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Seeking for Love and Intimacy.
Emerging Adults, Mobile Dating Affordances and Dating Culture

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Table 1: Participants' Sexual Orientation Definitions

Definition	Abbreviation
Heterosexual	H
Lesbian	L
Gay	G
Bisexual	B
Not Defined	N.D

Abstract

Mobile dating technologies have become a global trend in the dating environment, infiltrating the creation of romantic relationships, turning into social mediators that initiates, accelerates, defines, and even ends communication. For so, traditional social norms have been replaced by uncertainty and endless choices, amplified by digital developments. In particular, emerging adults have been significantly impacted by the broader societal changes occurring around them. Specifically, these changes have led to a transformation in the way they experience intimacy, dating, and relationships. The research questions are: 'What are the effects of mobile dating technologies on the patterns and experiences of emerging adults in their romantic relationships and dating practices?'and 'How do these changes reflect a paradigmatic shift in the way romantic relationships are experienced?'. This thesis aims to explore how the paradigmatic change in society is reflected in relationships and dating patterns through digital media in the phenomenon of digital dating in emerging adults (20-30 years old) in Turkey and Italy. Data are collected through online in-depth interviews in June-November 2022 and analyzed with a thematic analysis.

Research findings suggest that the digital media era had a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of intimacy, dating, and relationships, largely due to the changes it has brought to the concepts of time and space. Moreover, the changes brought about by the digital media era resulted in a redefinition of traditional gender norms in sexual relationships. The blurring of lines between public and private times has resulted in a complex intertwining of physical and online presence, causing changes in how online socializing and matching are perceived.

Keywords: Love, Dating Culture, Mobilities, Mobile Dating Apps, Emerging Adults

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the way in which people establish and experience romantic relationships has undergone significant changes due to technological advancements and the rise of mobile dating applications.

Four renowned sociologists - Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Eva Illouz, and Zygmunt Bauman - have explored various aspects of modern love, relationships, and intimacy.

Anthony Giddens (1992) argued that modern societies have made pure love characterized by the belief that true love should be based on emotional connection and personal choice since traditional social structures have eroded.

As Ulrich Beck (1995) posited, the modern world's uncertainty and risk have led to a new kind of love called reflexive love, which requires a heightened awareness of risks and uncertainties inherent in intimate relationships.

Followingly, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) suggested how modern love is increasingly becoming "liquid" and characterized by a lack of stability and durability, with a constant search for the "perfect" partner, leading to a lack of commitment and emotional investment in relationships. Overall, these sociologists see modern love as a complex and evolving ideal, influenced by changing values and social structures.

Eva Illouz (2013) stated how modern relationships can be often characterized by negative emotions, such as disappointment, frustration, and resentment, due to choice overload and the ability to unchoose partners at any time. All of these changes and effects have been intertwined with the digital developments. Smartphone technologies and mobile applications have become a social mediator that initiates, accelerates, defines, and even ends communication, providing people with new ways to explore their private lives and augment their social reality. This has resulted in the emergence of new patterns of relationships and dating, and the mobility paradigm has provided a new perspective for understanding these changes.

Additionally, sociologist John Urry and Anthony Elliott (2010) connect love, intimacy to mobile developments and elaborates how these developments created new ways of cultural practices around the world. Sociologists discuss how mobile technologies have changed the nature of relationships in the 21st century and how mobile relationships formed without traditional or territorial structures and are characterized by the accumulation of different meanings in different situations. As such, mobile relationships depend heavily on the ability of the couple to reconstruct their relationship through negotiation and reflection on past situations. They touch upon the tension between the demands of the global mobile economy, which privileges speed of movement, rational calculations, and the socio-cultural order of intimacy, which is increasingly ordered around short-termism and communication at a distance. This tension can lead to a backlash against intimacy, as shown by the growth of the global sex industry. Although mobile relationships may seem well-suited to the demands of the global mobile economy, they may also be hollowed out of emotional content, leading to a weakening of the quality of relations within intimate ties at the societal level.

In this thesis, I aimed to explore the ways in which mobile dating technologies have influenced and changed the experiences, ideas, and perspectives of emerging adults: and how these changes reflect a paradigmatic shift in the way romantic relationships are established and experienced. For this reason, my research questions are: 'What are the effects of mobile dating technologies on the patterns and experiences of emerging adults in their romantic relationships and dating practices?', 'How do these changes reflect a paradigmatic shift in the way romantic relationships are experienced?'.

The normalization and incorporation of digital dating as an everyday practice have resulted in a distinct pattern of intimacy that differs from conventional dating. The widespread adoption of mobile dating technologies, which offer simplicity of use and enhanced connectivity, has contributed to the global popularity of the phenomenon of digital dating.

The research methodology employed in this thesis is a qualitative analysis approach, which is particularly suited to investigate the impact of technology on intimacy and dating culture among young adults. In-depth interviews have been conducted to capture the diverse perspectives of individuals and gain a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the topic at hand. I have used thematic analysis to examine underlying processes, such as the ways in which participants discuss digital tools and their dating experiences, revealing the meanings that shape their behavior and attitudes.

As the Mobility Paradigm suggests, studying culture requires a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, in my research, I relied on a diverse range of disciplinary sources, including sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and media studies, as well as various research methods, such as observations and interviews. Specifically, I approached the theories that underlie the reasons why dating practices among emerging adults change due to the influence of digital media, and I used these methods to analyze my data.

In the end, I have come to the realization that behavioral change is directly connected to surrounding cultural, societal norms. To understand this behavioral change required me to study ideas, perceptions, practices, norms and definitions towards two relatively similar cultures: Italian and Turkish.

Dating apps play a vital role in facilitating, mediating, and shaping interactions among individuals in the formation of relationships. By virtue of their affordances, these apps introduce new terminologies and practices in dating culture and provide young people with an opportunity to connect with strangers.

However, my research journey reveals that while platforms form and structure interactions through their affordances, users' behaviors and cultural influences also contribute to their reconfiguration. As Giddens' (1984) discussed in his book Structuralism Theory, structures are maintained and modified by the use of agency, just as a person's autonomy is influenced by a structure. Giddens' theory highlights the dynamic interplay between structures and agency. According to Giddens, social structures are not fixed and immutable but are constantly being reproduced and transformed through the actions of individuals and groups.

1. State of the Art

The modern period has witnessed societies going under scrutiny for rooted ideas such as gender roles, relationships, and marriages. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), individualization is a historical process in which often religious and traditionally established social norms become fragmented and dissolved. Therefore, individuals realize their subjectivity and diversity, and relationship types have become diversified, and new forms have been developed. As a result, people have a wider range of options to consider, and individualization weakens social norms rather than completely eliminating them. Furthermore, digital technologies transform and multiply these romantic discourses, opening up the possibility of online contacts and potential mates. The highly individualized structure of modern life has added uncertainty to daily lives, along with the rapidly developing and dynamic pace of life.

The widespread influence of romantic narratives of Western culture is part of the culture that defines the way individuals experience relationships and shapes their expectations and realities surrounding them. Romantic plots are ubiquitous in that they occupy space in the vast media consumption areas, and they have become "culturally approved templates for interpreting the reality around us" (Portolan and McAlister, 2021, cited in Roche, Maruyama, and Kroik 2018, 36). Since cultural discourses and romance narratives have been widespread for a long period, discourses about sex are embedded in dating practices. Cultural logic is and still has been changing along with the technology and responding to a general need. Cultural and institutional constraints continue to play an essential role in determining people's decisions, particularly in changing societies therefore opportunities are not equally distributed to everyone. As one study (Urrutia and Tello-Navarro, 2021) suggested that since gender roles and power dynamics, such as existing gender normativity, are not equally distributed in courtship and romantic relationship practices, online digital media is another domain for reflecting these practices. However these places actually can provide an escape point and help to reform these dynamics. Their findings demonstrate that in digitally mediated courtship and relationship practices, gender is managed and negotiated. Along with these paradigmatic changes, young adults are forming new ways to communicate and experience romantic relationships in an ever-changing world where traditional social structures, such as marriage and dating, are being replaced with alternative forms of romantic and sexual engagement. They were born into an environment with many variations, including increasing rates of divorces, consensual unions, single parenthood, etc. Additionally, all of these changes have intersected with online developments and the virtual world. It is interesting to discover how they form new ways to communicate and experience romantic relationships in this ever-changing world. Existing studies

suggest that premarital sex is widely accepted, as are a variety of ways to engage in sexual or romantically-oriented activity, ranging from traditional dating where people must get to know each other emotionally before having sex to hooking up with no expectations (Urrutia and Tello-Navarro 2021, as cited from Besoain et al. 2017; Gómez-Urrutia, Royo, and Cruz 2017; UC-Adimark 2013). In contemporary society, the attainment of marriage is no longer regarded as the essential hallmark of a succeeding romantic relationship.

1.2 Cultural Norms in Digital Intimacy

One study (Cöbek and Ergin, 2021) analyzed Tinder as an algorithmic cultural object and elucidated the interdependent relationship between technology and culture in a framework of collaborative production, thereby explicating how culturally diverse contexts may foster different Anglo-Saxon perspectives on online dating. The study examines the utilization of the dating application Tinder in Turkey, with the objective of comprehending the underpinning motivations, strategies, and contextual factors that influence the use of Tinder within this region. The findings indicate that among the various motivations for using Tinder, the predominant one was seeking casual sexual encounters, followed by socialization and entertainment, while seeking romantic love was the least common motivation. Another finding appeared from their research supports that "status vs. beauty" stereotype, with physical appearance being the top criterion for women. The context of Tinder use in Turkey was different from North America and Europe, with users being acutely aware of negative perceptions of Tinder, and women limiting their app use to contexts associated only with private spaces. Technologies like Tinder are not independent of cultural stereotypes and prejudices and that the culture-technology relationship becomes especially salient in terms of the users' perceptions of non-users' perceptions.

A study on young people in Latin America indicates what is considered acceptable behavior for males and females, and how is continued to dominate among younger generations, demonstrating the persistence of double standards in sexual morals among youths (2021, Urrutia, and Tello-Navarro 2021 as cited from, Araujo and Martuccelli 2012; Bernasconi 2010; Heilborn and da Silva Cabral 2013; Lara and Gómez-Urrutia 2019; OXFAM 2018 and Nash 2008). Their findings demonstrate how gender is negotiated in digitally mediated daily courtship and maintenance of existing romantic relationships, including the power dynamics inherent in gendered normativity where digital media can be utilized to both reproduce and modify power dynamics.

