept of love, i.e. confluent love, instead of its predecessor – romantic love, as presupposed by Giddens (2000).<sup>8</sup> In this sense it could be said that internet daters in very general terms nevertheless hold views in accordance with the characteristics presupposed by the theory of transformation of intimacy, although these views were not shown in our study as explicitly as we had assumed.

## CONCLUSION

The sample of internet daters in Slovenia turned out to be rather common in their attitudes on partnerships, romantic love and monogamy. Unlike our initial hypothesis that those who use internet dating sites might be the bearers of late-modern changes in intimacy (young people, literate in computer communication), their views generally do not express to a large degree explicitly progressive and late-modern positions which would not be found in the general public. It means that internet dating has become a mainstream activity, an

8 If romantic love is characterised by emotional equality and social inequality between partners and it presupposes marriage (heterosexuality) and eternal commitment, confluent (and reflexive) love is based on constant work on and reflection of (the meaning of) a relationship, equality between partners and is not limited to marriage and heterosexuality.



important marital market, where people meet, chat and date and it could be argued that they do not substantially differ in their attitudes from those who date in »traditional ways«. In fact, we believe that more or less same people occupy both markets. Internet has simply become just an additional space in the marital market. It means that differences in attitudes cannot be explained solely by the very fact that these people use the internet for dating, but rather through »classical« predictors such as religiosity, sexual orientation, gender and age as shown in our MCA models. Internet daters can be tradi-

tional or late-modern – it is not the fact that they are internet daters which would influence one or another, but rather other demographic factors and also cultural differences, which were not discussed in this article. In the context of the late-modern praise of individuality traditional cultural norms about love, marriage and relationships might be losing their power. Individuality offers choice – and one might choose either a »traditional pattern« or not. The cultural norms loosen, but traditional patterns are still floating around.

## PREOBRAZBA INTIMNOSTI? PERCEPCIJE LJUBEZNI, INTIMNOSTI IN PARTNERSTEV MED UPORABNIKI SPLETNIH PORTALOV ZA SPOZNAVANJE PARTNERJEV V SLOVENIJI

*Tina KOGOVŠEK*

Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
e-mail: tina.kogovsek@guest.arnes.si

*Alenka ŠVAB*

Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
Univerza na Primorskem, Fakulteta za humanistične študije Koper, Titov trg 5, 6000 Koper, Slovenija  
e-mail: alenka.svab1@guest.arnes.si

*Roman KUJAR*

Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
Mirovni inštitut – Inštitut za sodobne družbene in politične študije, Metelkova 6, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
e-mail: roman.kuhar1@guest.arnes.si

### POVZETEK

V zadnjih desetletjih so se zgodile pomembne spremembe v družbeni organizaciji intimnosti in seksualnosti. Teorija Anthonyja Giddensa o preobrazbi intimnosti jih povezuje z nastankom novih partnerskih razmerij (čista razmerja), novimi oblikami ljubezni (sotočna ljubezen) in z novimi oblikami seksualnosti (plastična seksualnost). Avtorji študije so predvidevali, da je omenjene spremembe mogoče zaznati tudi v novih oblikah spoznavanja partnerjev, povezanih z novimi tehnologijami, kakršna je uporaba spletnih portalov za spoznavanje potencialnih intimnih partnerjev. Domnevali so, da tisti, ki uporabljajo internet za spoznavanje potencialnih partnerjev in so s tem del spletnega maritalnega in partnerskega trga, v kontekstu zmenkov predstavljajo t. i. »avantgardo«, za katero bodo značilna postmoderna stališča, povezana s preobrazbo intimnosti. Glavni cilj študije je bil raziskati, ali uporabniki spletnih portalov za spoznavanje partnerjev v Sloveniji (N=1334) predstavljajo populacijo, katere stališča glede partnerskih zvez, ljubezni in seksualnosti so v skladu z Giddensovo teorijo. Za analizo je bila uporabljena metoda MCA (Multiple Classification Analysis), s katero so avtorji preverili, v kolikšni meri spol in spolna usmerjenost uporabnikov spletnih portalov za spoznavanje partnerjev vplivata na njihova stališča glede ključnih postavk teorije preobrazbe intimnosti. Poleg tega so v model MCA kot kontrolne spremenljivke vključili partnerski status, religioznost in starost.

Raziskava je pokazala, da stališča uporabnikov spletnih portalov za spoznavanje partnerjev glede (romantične) ljubezni, partnerstev in monogamije niso tako »revolucionarna«, kot so avtorji predvidevali. Zdi se, da je internet postal preprosto le dodatni vidik maritalnega trga, kar pomeni, da razlik med tistimi, ki so del tega trga, ne moremo pojasnjevati izključno na podlagi dejstva, da posamezniki uporabljajo spletne portale za spoznavanje potencialnih partnerjev. Stališča nam bolje pojasnijo »klasične« spremenljivke, kot so religioznost, spolna orientacija, partnerski status, spol, starost ipd. Dva modela MCA, ki sta bila uporabljena v analizi, sta pokazala, da stališča anketirancev glede partnerskih zvez najboljše pojasni posameznikov partnerski status, religioznost v največji meri napove posameznikova stališča glede romantične ljubezni, stališča glede monogamije pa se najbolj razlikujejo glede na spolno

usmerjenost posameznika. Ne glede na to je dolgotrajno čustveno in seksualno ekskluzivno partnersko razmerje med dvema oseba še vedno norma, h kateri teži večina anketirancev ne glede na spolno usmerjenost. Na splošno lahko rečemo, da so zunajpartnerska razmerja (dogovorne odprte zveze) bolj sprejemljiva v skupini homoseksualcev, ki s svojimi partnerji o tovrstnih zvezah tudi več razpravljajo, medtem ko se za heteroseksualce zdi, da so pod pritiskom tradicionalnih podob ekskluzivnih monogamnih dolgotrajnih partnerskih zvez. Kljub vsemu pa v stališčih uporabnikov spletnih portalov za iskanje potencialnih partnerjev izstopa dejstvo, da koncept romantične ljubezni vse bolj zamenjujejo postulat sotočne ljubezni. To pomeni, da so partnerske zveze, h katerim si prizadevajo, vseeno drugačne od tradicionalnega razumevanja intimnega partnerstva. V tem smislu lahko zaključimo, da so stališča uporabnikov spletnih portalov v zelo splošnih potezah v skladu s karakteristikami, ki jih predvideva teorija preobrazbe intimnosti, čeprav te niso tako eksplisitno vidne, kot so avtorji uvodoma domnevali.

**Ključne besede:** intimnost, partnerstvo, ljubezen, internet, spletni zmenki, stališča, heteroseksualci, homoseksualci

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