Timmermans and Courtois (2018) investigated choice processes of users by looking behind the logic and questioning if discourses on sexual encounters change, the beginning of a relationship

can likely turn from dating to hookup. Since finding a casual sex partner is easier than ever (2018, Timmermans and Courtois as cited from Bhattacharya, 2015; David and Cambre, 2016; Race 2015; Sales, 2015), they claim that sexual encounters can lead to committed relationships in a society where dating has been substituted by hooking up as the commencement of relationship development. They study that since Tinder's affordances such as mobility, immediacy, proximity, and visuals all create a sort of immediacy, accelerate the frequency of use and improve spontaneity; if all these utilities make it easier to have casual sex. Their findings indicate that even though the common misconception for Tinder meetings result in casual sexual experiences, there are also a significant number of serious partnerships with other Tinder users. Both for online and mobile dating users; since women are selective when it comes to swiping women are more likely to have matches than men. In a similar vein, both offline dating and online dating conversation initiations are heavily started by men. The creation of a committed relationship occurs in more than a quarter of offline encounters on Tinder, proving that it is not "simply a hookup app" as is frequently implied in public discourse. Another significant result is that motives played an important role when it comes to studying Tinder outcomes. Participants with a sexual motive are positively associated with reporting a higher number of one-night stands and casual sexual relationships, whereas having a relationship motive is negatively associated with reporting a higher number of casual sexual relationships. However, taking into consideration that Tinder is associated heavily with being a hookup app, forming committed relationship motives was not associated with high numbers.

1.3 The Impact of Digital Platforms on Intimacy

In relationships, intimacy is linked to feeling understood by one's partner. However today, intimacy means much more than single and stable definition. Relationship types are fluid and change quickly to name. Byron et al. (2021), investigate how dating apps create opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to develop friendships, which may initially be perceived as side benefits. The researchers investigate how the less physically restricted structures and uses of dating/hook-up apps have resulted in LGBTQ+ friendship practices being a fundamental organizing factor in young people's everyday digital negotiations of intimacy, sex, and dating. Flirting can quickly replace friendship, or vice versa, or flirting elements can gain new dynamics between friendships. For individuals, since the online world has a structure that includes many tools and allows them to quickly switch between these tools, there is no point in separating user experiences as social media/dating apps. For example, even though friendships often tend to develop and sustain through social media, dating apps also serve as a medium for forming and having friendships since interactions are much more flexible and interchangeable.

Generally, friendships develop through communicating different media by combining digital tools with non-digital ways. Since these apps connect people in local areas such as bars (Miller, 2015), it helps people to develop local cultures through making friends with multiple motivations such as connection, affinity, and common interests. As a consequence, these created places help people to feel safe and accepted. Similarity and free space create a proper environment for bringing like-minded people and creating friendships. However, using one platform for both purposes, namely sex/dating communication and friendship motivations, this singularity leads to context collapse, and researchers highlighted in this point that it can be more possible with open-minded users.

Self-presentation and self-disclosure procedures are critical parts of offline relational development, particularly in the early phases. According to Reis and Shaver (1988), as cited in Ellison et al. (2006), desire to accentuate one's favorable traits coexist with the urge to present one's actual (or authentic) self to others, particularly when the intimacy is aimed for a relationship. Interactants in online contexts face the same constraints and demands with offline contexts, however computer-mediated communication affords them greater control over their self-presentation, enabling more strategic management of their online interactions (Ellison, 2006). Dating apps promote some practices in a way favoring attractive individuals, providing mainly superficial interactions, and reducing people to commodities in a marketplace of romantic options. Therefore many individuals feel the need to create their ideal selves to attract more attention but at the same time trying to express themselves in their true selves (Ellison et al., 2006, 430). Apart from these, technology gives people a greater opportunity to express and communicate with others compared to the previous generations. In other words, modern romantic practices are complicated in nature and technology is transforming these practices in ways that are not solely positive or negative.

1.3.1 Digital Identities of Dating App Users

While mobile dating is gaining more popularity, there is an increasing number of smartphone applications targeted for making dating easier. However while some people find these platforms helpful, some others do not prefer them as an option and this shows that user motivation directly affects usage of these tools. Specifically, certain personality traits and demographic identifying variables such as gender and sexual orientation have an effect on the usage of dating apps and motivations. According to that, individuals who do not use dating apps compared to dating apps users, are more likely to be heterosexual, with high levels of dating anxiety, and having low levels of sexual permissiveness. In their study, Sumter and Vandenbosch (2018) argued that individuals'

identities are closely tied to their motives and participation in mobile dating. The Media Practice Model (Shafer et al., 2013; Steele and Brown, 1995) proposes that users' identities have a direct impact on their usage patterns and motivations, which researchers must consider in their investigations. The model is based on the assumption that identification characteristics can predict and explain why and how people interact with social media and dating apps. The preceding research conducted by Sumter et al. (2017), identified that young adults employ dating apps with distinct objectives related to relationships, intrapersonal development, and entertainment, a finding that the current study corroborates. Young adult males and those with high scores on sexual permissiveness seem to use dating apps especially triggered by the casual sex motivation. Seeking self-worth validation, having high sexual permissiveness and other sensation seeking are motivations for young adults to use smartphone dating applications. Additionally, Van Oosten et al. (2017), integrated gender literature with the model to investigate how a hyper-gender identity interacts with social media profiles. They discovered that adolescents with a strong conviction in gender stereotypes, i.e., those with a high hyper-gender identity, tend to post more sexualized selfies on social media compared to those with a low hyper-gender identity.

1.3.2 The Rationalization and Marketization of Loving and Dating Practices

Since dating practices have been marketized through dating apps and platforms, users tend to make more conscious effort to get qualified choices by researching and comparing them in the market environment. They attach importance to rationality for choices in their lives, in a world where reason and logic play a prominent role. Therefore, more people refer to the tools of science and the assurance of technology while choosing a partner. A critical study from the UK, Best (2019) argued Zygmunt Bauman's (2003) idea on how individualism and technological advances have taken dating practices and turned them into the profits and interests of the capitalist market and liquefy human relations. Researcher argued that modernity has not brought about a complete "sexual free for all" or made all relationships more fluid, in fact the movement for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the 2010s represents a demand for more solidity in relationships rather than fluidity.

Hobbs et al. (2017), discussed that people believe that these tools have changed the way they approach sexuality, and how they view monogamy, long-term partnerships, and other romantic ideals. By investigating to what extent digital intimacy changes under way, they discover that dating apps provide a "network of intimacy" that increases social capital and enhances what Anthony Giddens (1992, 2) termed as "plastic sexuality," leading to an increased capacity to find a mutually fulfilling relationship. However, their findings suggest that the technology boosted participants' desires and ability to find a date or a compatible life mate, despite worries about strategic and

inauthentic behavior. As stated in the article, dating apps provide new freedoms, opportunities, and pleasures for seeking flirting, courtship, and love, but they can also produce old and new anxieties related to risk, self-image, and love. This demonstrates that everyone experiences these technologies in a different way.

Throughout history, romantic love has provided a base for power dynamics and idealization that could be connected to male competition and bonding. For example, courtly love in feudal times was seen as a way to solidify homosocial power and position women as objects to be won. The structure of romantic relationships reinforced social hierarchies by appearing to be driven by individual choice, but actually was mainly serving to cement homosocial power. Current studies (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014; Hodgson, 2018; Isisag, 2019) argued that the concept of modern romantic love has been based on games of chance and competition in which these games provide benefits such as social bonding and determining personal responsibility and rule-based systems hide their market logic. According to Deterding and colleagues, games of love are encoded by market economies through hiding their intention behind the games of chance; this is accomplished through the logic and set reproduction of norms and their management in an economic way (2011, 10). Their popularity can be traced back to historical moments in Western Europe where early iterations of romantic love reinforced class and power hierarchies by dramatizing them through games.

1.3.3 Rationalized Partner Selection: Algorithmic Matching Systems

After entering daily lives through mobile phones, mobile dating apps become an inevitable part of young people's lives which encompass and dominate their experiences (Ansari and Klinenberg, 2015; Chambers, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 2020). By using datafication and algorithmic matching systems (Albury et al., 2017; Lutz and Ranzini, 2017), dating apps claim to provide a remedy towards the uncertainty of love and relationship (Bandinelli and Gandini, 2022).

Rationalized partner selection has created new criterias along with the spread of these apps and their algorithms (Finkel et al., 2012). After the selection has been made and the match has occurred, another choice awaits individuals: whether to maintain online communication or to meet offline. Hallam et al. (2019), evaluate which factors affect users' decisions to move from online to offline by putting social selective theory to the center.

Age algorithm is another significant parameter for online dating users. As people get older they have a higher likelihood of divorce and the need to balance a career and children therefore they tend to approach searching a partner online more positively, due to the difficulty to find partners through traditional methods. Studies also highlight that divorced individuals are more likely to use

dating sites than the average internet user (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Another study describes how age relates to people's perceptions and their experiences with online dating and their results indicate that older adults are more likely to use online dating, possibly due to decreasing satisfaction with conventional ways of finding romantic partners, and age did not appear to affect the stigma associated with online dating (Stephure et al., 2009).

In the literature, the decision to switch platforms is called modality switching (Ramirez, Sumner, Fleuriet, and Cole, 2015; Ramirez and Zhang, 2007). Based on this idea the research evaluated age factors and also trust as variables which according to the results, age is the most important factor to affect the tendency for modality switching. It seems that as the age increases, the desire to move online dating to the offline environment also increases. The findings point to modality switching, which was not significantly connected with either general confidence in people or online trust, but was highly correlated with age.

1.3.4 Affordances and User Experience in Mobile Dating Apps

Mobile dating applications primarily use geolocation technology that focuses on place and proximity, re-configuring distance, closeness, and intimacy for intimate practices such as hooking up, dating, and having sex. The affordances of mobile dating apps allow individuals to be mobile even while standing still and therefore individuals create hybrid ecologies in synchronization with the physical environment while they are in the application. Dating apps facilitate, mediate, and shape interactions between people in forming relationships. Through their affordances, dating apps create new terminologies and practices for dating culture while young people have the chance to reach strangers. These systems formalize the market's conceptions of rationality and efficiency by quantification of selves. Platforms gain from people returning searching for something better rather than committing to one individual and deleting the apps (Sharabi and Timmermans, 2020).

1.3.5 User Experience in the field of Data Mining and Ethics

Since dating apps contain and accumulate user's data, data mining has been on the agenda for a long time in terms of government politics and surveillance. Privacy concerns on mobile media around data mining have been gaining awareness in terms of ethical and social implications. Therefore, several researches have emerged on intimacy and privacy since mobile dating applications began collecting highly private information on their users such as locational data (Goggin, 2006; Hjorth and Lim, 2012). Apart from this governmental or corporate concerns on data, the human-centered side of those data mining operations can be helpful to explore demographic reasons, discovering social behaviors and helping users to improve their usage efficiency. With the same logic, it is a point which can help to increase the usage quality in terms of security, ethics,

health, and well-being. Since dating has been gamified through algorithmic strategies, it is widely used by market-based logic. Geolocational data also entered into a critical and empirical research agenda to discover the social implications of data cultures. Data cultures are defined as the datafication of culture through the algorithmic logics of digital media. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) claimed that mobile dating and hook-up apps, and their incorporation into the broader' social media logics' shape society. The researchers discuss how different types of data emerge from the socio-technical configurations, and business logic of hook-up apps to build numerous, overlapping data cultures. In short, mediated intimacy in terms of safety, public health, ethics, and cultures of use, and from a scientific aspect, all these elements can be helpful to improve user experience and understand social behaviors. Addedly, these debates and actions from developers and even ordinary users led many apps to accept their responsibilities on their users' security and privacy.

1.3.6 Gamification, Competition, and Monetization

However, the 'main purpose' of the applications to which they dedicate themselves is not providing a match for their users with their partners and sending them off forever to their happiness. On the contrary, the purpose of the applications is to maintain their existence with high profits by keeping the users in the application as much as possible.

Krüger et al. (2020), taking Tinder as an example to study location based real time dating apps affordances and their effects. As they stated, Tinder uses an Elo Score ranking method in which the algorithm rotates all uploaded photographs and selects which picture obtains the most likes (Krüger and Spilde, 2020, 7). Users earn points when they are matched, especially with higher-rated users, and they lose points when they are refused. The more points users earn, the more likely they are to be rotated and shown to other profiles; in this way, mating has been gamified. The emphasis on visuality tends to create pressures for users to meet bodily norms of beauty, inside these apps contradictions and ambiguities seem to be present. Therefore, dating apps, especially Tinder's user interface and designing style, actually determine notions in commodity culture. As Illouz (2019) discussed the binary nature of dating apps as the swipe gesture actually seems to promote a consume or discard attitude, and the aesthetics of the database feed a grasping desire to keep swiping. According to the researchers, despite the absence of emotional aspects that appeared to be removed by algorithmic consumer-based practices such as immediate pleasure and speed, they are unlikely to erase the desire to pursue love outside of these platforms.

The use of chance and mathematical models in modern relationships has a basis in behavioral economics, and that the trend towards using data to anticipate and direct human desire can be seen as a continuation of this pattern. Even though games can alter the perception of time

and space, today the excitement and immediacy of online connectivity has heightened this effect in which users become deeply encaptured with digital systems that they often forget themselves. While games may make romantic rejection less serious, they also emphasize the importance of winning and give insight into the use of force when losing may be the only alternative. Therefore, the vindication of personal responsibility in games highlights the significance of winning in romantic relationships.

By taking gaming features as their strategy, digital apps and platforms have affected modern romantic love in Western Europe which are all led through a market logic that can be compulsive and addictive. The rule-based structure of these games helped to reinforce rule-based social systems, even though they appeared to be driven by individual choice and voluntary participation. The evolution of gaming has become integral to marketization processes and despite the fact that games are generally regarded as being unproductive. The environment created by competitive games is thought to facilitate the suspension of norms and the affirmation of individual responsibility. Gambling games helped to shape the modern capitalist love economy by providing a way to calculate and manage chance.

1.3.7 The Impact of Location Affordance on the Reconfiguration of Physical and Digital Space
Dating app affordances directly affect user's experiences and interactions with others. Through several affordances, mobile dating apps have facilitated the meeting of strangers. Data relating to location has always been fundamental for online dating systems and by using the global positioning system (GPS) as a facilitator applications enable social, romantic, and sexual connections between proximate strangers. As several studies stated, the capacity to locate nearby strangers, assisted by the app's geolocation function, enhances the immediacy of sexual encounters. (Licoppe et al., 2016; Van De Wiele and Tong, 2014).

Hook-up applications with geolocational functionality are not only about finding the "perfect match," but also about categorizing and arranging yourself in locations where others can discover you (Brubaker et al., 2016).

According to Lawson and Leck (2006), online daters only begin a relationship after discovering that they are compatible with each other. This means that trust is not immediately established; rather, it develops over time as online daters spend more time getting to know one another. These findings support the idea that temporal cues are full of meanings and values and can be revealing in terms of relationship development dynamics. Tempo and sequence are one of the most salient dimensions of social time shaping participants' mobile dating apps usage. The

notification system is seen as a 'convenience' of these apps and alerts users for new messages which fasten the amount of time for responding and accelerating the interaction. Proximity on the other hand directs for immediate meetings which lead to depersonalization experiences for many users. Since time is valued as the most important possession of the modern individual, giving time and showing eagerness for a communication can be interpreted as a sincere and serious relationship.

As one study (Yeo and Fung, 2018) stated, while encounters progressing quickly reflect impersonality, relationships developing gradually much likely contain sincerity. These mobile dating apps are facilitating relationship building opportunities through interaction patterns and user browsing. As researchers (Stempfhuber and Liegl, 2016) stated, concepts related to proximity and space, such as 'nearby', 'close', or 'intimate' have gained new derivatives through the possibilities provided by mobile applications and impacting on the fundamental nature of contemporary intimacy. Their research focused on Grindr's affordances as frequent and quick switching between real and digital contexts enables the instantaneous construction of hybrid ecologies that combine them. Grindr users can now communicate with each other across longer physical distances, and the app encourages them to move not just their bodies but also mobile hybrids through the urban environment. This promising feature of dating apps is enabling their users to reach proximate potential partners by providing location.

1.3.8 Pre-Interaction Behaviors and Relationship Development in Mobile Dating
On mobile dating, strategic actions such as selecting mobile dating apps and deciding how to present oneself online are pre-interaction activities that are generally missing from traditional types of communications. On mobile dating apps, once a match has been acquired, users can start and experiment with several processes. Upon visiting the application or website, this first pre-interaction step contains explicit and deliberate selection criterias.

Tinder provides opportunities to become acquainted, communicate, and meet with possible mates. Tinder's software features and technical affordances enable proximal partners to date in real time. The platform promotes human interaction and facilitates physical and psychological interactions by combining closeness, convenience, and technology (Quiroz, 2013).

The classic relationship development model (Knapp and Vangelisti, 2010) produces a descriptive dual staircase model for analyzing relationship start and dissolution behaviors and patterns in face-to-face applications. The dual staircase incorporates couples navigating escalation (coming together or start) and de-escalation steps (i.e., coming apart or dissolution). These include

starting a conversation, forming an impression, learning what the other person does not know about you, and opening up about yourself.

Lefebvre (2018) studies mobile dating apps for investigation by taking into consideration the relationship development model and explores how choosing Tinder and its affordances affect relationship development. The study looks into how people use Tinder to initiate relationships and highlights how interpersonal relationship initiation, selection processes, and strategic pre-interaction behaviors are evolving in today's mediated dating culture. The planned pre-interaction processes appear as programmed, static, and scripted actions which are intended to spark interpersonal conversation and future possible romantic connections. On Tinder, once a match is made, initiating and experimenting processes take place; however, the pre-interaction processes are strategic behaviors, including choosing mobile dating, defining personal profile, and creating an asynchronous impression. The study underlined the need to include these behaviors to the relationship development model.

1.4 Choice in Non-Choice Culture

1.4.1 Non-Choice Culture

Bandinelli and Gandini (2022) claim that dating apps can be considered as technologies of non-choice, which Illouz (2019) defines as sociotechnical tools that reproduce the ontological ambiguity of romantic partners as entrepreneurs who assert themselves in a constantly changing environment. These digital platforms introduce a new form of interpersonal trust, based on evaluating uncertainty associated with engaging with strangers, a typical feature of digitally mediated situations according to Luhmann's definition (Bandinelli and Gandini, 2022; Luhmann, 1986). The authors refer to this phenomenon as the 'codification of intimacy', where actors deepen their communication without real communication. In the context of dating apps, this is represented by actors interpreting different signals, such as swiping, to confirm their mutual interest. However, these signals are not enough to eliminate uncertainty and do not count as genuine communication. Bandinelli and Gandini's observations indicate that true communication with a potential partner only occurs when the conversation is moved to another app, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, or Instagram, often when there is a 'slight' chance of an offline date. This finding may help explain the low ratio of matches to actual dates.

In a culture where having a dating life is an imperative, dating apps offer a space for desire to emerge without the need for an embodied encounter. What makes dating apps effective seems to be the approach by which they engage users rather than the outcomes they provide. In their study,

Bandinelli and Bandinelli (2021) discuss the impact of dating apps on courtship activities, such as swiping and matching, and how interpersonal relationship initiation, selection processes, and strategic pre-interaction behaviors are evolving in today's mediated dating culture. They asserted that people use dating apps for a variety of reasons, beyond emotional and physical intimacy, and dating apps' primary function does not seem to enable embodied encounters, but to produce a libidinal attachment to the process of looking for someone. They claim that dating apps can be considered as technologies of non-choice, what Illouz defines them as sociotechnical tools that reproduce the ontological ambiguity of romantic partners as entrepreneurs who assert themselves in a constantly changing environment. According to their research dating apps can act as objects of affective and libidinal investment, triggering enjoyment beyond their explicit function. When the app acts as a partner, teasing and triggering desire, it generates a paradoxical dissatisfaction because it plays out the impossibility of satisfying endless desire. They highlight three key characteristics of dating apps' libidinal economy, including the alleviation of anxiety around dating, the quantification of the possibility of a romantic event, and the potential for dating apps to occupy the position of an affective object in their own right. Overall, dating apps are seen as producing forms of affective attachment in and for themselves, rather than simply mediating romantic encounters.

1.4.2 Partner Choice and Emerging Technologies: Motivations
Since platforms are aware of user concerns about using these applications for finding partners for themselves, they seek to maintain their stay in the application through various incentives such as providing a sense of autonomy in their choices. Emerging technological opportunities such as gaming interfaces, app-enabled dating/hook-up practices give individuals autonomy in their partner choices and make them feel more responsible. Within a broadened social network environment, users have the control over their partner choices with different motivations from sexual or casual encounters to more serious long term relationship motives (Barraket and Henry-Waring, 2008; Couch and Liamputtong, 2008; Goluboff, 2016; Meenagh, 2015). One study conducted in Holland asserts that Tinder is not just a casual hookup app but rather a multifunctional tool that satisfies various needs among emerging adults since the outcomes are mainly related to the goals of the user (Sumter, et al., 2017). By identifying six primary motivations, which are love, casual sex, ease of communication, self-worth validation, thrill of excitement, and trendiness, the motivations for using Tinder can be interpreted. The study found that love is a stronger motivation than casual sex, and men are more likely to report casual Sex, ease of communication, and thrill of excitement. Age is positively related to love, casual sex, and ease of communication motivations. The study also suggests that Tinder can be used to initiate committed romantic relationships.

1.4.3 Choice Process and User Behavior

In their study, Sumter and Vandenbosch (2018) argued that individuals' identities are closely tied to their motives and participation in mobile dating. They examined the effects of various information tailoring techniques used by online dating sites on users' views, both separately and in conjunction with control on usage and they found the combination of the two led users to perceive the largest proportion of date-worthy companions. According to the study, users who invest more personal information to customize their date recommendations are likely to evaluate more partner options as date-worthy, which can justify their time and effort. Participants who had access to customization and personalization options reported a higher percentage of suggested mates as being worthy of dating, indicating that information tailoring tactics significantly influenced partner perceptions. Moreover, experienced users place less value on customization than new users, and their previous use of dating apps affects the proportion of date-worthy mates.

1.4.4 Ghosting

Since it is a developing practice, recent studies about ghosting are still scarce. Timmermans et al. (2020), define ghosting as an indirect breakup method, often leading to a lack of closure for the person being ghosted, making it difficult for them to move on. Individuals who had been ghosted used coping mechanisms such as justifying the experience, modifying their dating app behavior and expectations, reviewing the ghoster's social media accounts, seeking comfort with friends, or deleting the dating app. According to their findings, some people use ghosting as a way to protect themselves from aggressive behavior by the person being rejected. The study also found that emotionally attached and rejection-sensitive individuals were more likely to use online dating platforms and may be more vulnerable to being ghosted or provoking ghosting behavior in others.

Another study from Navarro et al. (2021), examines how ghosting could become a habit or learned behavior pattern by being a victim of ghosting, after valuing the functionality of ghosting. A study conducted on the relationship between ghosting victimization and ghosting initiation behavior and intentions in online dating and findings suggested only moral disengagement and conflict resolution styles correlated with ghosting behaviors and intentions, while other factors, such as personal beliefs and interpersonal skills, did not show significant correlations. Researchers also stated that while factors like personal beliefs and interpersonal skills did not show any significant correlations, only moral disengagement and conflict resolution styles had a connection with ghosting actions and intentions. The connection between ghosting and socio-cognitive factors is more intricate than a simple, linear relationship, as noted in this study.

1.4.5 The Impacts of Choice Overload

Apps are becoming technosocial devices and claiming to offer their users suitable matches. Moreover, dating apps provide high availability of potential partners to their users, although having too many choices can have reverse effects and create confusion in the choice process (Chernev et al., 2015). Even though the fear of being single leads to using dating apps, also using dating apps seem to increase users' concerns about not being able to find a right partner. Besides, the high choice of potential partners causes individuals feeling despair about being alone, having too many options available also leads users to choose the right one. (Lenton et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2004; Sumter, Vandenbosch, and Ligtenberg, 2017). One study (Thomas et al., 2022) researched the impacts of partner choice overload, self-esteem, and anxiety about being alone by exposing individuals to low, moderate, or high numbers of dating app profiles. According to their results, high partner availability increased the fear of being single compared to low partner availability.

1.5 The Impact of COVID-19 on Dating Culture

Along with the external factors involving several crises, diseases, wars, economic ambivalences, the reality of modern life has added uncertainty to daily lives with the rapidly developing and changing pace of life. When looking at Western culture, the influence of romantic narratives is a widespread part of the culture. However, a common theme in discussions about dating apps is the ways in which they have colonized love, created a virtual emotional marketplace, promoted a hook-up culture, and devalued conventional institutions such as marriage, monogamy, and long-term relationships (Fetters and Tiffany, 2020).

Furthermore, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, human interaction and contact suddenly became risky and socially unacceptable. The use of dating apps in modern media has been the subject of numerous discussions, with many different viewpoints. One article investigates how the romantic master plot influences people's perceptions of romance on dating apps when the global COVID-19 pandemic was a significant complicating factor (Portolan and McAlister, 2021). These narratives are well-defined master plots that individuals have strongly believed in for many years as a way to reach happiness. These beliefs have been shaped and regenerated for a long time by different sources with different motives. Participants stated that they have tended to use dating apps more because of the fear of being left alone during the COVID-19 pandemic period, therefore missing the right time to find their partners, and they also stated that they deleted the applications by experiencing disappointment at the same speed. First of all, they got frustrated by the fact that these interactions, which they believed do not occur organically, are far from intimacy. Furthermore,

the possibility that the matches they invested time and effort in online may not have any chemistry in real life. They coined a term to describe the dynamic and cyclical move which describes this period as the motivation to obtain a romantic story and lose faith, deleting the app and downloading again. Stating that this cyclical situation is increasing gradually during the COVID-19 pandemic period, the authors called it 'jagged love' (Portolan and McAlister, 2021). Although this pattern is not significantly different from the way people used dating apps in the past, after the uncertainty heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, this pursuit has gained momentum as people desperately search for the certainty offered by romantic narratives.

A recent study by Genç and Çelikoğlu (2021) investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on online dating in Turkey, focusing on the popular dating app, Tinder. The study examined four main changes in the context of online dating, including changes in the community, conversations, context of video calls, and perception of online dating. The authors emphasized the importance of considering the diversity of users' experiences and provided design implications for increasing variety in online communities and integrating offline and online interactions. The study concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new forms of social interaction and the discovery of previously hidden social affordances within the Tinder community (Genç and Çelikoğlu, 2021).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to develop a conceptual framework that explores the interrelated concepts of intimacy, dating, love relationships, and sexuality, particularly in the context of how these concepts have evolved among emerging adults through digital technologies. The interchangeable usage of multiple terms in this context suggests that these terms have come to share similar meanings.

2.1 Broad Changes in Societies

2.1.1 Modernity

Modernity can be characterized as the increasing expansion and influence of the local with other localities through urbanization. ''The advent of modernity has increasingly torn space away from place by 'fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction'' (Giddens, 1990, 18–19). The place refers to the concept that is socially loaded at the local level. Giddens states that these two concepts could be used interchangeably in pre-modern societies, however the development of modernity expands the meaning attributed to the place with the concept of 'absence'. He distinguishes these two concepts from each other with the spread of communication that cannot be provided geographically or face-to-face, which the absences of others shape. Space gains new forms and the familiar location expands to involve distant relationships and becomes *phantasmagoric* (Giddens, 1991, 19).

As people continued to feel cut off from the past and embraced modernized lifestyles, they abandoned traditional ideals like reproduction because the religion ordered them so. The nuclear family was formed in the nineteenth century when industrialization gained momentum. As families got smaller and children were valued as vulnerable and needing long-term emotional labor, women's power over child-rearing increased. People have started to turn to romantic partners to lean on them with that existential loneliness. Beck (1992) argues that after traditions were beginning to erode, the appeal for a close relationship and the need for bonding increased. ''One looks to the

other for everything which has been missing since there is nowhere to pour the guilt or sort out some ideas of what is right or wrong as God's predications.'' (Beck, 1992, 113). Scientific facts have replaced the class system, which at least had its explanations for the suffering it caused.

Modernity erased the effect of the soft illusions once had made lives bearable. People now deprived of these fantasies and obligated to live their lives without dedicating themselves to higher principles and values, without the vibrance of the sacred, without the valor of saints, without the certainty and orderliness of divine commandments, but most importantly without those fictions that bringing comfort and beauty. Illouz (2013, 8) argues that perpetuating gender inequalities is a result of historical idealization of love for several centuries in Western Europe which was governed by the ideals of chivalry, gallantry, and romanticism. Women were seen as weak and frail, and their social inferiority was compensated by the idea that men would protect and love them. This created a seductive promise for women, as it gave them a sense of moral status and dignity they were denied in society. However, this idealization of love concealed the deep inequalities in gender relationships, as it perpetuated the idea that women were inferior and that men had power over them. Therefore, love has been a tool to mask and beautify gender inequalities, which leads to creation for a complex and often problematic concept.

2.1.2 The Changes in Religion and Traditional Bonds

Human groups had lived in tribes, villages and in those places, everything was defined from what to do and what is forbidden, therefore things were clear in return for allegiance and obedience. People had a sense of belonging and solid identity. During the eighteenth century, the family had an extended familial structure, which was quite functional in terms of economical mechanisms. The function of the family was to maintain community life and be bound to economic, social, and religious ties with a lot of certainties and therefore very little freedom was present. Almost no room existed for individual pursuits and occupations. Later on, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, agrarian societies gave way to industrial, and subsequently spatially centered societies. The Industrial Revolution started in England in the middle of the eighteenth century and later spread to the US and other countries in Europe. Expansions in industrial formations brought the replacement of hand tools with machinery and mass production, therefore there was so much demand for labor. The need for a workforce had led people to move to the cities; individuals relocated from farms to cities during the following century. The population increased and for the first time, there was too much freedom but also much more loneliness.

Increasing wealth, a free market, better payments, and greater individual wealth have all attracted people to cities, which is why urbanization is frequently associated with economics. For a

very long period, these pull factors were what drove the expansion of cities. In modern society a lot of changes occurred on many levels, leading to a profound individualization process that cut off people from their old traditional ideas, values, and social networks.

Over the centuries that followed, this process continued on many levels in the intricately structured economic system, as well as in the rising secularization, urbanization, personal mobility, and other trends. As secularization spread many landmarks that once provided direction, purpose, and a sense of personal anchoring in a broader world have disappeared. Consequently, new living patterns emerged and individuals started to question value systems and beliefs. Max Weber (1985) stated in his book Protestant Ethic; ''the Reformation and its teachings revoked any assurance of salvation and threw people into a profound inner solitude. When the welfare state was established following World War II, one of the fundamental structural changes happened and women started to be included and entered the demands of the job market. The changes in the workforce marked the beginning of the end for traditional family values, gender roles, sexual, and parenting taboos'' (1985, as quoted in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

2.1.3 Globalization

Globalization, as one of the macro-level transformations, is the result of several processes, which leads to an increase in the interconnection of people, ideas, and patterns from other cultures, nations, and regions. It also 'unhooks' and 'dis-embeds' people from the limitations but also the support of old social structures. Globalization has created a paradigm which is elaborated and discussed in several angles from many scholars. These discussions have been based on dimensions, structural concepts, ideologies, performances, and complexity.

As Urry (2003) suggests, globalization is not the property of individual actors or territorial units but rather it is an emergent feature of the capitalist economy, developing from the interconnections between different agents, especially through new forms of time-space 'distanciation' across the globe. ''New technological and organizational innovations 'compressed' the time taken to communicate and travel across large distances. Some of these momentous innovations that changed time-space a century ago included the telegram, the telephone, steamship travel, the bicycle, cars and lorries, skyscrapers, aircraft, the mass production factory, X-ray machines'' (Urry, 2003, 1). This increased density of interactions is seen to result from a number of causes. ''There is the liberalization of world trade and the internationalization of the organization of much capitalist production. There is the globalizing of the consumption of many commodities and the declining costs of transportation and communications. Inter-regional organizations are more

significant with the internationalizing of investment and the general development of 'world system'"(Urry, 2003, 4).

This reorganization, reconstruction, and compression of distances between people and places have had profound effects on sexuality, gender, and intimacy. One effect is the rise in distance relationships and commuting lifestyles, which has furthered the breakdown of traditional family and intimate structures (Elliot, A., and Urry, J. 2010). The world can be defined as an interconnected society thanks to the combination of many innovations in the field of transportation, technology, and communication.

2.1.4 Capitalism and Consumerism and Hedonism

Consumerism, romance narratives, and new types of sexualities usher emotional uncertainty and thus provide new tools for upcoming needs. Modern identities build around infinite choice possibilities in the consumer sphere in which emotional interactions are uncertain and competitive. Although the scene looks like it is set by personal freedom, this freedom involves or hides the organizing forces taken by the consumer market, therapeutic industry, and technology. This personal freedom and the emotional autonomy created by social change involves romantic relationships, marriages, and widely accepted practices. Nowadays, consumption culture has become more prevalent and sexuality has acquired alternative hedonistic activities. The sexual has gained various hedonic practices produced within the consumption culture. As Jackson suggested (1998, as cited in Illouz, 2019), ''The consumer leisure sphere began to focus on the biologically hedonistic body as its primary object and target.'' Sexuality was now relegated to the realm of recreation rather than sexual reproduction, serving as a platform for the exploration and expression of the "unrepressed" self in a variety of consumer settings. Sexuality has been a consumer project, aiming to achieve one's deepest self and life's projects through a variety of consumer practices.

2.1.5 Individualism: The Central Paradox of Modernity

For modern individuals, there are no rules that prove to be unarguably true, truth is ephemeral and therefore merely provisional. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 7), those who search for intimacy; must be critics, directors, and audiences of themselves, as well as having to perform, observe, discuss, and continually evaluate. With the liberation from the steady guidelines of the traditional family roles—good husband and father, good wife and good mother—and the need to be more mobile and career-seeking—the modern individual has to pick among numerous projected identities. Giddens (1992) shows his interest by stating how societies become aware and reflexive at the same time. Gender equality, for example, has given women freedom of work, and both women and men gave less effort to build relationships and instead focused on their careers. Therefore their

age of marriage was pushed to a further stage in their lives. Similarly, according to Beck (1992), individualization has become the new social norm, and as a result, marriage is becoming less common as our own desires take precedence over communal obligations. He discusses how society becomes more aware of the risks around them, and as a result, become more reflective in the sense that they observe others before making important decisions in their lives. For example, to someone who sees other people's marriages ending in divorce, a decision to marry becomes more critical in their lives. Consequently, people are more prone to postpone this decision and extend their individual times. Being mobile, reflections for self-improvement, and many other uncertainties caused a break from finding and committing to 'the one'. As traditional family ties have been dissolved, the need for attachment to someone outside the family has increased.

As Giddens (1991) stated, today being a capable human being means having an effort for self reflection that involves a constant examination of the past, present, and future. It is an ongoing effort among an abundance of reflective resources, including television programs, magazine articles, and self-help books of all kinds, and now more than ever with mobile phones and their tools. The life of an individual has been filled with endless options and choices to make. Traditional codes and frames imposed by local culture have been replaced by do-it-yourself biographies. Personal life has been recreated around various forms of values and ideas which accelerated flow of cultures, lifestyles, and these have transformed relationships, intimacies and family structures. Other major changes through the eruption of choice have been realized around self-care which have been backed up by science, psychology and media tools. Self-creation phenomenon has gained increasing momentum with many derivatives, and in this way, the individual has become the sole subject responsible for what happens in her life. Such lifestyle experimentation has particular application to the area of consumption in contemporary societies, as the multiplicity of choices presented within the ever-growing sectors of lifestyle consumption facilitates the adoption and enactment of novel social practices (Elliot, A., and Urry, J. 2010, 91).

2.1.6 Emerging Adults
Jeffrey Arnett (2012, 31) describes the term 'Emerging adulthood' as a term used to describe ''the developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood, typically occurring between the ages of 18 and 25. It is characterized by a time of exploration and experimentation, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities, pursuing education and career opportunities, and forming intimate relationships. The criteria for adulthood attributed to emerging adults in industrialized countries mirror the societies' individualistic beliefs. Since individualism emphasizes mostly the value of learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient individual without relying on others; individualist principles such as independence and self-expression are often contrasted with

collectivist values such as duties and commitments to others. Overall, emerging adulthood is a term to create for what is described as a time of transition, as individuals move away from the stability and structure of childhood and adolescence and work towards establishing independence and self-reliance. As Arnett (2012) continues to elaborate, this developmental stage is mostly representative to modern societies and is a result of changes in social, cultural, and economic factors, covering an increased focus on higher education, delayed marriage and childbearing, and the emergence of new technologies and communication platforms. The majority of young adults in their thirties have not yet formed a permanent adult life structure. As a result, emerging adulthood can be defined by a lack of long-term commitments in love relationships and work, leading to increased volatility. Before making long-term decisions, this period is mostly attributed to frequent changes in love relationships and jobs (as Arnett 2012 cited from, Douglass, 2005, 2007).

The notion of "emerging adults" may encompass a variety of attributes that are influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they arise. Therefore, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this term, it is helpful to investigate the divergences that exist across cultural contexts. The tradition of patriarchal authority in North Africa and the Middle East cultures, which is supported by Islam. This tradition emphasizes the father's unquestionable authority in the family, and discussions of family rules are uncommon in Muslim families. Women's appearance and behavior are tightly controlled in Islamic societies as part of the tradition of male dominance over women. In Asia, Confucianism has deeply influenced the cultures, which emphasizes respect and care for parents, especially the father. This has led to a higher possibility of having grandparents living in households and a strong emphasis on education, which tends to result in intense pressure on young people in Asian societies. As a consequence, high school, which is one of the most important phases in adolescent's period, often entails strong pressure, as performance on college entrance exams largely determines their path through adult life. On the other hand, "The West" is a cultural grouping of countries that includes Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The young people in these countries have access to education, a wide range of occupations, and leisure activities, which are mostly media-based. Adolescents in the West spend most of their time outside of school in leisure with their friends (Arnett, 2012, 25-28).

Globalization has led to young people around the world experiencing increasingly similar environments. Having all these in mind, young people around the world are becoming increasingly bicultural in their identities, participating in both their local culture and the global culture through email or interactions with foreigners. (Arnett, 2002a cited in Arnett, 2012).

2.1.7 Alienation

Disembodied world of information technologies has often been depicted with its depersonalized nature. ''The outside world confronts us with a barrage of abstractions: statistics, figures, formulas, all indicating how imperiled we are, and almost all of them elude our comprehension. Loving is a kind of rebellion, a way of getting in touch with forces to counteract the intangible and unintelligible existence we find ourselves in'' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 178). Algorithms enable measurability and calculability to provide efficiency for matching while also saving time in today's fast-paced world. As Bauman (2016) introduced in an interview with Peter Haffner, ''Online dating involves an attempt to define the features of a potential partner that best reflect one's longings and desires. Candidates are chosen based on hair or skin color, height, figure, bust size, age, interests and hobbies, preferences, and dislikes. The underlying idea is that an object of love can be assembled from several measurable physical and social characteristics. In the process, the most decisive factor gets forgotten: the human person''. Visual evaluation, due to its speed, reduces the attribution of worth to a binary process: a person is either hot or not, appealing or unattractive. This binary nature of perception has been embedded in technology (Illouz, 2019).

2.1.8 The Threats of Uncertainty

Recently, uncertainty has become synonymous with risk. Since individuals see uncertainties as a sort of danger, they cling to the sources for the information they can access. The online world is full of obscurity, fraud, and anonymity, thus users resort to the security that platforms try to achieve through their continuously modified algorithms. For instance, dating apps tackle several identity problems and build new security solutions to avoid problems such as 'catfishing'. Being aware of the risks and uncertainties, many dating apps employ "affect parameters" to estimate matches, make use of the calculability of emotions. Moreover, users tend to have more predictable outcomes and reduce the danger and uncertainty of the new meeting experiences before meetings in an offline setting. According to Alain Badiou (2012), today's computerized control of meetings eliminates the chance factor from the game of love and describes the risk-free policy as the templates and protocols of the virtual romance of enforcement. Insured against all risks and heavily advertised, and therefore the current trend in love focuses on a "safety-first" approach where people search for a risk-free option by thoroughly assessing potential partners through online searches for personal information, such as photos, tastes, date of birth, etc. ''Dating systems guarantee their users precise possible matches by determining many parameters such as your sign, age, height, and tastes'' (Badiou, 2012, 7-8). According to MacKinnon, technology handles love as 'a calculation of chance' to predict suitable users with different acquired data, and then its urgency depends on the timing under convenience (MacKinnon 2016a, 2016b as Malinowska 2022 cites). Under the rule of digital time, each of these acquires fresh meanings and new layers of autonomy. Malinowska (2022) also

mentions non-negotiability, which algorithms increasingly provide promise for pleasure, and a trajectory for how users think about a love that technologies can never unravel and never fail to amplify. Another way to reduce the uncertainty which comes with the risk of being disappointed in real-life encounters, is to track other people by using the internet and digital media. Communication technology sociologist Mary Chayko states that ''This can be done by searching Google or social media for content created by and about the other person'' (Chayko, 2017, 188).

Social interactions are built on expectation and predictability. For example, rituals add predictability to the cultural practices by determining what form it will take, the roles of actors, and the expected outcomes. As Giddens (1991) stated, rituals have a role in the creation of an individual's identity in traditional societies and the stages that an individual goes through, such as shifting from adolescence to adulthood, are clearly marked. However, modern society has obscured this clarity; an individual has become free to determine, choose, and change the changes he has undergone. When rituals are performed in relationships, they determine the level of the relationship and the rules arising from the roles. As Illouz points out (2019, 45), these roles were performed within the framework of shared rules and norms in premodern dating forms, and these rules included the hierarchical structure of sexuality, ethical ascriptions, and heteronormativity. However, by removing role expectations and rules the postmodern way of living leads individuals into interactions where uncertainty prevails.

2.1.8.1 The Negative Choice

Since there is no family, tradition, or social code mechanism that dictates the individual's decision mechanism, the individual arrives in a position to make a decision autonomously. Although this autonomy brings freedom, it also comes with confusion in the face of the abundance of decisions of the consumption society. Here, Illouz (2019, 19) defines the 'negative choice' as the modern individual chooses not to make a decision. Illouz (2019) states the natural causes of the decision to unchoice as decreasing birth rates and increasing trends for divorces. Capitalism has been providing countless familial practices such as marriage rituals, child care, etc., to be able to promote consumption. Moreover, new alternative types of capitalism reached different social forms and therefore supported more than the family idea only. Values such as loyalty, monogamy, and long-term relationships have been questioned, which each result in loneliness formed around individuals who have been separated from many values and roots. Avoidance of making stable decisions leads to some patterns such as living without marriage or single parental types of formations. Faced with the alternative between family and no family, a growing number of people

are 'deciding' on a third possibility: a mixture of various forms, trying out what seems to fit the current situation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

2.1.8.2 The Ontological Uncertainty

Illouz defines ontological uncertainty as an individual's needs and desires waiting to be satisfied. In the consumer market, Internet technology, and the media industries serve as intermediaries for the self which constantly evaluates and interrogates itself fragmentally. Therefore, the self cannot be sure of its value as entirety. Illouz breaks down ontological uncertainty into three processes namely valuation, evaluation, and devaluation. These three are surrounded by economic, cognitive, and cultural processes. Value is directly related to one's place in society, consequently, evaluation is the process of creating and realizing worth through economic and symbolic practices. Devaluation refers to the act of decreasing value with different processes that produce dynamics in the market such as overproduction reduces the demand. Evaluation has always been used from different domains to place the worth of the commodity or in this case of the individual. This can be realized through certificates, bureaucracies, and increasingly online platforms. Appearance, physicality, and social identity are all connected to images on the internet and valorized one's worth. Since these performance tools become the precursors for communicating with others, they will also affect the dynamics and structure of communication from top to bottom.

The partial evaluation of the body in separated pieces disrupts the holistic notions of the person which this objectification leads to alienation from one's value (Illouz, 2019). Therefore uncertainty is a result of the difficulties in engaging the recognition; it is a doubt regarding the nature, worth, and ultimately the value of the self involved in a relationship. Sexual valuation frequently serves as a limited sphere for women, a value that yields uncertain returns and the value is more limited as opposed to men in terms of age and social value. In the sexual or economic market, women's value is generally limited, as when they are, for example, viewed as being "too old" to be recruited for a particular job or pursued a relationship. Men's attractiveness, on the other hand, aligns with their social value and has a considerably longer lifespan, leading to more stable kinds of selfhood where the sexual and the social are congruent. Consequently, men have a longer period to get valued positively both age and position in society. The support of qualities creates a stronger sense of identity for a man; however, it's more fragmented and open to scrutiny for a woman. Since contemporary time contains paradoxical parts, one has to protect their autonomy and secure self-worth but also have attachment and connection with the other.

2.1.8.3 Ontological Security

Chayko (2017), points out the need for what Giddens calls ontological security (1991); ''The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action.'' This indicates the need for security of the individual in the rapidly developing pace of life, where belief systems are gradually receding into the background with continuous instability. This need is basically for the continuity of the self-identity of the individual who needs to feel the continuity of his/herself entity for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. However, modernity and digitalization not only multiply the reality of the individual but also diversify it, challenging the identity to be on a solid ground. As individuals routinely participate in social actions and routinized practices, the world remains orderly and secure to them.

Furthermore, existing primarily in a mental world, sociomental bonds indicate a space that cannot be produced by one person alone, instead takes two or more minds to make possible or "activate"—a "meeting of the minds." Thus, when sociomental bonds give this routinized anchoring feeling, people view the online world as real as the physical world and stay connected (Chayko, 2002, 1).

2.1.9 Technology

Since there is no longer the safety of religion and traditional precepts, people have more and more questions and technology has replaced it as a reference point for answers to each question. It appeals to the inner world of the individual and offers infinite possibilities. Sense of belonging and rootedness used to be given by the community, technology and sciences have become the main substitution for almost any question. Being connected all the time, everywhere with numerous platforms creates a sort of intricately formed connectivity, new types of interactions and indirect presence, which Illouz calls this as a 'cold intimacies' (Illouz, 2007). Contemporary modernity has been associated with this enmeshed type of connectivity which is dubbed differently by several scholars. This type of hyperconnectivity according to Illouz, ''enables fast and pleasure-based connections and interactions which mainly lack emotions such as sexting, hookups, casual sex, fuck buddy, friends with benefits, and so on (Illouz, 2019, 33).

2.1.10 COVID-19 and Its Consequences on Intimacy and Relationships

With the advent of the coronavirus disease 2019, governments responded by imposing numerous lockdown periods to prevent virus transmission, including a prohibition on leaving the house except for vital necessities. Non-cohabiting persons were rigorously banned from meeting each other, and physical contact became exceedingly harmful, while social separation and house confinement were essential precautions to avoid the virus. Technology and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted

intimate relationships on various levels. One of them is how people's fear of contagion drives them to be alerted towards risks and rather stay connected online. Therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic period it has been noticed significant increases in the number of online dating subscriptions. People who were reluctant to meet in person, a non-presence grew to represent a new standard for relationships particularly for romantic relationships. All of a sudden, what was formerly wanted (or at least tolerated) human company (and companionship) is suddenly a cause of boredom and exhaustion. Divorce and breakup rates increased dramatically over the world when the COVID-19 pandemic trapped millions of individuals inside their houses. Although sex remains a primary desire, the potential dangers that the body may carry have led to online representations of it rather than a physical act. Elements for traditional encounters such as modality (face-to-face), locus (restaurant, hotel), and temporality (natural/analogue time; social time) have been nearly fully overtaken by digital versions on a worldwide scale (Malinowska, 2022, 3). The logic of what Turkle (2011) referred to as "alone together" has increasingly transformed into "together alone", as Malinowska (2022, 23) describes it. Because the reason for seeking companionship with digital "subjects" has provided energy-saving passivity to those connections.

Because of all the broad changes in society that have been mentioned before, it is important to understand how they affect the perception of intimacies and digital spaces.

2.2 Love, Intimacy, Sex and Society

Love has become a prominent subject in life, but its complexities have increased in contemporary times. The definition and significance of love have transformed throughout history, corresponding to changes in social, cultural, and economic circumstances. While love has been characterized as an irresistible force beyond individual control, it has gradually evolved as a cultural and communicative practice into new forms. The prevailing definition of love has been shaped by art, literature, popular films, and television series, as noted by Bauman in his book Liquid Love (2003, 13), which argues that kinship, affinity, and causal links are features of human selfhood and togetherness, while love and death lack a distinct history. However, with the advent of modernity, macro processes such as globalization and digitization have altered and multiplied the decision-making mechanisms, affecting people's autonomy and their sense of place in the world. Consequently, while the importance of love in one's life endures, the practices and ways of experiencing it have changed.

Arnett (2012) defined various types of relationship types, among which intimacy has been traditionally associated with the establishment of a close sensual and emotional connection with another individual, while courtship is understood as the pursuit of a steady partner. Romantic

relationships, by contrast, are characterized by both intimacy and sexual activity. Collins and Sroufe (1999) stated that combining passion and intimacy leads to the formation of romantic love (As cited in Arnett, 2012). Additionally, as Arnett described, sexual activity is not necessarily a defining feature of these relationship forms, as it can be experienced outside of romantic associations as well. Thus, sexual experiences may occur in different types of relationships.

2.2.1 How Does Love Relationship, and Intimacy Transformed through the Modernity

People built social institutions such as family, work, education, and sports, each of which comprises a variety of roles and performances, and these institutions in turn developed distinctive cultures. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) pointed out that it is no longer possible to pose in some binding way what family, marriage, parenthood, sexuality, or love mean, what they should or could be; rather, these vary in substance, exceptions, norms, and morality from individual to individual and also from relationship to relationship. As individuals realized there is no one fixed truth to follow, new revelations occurred in the mind for reflection on the self on matters such as what people want, or do not want and which path to follow or leave.

Previously the workload and undefined nature of labor was not allowing for individuals to reflect on themselves, let alone with being able to seek desire and romance. Both the advent of sexuality and the transformation of love have a direct connection to self-reflection and identity subjects. As identity became a project shaped by the individual's choices, birth control, abortion, premarital sex or open relationships/marriages became just a few of the countless choices left to the individual. As sexual and reproductive behaviors transformed it has also led to giving love and emotions a moral authority in marriage. All of these choices affected family structures and created several crises in the perceptions of the nuclear family, and divorce which led to a change from marriage until death do us part to marriage until further notice.

When the industrial society's framework, which consisted of fixed gender, family, and occupational duties, started to disintegrate, a contemporary version of anarchy emerged. As millions of people look for happiness, statistics on divorce and remarriage, overlapping families, and serial marriages are being affected by this desire for immediate personal independence and fulfillment, which may so easily turn into hatred, desperation, and loneliness (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Under the guise of granting individuals freedom of choice, a post-family society is envisioned. The new model of family life being supported by medical advancements and backed up by new genetic legislation. ''As a result, parenting would not necessarily have to be connected to natural processes, and biology would begin to function independently.'' (Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 160). ''The child becomes the final alternative to loneliness, a bastion against the vanishing chances of loving and being loved. It is a private way of 'putting the magic back' into life to make up for general disenchantment.'' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 37). A combined emotional venture between husbands and wives is becoming increasingly prevalent, taking precedence even above the duties parents have to their children.

During the nineteenth century, as romance took more space in literature, romancing became a common practice that appealed to a general group (Giddens, 1992). Through the idealization of romantic ideas, love standed as the predominant condition for an individual's decision for marriage. Romantic love ideas were widely spread over much of the social order, in which bourgeois groups had a primary influence on this. For the majority of people, the establishment of marriage relations shifted away from being based on assessments of economic value over to emotional reasons in the nineteenth century. The rise of romantic love ideals separated the marital link from larger familial ties and gave it extra special significance to end in itself. The "home" has gained a place where people can get emotional support, in contrast to the instrumental nature of the workplace.

2.2.2. The Rise of Dating

In her book Beth L. Bailey (1988) describes the creation of the concept of dating, which underwent a significant transformation in the 20th century, shifting from a marriage-centered courtship to a form of youthful recreation, shaping the societal norms and expectations around relationships and romance. The concept of "dating" as a form of courtship originated in Western societies during the early 20th century. Prior to this, the primary system of courtship in the American middle class was "calling," where a young man would visit a young woman at her home and meet her family before being allowed some time together in the family. Dating became increasingly popular in the first two decades of the 20th century and essentially replaced calling as the accepted mode of courtship for young people in the American middle class. This change revolutionized American courtship by moving the location of courtship from the home to public places and removing the young couple from the eyes of the girl's family to the anonymity of the public world. The concentration of Americans in large urban areas meant that families had less space in their homes, making it difficult to host suitors. Cities also offered more entertainment options, giving young people more opportunities to go out and explore. The invention and mass production of the automobile gave young people greater mobility and more places to go (Duvall, 1957, as cited in Bailey, 1988, 19). The popularity of dating in rural and suburban areas was boosted by the advent of automobiles, but it was only speeding up and expanding a trend that had already started. Similarly, Urry (2004) mentions how the advent of automobiles has become a central symbol of modernity and

individualism, promoting a particular way of life that is based on speed, mobility, and independence.

Dating also diminished parental control and allowed young people more opportunities for sexual exploration. This change led to the sexual revolution of the 1920s. Although parents maintained a degree of control by setting curfews, dating enabled greater sexual opportunities for young people. The birth of dating in the United States in the early 20th century transferred the balance of power in courtship from the female to the male. Prior to dating, the primary system of courtship in the American middle class was "calling," in which the girl took the initiative and a young man would 'call' on a young woman, usually in her family's home. However, with the rise of dating, the male became the initiator and had the power to ask a girl on a date. Additionally, going on a date often meant spending money, which further increased the man's power in the relationship and created the expectation that the woman owed him sexual favors in return. This transfer of power significantly changed the dynamics of courtship in American society. Bailey (1988) discussed how calling and dating were primarily activities engaged in by emerging adults rather than adolescents. At the beginning of the 20th century, calling was a serious step that often led to marriage and was not seen as a form of youthful recreation. Young people did not typically engage in calling until they were around 20 years old because marriage did not occur for most people until their early to mid-20s. Similarly, when dating emerged as the primary form of courtship, it was primarily an activity for young people in their 20s. It was only later in the century, as the marriage age declined and high school enrollments grew, that dating became acceptable for teenagers.

2.2.3 Love and Intimacy on the Sphere of Individualism: Modernism, Consumption and Rational Minds

Industrial Revolutions and technological developments have increasingly transferred individuals' lives from locally fixed places to modernized and individualized mobilities. These locally fixed places were solidified and ruled by religion, communal orders, and stability. The 'new' instead, has become an ever changing rules, dissolution of community ties, increasing claims to equality, and therefore restless uncertainty about identities. As a result, ideas about love form a framework according to the living conditions of the individual who is surrounded by the values towards family, and gender roles, and all these ideals have been maintained as oral and textual narratives in a historical process. Today's accelerating pace and the endless resources offered by technology equip the narratives provided to the individual for relationship formations with endless options. People have discovered new ways to explore their private lives thanks to technological advancements

which have augmented their social reality for them. For this reason, ideas about the concept of love have gradually changed.

2.2.4 Confluent Love and Pure Relationship

Giddens (1990) divides societies into traditional (pre-modern) and post-traditional (modern) in order to indicate differences in cultures and individual actions. He states that primitive civilizations did not have wide options to access which they were predefined through customs and traditions. However, in post-traditional or modern society people are less concerned with these premises made by previous generations, and they have more alternatives. Therefore, their actions require greater analysis and consideration before they are taken.

In his book 'The Transformation of Intimacy', Giddens (1992) describes how individuals' pre-modern lifestyle and daily life patterns, nature, attitude, behavior, emotion, and sexuality have been steadily changing in contemporary society. As Giddens stated, "In the pure relationship, trust has no external support, and has to be developed on the basis of intimacy" (Giddens, 1992, p. 138). The nature of intimacy has transformed since communication gained new shapes and practices as marriage and courtship become an 'end in itself' contrary to economic endeavors. It concerns deeply emotions, inner world, desires, and insecurities.

'Pure relationship is one in which external criterias have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver. In the context of a pure relationship, trust can be mobilized only by a process of mutual disclosure.' (Giddens, 1991, 6). Meanwhile, confluent love emerges as an ideal in a culture where practically everyone has the opportunity to achieve sexual success. 'Unlike romantic love, confluent love is not necessarily monogamous, in the sense of sexual exclusiveness. What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, 'until further notice', that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile.' (Giddens, 1992, 63). Sexual exclusiveness here has a role in the relationship to the degree to which the partners mutually deem it desirable or fundamental. Hence, today sexuality seems to be rendered as a mere pleasure and connection with no other motive, therefore the quality of sex is one of the key matters for maintaining the interaction. With this liberation, advice and self-help manuals led individuals to think reflexively about themselves, and getting help for their wishes and problems helped them to develop autonomously. Therefore, the valuation phase is a constant process between two people to maintain or break the communication.

However as Illouz (2013) stated pure relationship also comes with its drawbacks. Even though, ''romantic love challenged both patriarchy and the family institution, the "pure relationship" also rendered the private sphere more volatile and the romantic consciousness unhappy. What makes love such a chronic source of discomfort, disorientation, and even despair, as she argues, can be adequately explained only by sociology and by understanding the cultural and institutional core of modernity (Illouz, 2013, 12).

2.2.5 The Emotional Autonomy and Emotional Modernity

Love stands as an escape from loneliness and goes along with individuality while also allowing togetherness since it is based on genuine emotions, and faith in their validity. Lovers create their own laws and express their love for another through their language of themselves. With all these novelties and rational systems, even love can also be saved from its outdated norms and established codes now that the conventional law-givers, the church, the state, and traditional morality are stepping back. As a result, a form of positivism emerges in which personal preferences and ideals are transformed into only standards. ''Love is an 'utopia' which is not ordained or even planned from above, from cultural traditions or sermons, but grows from below, from the power and persistence of sexual drives and deep personal wishes. While love used to break up (or ignite) under the tin pressure of social conventions, nowadays people seek a loving relationship as a place in which to hide from an inimical world.''(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 176-192).

Rationality and commodification form the backbone of many societies, and this naturally reflects even the micro level of interactions and dynamics. The capacity of a person maintaining control over his or her inner world in all spheres, including sexual and physical, is a prerequisite for emotional autonomy. Emotional modernity has been developing since the eighteenth century but it did fully materialize in the 1960s when the cultural acceptance of sexual decision-making based solely on personal, subjective, emotional, and hedonistic considerations emerged the creation of the private sphere brought emotional and personal freedom because it protected people from the Church's and the community's oppressive influence. Over time, privacy laws and the state's protection of the private sphere also came into play. Whereas sexual freedom depends heavily on the legal rights of women acquired through independence battles; emotional autonomy depends on the attainment of the right to privacy and the development of consciousness. These two liberties are the key components that enable emotional autonomy.

One of the main effects of sexual freedom demonstrates itself at the fragmentation of the emotional and sexual experience into several regimes of action. (Illouz, 2019). This had an effect negative by making interactions between men and women increasingly ambiguous. Finally, it

contributed to the cultural upheavals sparked by media industries and artistic elites, which helped define women's rights to control how they use their own bodies.

2.2.6 Heteronormativity

Since the heterosexual activity was inevitably the focal point for reproduction in nature, the socialization of humankind had bounded to externally organized processes. There was a lot of pressure on people to perform well since traditions and religions promoted the idealization of a single narrative, mostly built around heterosexual monogamous relationships to maintain a functioning society. Schisms such as being a man or woman, single or married, forced individuals to be either one or the other, thus separating them into respectable or unacceptable (Giddens, 1992). The social changes of the 20th century, individualisation and feminist movements enabled the individual to get rid of the burdens of gender roles. The constant change and diversification of narratives in the postmodern world have made it impossible to accept one single truth. For this reason, individuals have found the opportunity to move their sexuality away from the guidance of tradition and religion and build their lifestyles on personal autonomy. The individuals, who were freed from the social conditions of being a woman or a man, were able to make their sexuality a lifestyle. Heterosexuality has lost its feature of being a common standard with the emancipation of women and the separation of sexuality from its traditional bonds and coercivities. In this period, capitalism also penetrated the empty self-project areas of the individual.

Although heterosexuality lost its generality, there still seems to continue in some areas in life. As Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2012), "The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home," argues women often experience feelings of burden and overwhelm due to their dual roles of paid work and domestic labor, whereas men often feel undervalued or overlooked. She argues that while women have increasingly entered the workforce, they continue to be responsible for the majority of domestic work, which she refers to as the "second shift." the concept of "emotional work," which refers to the effort required to maintain and nurture intimate relationships in which this work is often performed by women, both in their romantic relationships and in their roles as mothers and caregivers. This makes it difficult for women to pursue careers and other interests, and can contribute to the delay of marriage and committed relationships. She suggests that the inequality in backstage support is hidden from view. This backstage contains a cycle where men's work time is seen as more valuable than women's, causing men to spend less time on household responsibilities and more time at work, which leads to their success and promotion. Women, on the other hand, carry more of the second shift at home, which limits their personal ambitions and earnings. This contributes to the expanding wage gap between men and women, and the cycle continues (Hochschild, 2012, 224). By giving examples from different

couples' lives, she indicated the emotional labor involved in managing a household, such as the providing the needs of family members, which is often carried by women make her feel overwhelmed by their double duties of paid work and domestic labor, while men often feel that their contributions are undervalued or go unrecognized.

Eva Illouz in her book 'The End of Love' (2019) describes heterosexuality as a fundamental relation with sexual and economic exchange between woman and man in which man provides economic incentives for alternative practices in different phases of the relationship. For example, traditionally men have used their social status to get sexual favors, while women have used their youth, attractiveness, and sexuality—often the only power they had in the past—to access social power that was otherwise inaccessible to them. Illouz (2019) points out that while comparing industrial capitalism and consumer capitalism, the former evaluates the female body for a single purpose, and the latter creates consumption objects that are partitioned body parts into multiple structures. If feminine sexuality is the commodity to be achieved, capitalism produces value through this commodity. This value is generated for the view, thus it can be said that there is still talk of a system dominated by heterosexuality.

2.2.7 Sexual Revolutions

Sexuality can be considered one of the oldest power dynamics since sexual identity has been a subject to prohibitions and hierarchical ordering. "'Sexuality' had no distinct existence so long as sexual behavior was bound up with reproduction and with the generations. Sexual activity was divided up between an orientation to reproduction and the ars erotica - that split which also classified women into the pure and the impure." (Giddens, 1992, 175). The lower position of women in society than men led to the exploitation and underappreciation of women's power. Similarly, homosexuality was seen as a disease, a shame that should be hidden in society. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, sexuality was gradually scientifically and rationally stripped of its religious expectations. When sexuality was scientifically justified, its religious expectations were gradually abandoned. The sanctity of private life and the idea that it should have a separate existence and therefore rights was beginning to gain importance. The "Baby Boom Generation," a large group of youngsters born in the Western world between the 1940s and early 1950s who would grow up in many cases in relatively prosperous and secure environments, as well as in a middle class that was on the rise and had better access to both education and entertainment than ever before was another cause. Due to their demographic importance and social, economic, and educational backgrounds, they were able to influence society by bringing about a change toward more comfortable and informal attitudes. People started to practice the outcomes of their sexual activities less and less in expectation of social rules as many norms and rules started to lose importance. With

several important events in history, sexuality ripped off connections with reproduction. One of them was the advent of contraception: without that, men and women could never experience sexuality. Women now have access to simple and effective contraception thanks to the 1960 invention of the birth control pill. Moreover, obstetrics brought significant advancement, which decreased the number of women who died during childbirth and hence increased life expectancy for women, which was another possible contributing factor. One study supports the idea that the development of penicillin reduced the ramifications of syphilis and, as a result, had a significant influence on the development of modern sexuality (Francis, 2013). The idea that sexuality should be embraced as a natural element of life rather than suppressed by the state, industrialized sexual morality, religion, and family gave rise to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The goal of the counterculture was to liberate people from the moral and legal sexual constraints in many parts of the world in the 1950s, especially in the contemporary USA. With the slow economic recovery, the rise in risky non-traditional sexual conduct was followed also by other social, and cultural factors. As an illustration, the 1950s witnessed accelerated economic expansion, enormous increases in the ownership of cars and televisions, suburbanization, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Cold War. Changes in the perception of sexuality led to an individual as a mere human being helping to be freed from their obligations that come from gender roles and religious scripts. Today, sexuality is more than a matter of biology and is mostly a part of socialization. It is a part of a self-created identity, of how one sees and expresses oneself and it's also a fundamental human right of someone.

2.2.8 Casual Sex

As Illouz (2019) states, casual sex is not a new phenomenon, but its modern form emerged as a response to the political and moral push to liberate sexuality from religious and economic restrictions. Illouz investigates the impacts of casual sex and the sexualization of interactions on the formation of relationships. Since individuals were liberated and freed from the liabilities of moral codes and as premarital sex was considered normal, the number of sexual experiences with different partners increased. It became more gender-neutral in character and linked with practices of authenticity and autonomy. Casual sex was facilitated by modern urban areas like cities and university campuses, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to interact without social control. In this sense, casual sex represents a breaking down of social and ethnic boundaries, and it reflects both new moral norms and the commercialization of leisure. These various social influences created certain politically complex issues through altering how sexuality was perceived in kinship, marriage, and more general ideas towards the construction of self. After sexuality was cut from the family bond system and turned into a pleasure activity, the visual industry produced and offered many consumption areas with the help of technology and the tools it offers. This has helped to form

a practice that is available anywhere at any time, thus accelerating the processes. The boundaries of relationships change because sexuality is experienced in a condition of seriality and open-endedness; they become contiguous and continuous with one another, through overlapping frames. By promoting the accumulation of sexual experiences and even permitting them, casual sex leads to uncertainty in a way that complicates the lines of the relationship. Illouz concludes that the concept of free sexuality as promoted by consumer culture and technology has a profound effect on relationships, causing forms of uncertainty that are the root of negative relationships (Illouz, 2019, 84).

The ritualistic and preset nature of sexual encounters has been lost as a result of all these sexual features and changes, and sexual relationships are now loaded with uncertainty and unfavorable social dynamics, in which men and women frequently end relationships abruptly or without noticing. This defines a condition of interactions that, to use Bauman's definition, are fluid (Bauman, 2003). However what has made sexual freedom the pervasive cultural structure it is today, is the fact that it has been appropriated by and used in the business sector. As sexuality evolved into an economic objective to be achieved through the economy and vice versa, economic practices merged with sexualized individuals and performances (Illouz, 2019, 28).

Where interactions get ambiguous and one is unsure about the feelings of the other -even themselves- sexuality stands out as a piece of certainty since it's clear when the activity starts and ends and Illouz argues that therefore sexuality becomes a source of certainty. ''While pre-modern courtship started with emotions and ended with sex that could produce guilt and anxiety, contemporary relationships start with (pleasurable) sex and must grapple with the anxious task of generating emotions. The body has become the site for the expression of emotions, and emotions become extraneous to sexual interactions.''(Illouz, 2019, 116). Thus, if sex becomes a way to collect information, interpretation practices for establishing a relationship can take shape in that direction.

2.3 Love, Intimacy, Sex and Technology

2.3.1 The Development of Digital Tools: Love and The Internet

Love is a combination of various cultural elements namely sexuality, economy, politics, traditions, religion, technology etc., the way of experiencing love changes in parallel as the other elements change. When most of reality was still analog and many cultural elements mainly used to be linked with tangibility, nobody regarded the media to be a part of personal and emotional interactions, thus love experienced between people and devices were considered non-intrusive and auxiliary. While technological advances flourished, cultural practices transferred and transmuted in the virtual space.

Love is especially affected as one of the main communication practices of human beings, when it gains new forms it has also been questioned about its first necessity: proximity. Even though for some, proximity is fundamental for love, there have been new formations and diversities. One of the most prominent realizations is that since the mind is the one experiencing, reflecting and enjoying all the impulses and stimuli, technology offers exactly what is needed for this. With the advent of the Internet, the effects and dimensions of all these changes have been intricately combined and intertwined and it has become a social mediator in a way that defines, initiates, accelerates, and ends the communication. Most, if not all, dates and romantic relationships have infiltrated online activities. The distribution of mediated emotions is becoming more complicated due to "intelligent" media, which are more interactive and appear to be more autonomous.

Additionally, the devices themselves begin to represent our love, fantasies, or desires. As Anna Malinowska (2022) puts it, maybe people do not need closeness to experience love and maybe not even a body. She also refers to technology's capacity that reveals love's hidden potentials and affordances, many of which have been suppressed in the past due to traditions or are simply not physically possible.

What Elliot, A., and Urry, J. named as 'affect storage' is helping people to create intimacy and emotional interactions across distance. 'Miniaturized mobilities' have been used to allow individuals to communicate, store, respond, and participate in many activities and practices anytime and anywhere as extensions of them. ''In a fundamental way, the affect storage and retrieval organized through various kinds of mobile life generate new modes of identity that are less tied to fixed localities, regular patterns or dwelt-in cultural traditions.''(Elliot and Urry, 2010, 6). ''In the fields of sexuality, gender and intimacy, this reorganization, reconstruction and compression of the distances between peoples and places has had dramatic implications – one result being the surge of distance relationships and commuting lifestyles, which in turn has served to intensify the dissolution of traditional structures of intimacy and family life.''(Urry, 2010, 88).

2.3.2 Media and Visual Consumption - Scopic Capitalism

Since the twentieth century cinema and advertisements are areas that have offered the sexual side of the body to the audience. Capitalism engenders cultural power through sexuality, and the body becomes the new instrument of consumption, with consumption items structured to accommodate this cultural power. Sexuality had become a performance connected with desire, without any imposition of will or moral obligations. Visual culture produced consumption products for the spectator and in this way, sexuality has moved away from external sources such as religion, tradition and their indictments. The display of the sexual body has stimulated many consumer

industries with what people wear, what they eat and drink, and the places they go. Capitalism exploits economic value through bodies and sexuality and distributes it in various markets. Based on the concept of symbolic economy, while capitalism continues to commodify the sexual desires of the female body in various ways, technology and specifically the internet provide suitable environments for this. Illouz (2019) describes this matter as scopic capitalism which the value earned in various marketplaces as a result of this display, linking it to the visual exhibition of bodies and the surplus value gained through the spectacles. Furthermore, men and women derive various types of economic and social value from scopic capitalism. Women cultivate their bodies to produce value, through the consumer market, while men consume women's production of sexual value as status markers in arenas of the masculine realm. Besides, male gaze escalated through media designed for visual consumption.

This process encompasses many sectors from providing advice to the individual for the idealized body, all types of products that will make the body appealing, and the visual industries that will serve to display this body. The individuals perform themselves as the self is reduced to fragmented pieces for gaze. This subject generates gaze value at the crossroads of sexual and consuming domains, and therefore the scopic regime has become the domain of the internet and social media and that each individual has the potential to idealize oneself (Illouz, 2019).

2.3.3 Online Dating During the Pre-Tinder Era

Generating a profile for romantic purposes has become the responsibility of the algorithms once internet dating took off in the 1990s. A combination of the functions of matchmakers, dating columns, and even more so in the past, these applications, which were selected according to the needs of the users, show them potential contacts according to the parameters of the individuals. Not only has this improved romantic efficiency, but it has also improved romantic speed/time estimation accuracy. Since online dating and digital profiling desocialize in-person interactions, the topic of technologically mediated relationships has been debated.

According to Malinowska's (2022) book, technology plays a significant role in shaping the experience of love and introducing calculability and computationality into human interactions. The use of calculability of emotions, linguistic estimations, and discursive permutations in chatbots and mobile dating applications have been derived from medieval texts and have transformed the nature, form, and phases of encounters. The design and narration of these technologies have led to different outcomes that people interpret and assign a meaning to. Malinowska argues that love has become a preprogrammed fantasy for instant emotional and other gratification, designed by fabulations, which has its roots in the medieval notion of romance. (Malinowska, 2022, 30-32).

2.3.4 From Online Dating to Mobile Dating

Mobile communication and technologies generated new everyday practices, relations, and new connections with the rest of the world and therefore the self became increasingly mobile. Mobile dating technologies have become a part of individuals' lives through smartphones since 2012. Tinder, the first heterosexual location-based dating app to launch in October 2012, has been immensely popular throughout the world. Due to Tinder's success, the online dating industry has experienced a surge. In contrast to the previous dating websites such as OkCupid, Match.com, and eHarmony.com, new smartphone programs like Her, Hinge, Tastebuds, Badoo, Bumble, Happn, Hater, Coffee Meets Bagel, etc. have entered the e-dating industry.

While computer dating makes the location factor tied to a place, mobile dating is mobile enough to accompany individuals every moment of their day. Bauman (2003, 29) elaborates on this aspect by giving an example from Catherine Jarvie (2002) who explains on Guardian Weekend this type of connection as 'top-pocket' relationships which is convenient and compatible and consolidates the user's emotional experiences. This confidence boost can be helpful for individuals who suffer insecurities and fragmental valuations of their identity. Furthermore, thanks to smartphones, individuals can be accessed 'online' in an application while they are included in a social organization in an offline space. This two-way accessibility is achieved thanks to the 'stability' provided by the application, 'always being there for the user'.

2.3.5 Loving in Contemporary Technoculture with Intangibilities and Temporalities

Technology, specifically mobile devices has affected the dynamics of relationships as they can be easily carried anywhere. Relationships tend to gain intimacy as they are reinforced in the physical environment, likewise, Chayko (2017) states that this is now achieved through mobile tools. For example, social media accounts provide the opportunity to view others and get updated information about them. Events that happen in the digital world have significant effects on people's lives. The relationship between people and digital events has become more mobile due to the merging of communication and technology. (Chayko, 2017, 91).

2.4 The Rise of Mobile Intimacies

The mobility paradigm refers to the rising ease and speed of movement and communication enabled by developments in transportation and technology. It alludes to the concept of people and information moving more freely and fast than ever before. In his book 'Mobilities: New Perspectives on Transport and Society', John Urry centers his ideas around how individuals' lives

have increasingly become 'on the move' which refers to having a potential to be somewhere else while even moving. He states that point as, "The rise of a mobile society reshapes the self – its everyday activities, interpersonal relations with others, as well as connections with the wider world. Such individualized mobility routinely implicates personal life in a complex web of social, cultural and economic networks that can span the globe or at least certain nodes across parts of the globe. This engenders the 'small world' experience by which those meeting in distant places discover that they are connected through a relatively short set of intermediaries." (Urry, J. 2012, 6). Several digitized mediums *-or 'miniaturized mobilities'; mobiles, laptops, iPods-* (Urry, J., 2010, 7), provide this opportunity to people and multiply their experiences in a given moment. The current stage of modern society's growth can be characterized by these miniature mobilities, which, thanks to advancements in portable software and technology, make it easier to experience more mobile. These software-based miniature devices can be worn directly on the body and are therefore becoming increasingly important to the organization of the self, providing information for many parts of the self's communication with others, and the outside world. These miniaturized mobilities give opportunities to create and recreate the self and therefore affect social interactions in multiple ways. The self folds with many layers through several mobilities which are surrounded by.

2.4.1 The Networked Individualism and Intimacy

As mentioned before, the sexual revolution and feminist movements carried the backbones of the transformation of intimacy. Concerning both emotional and interpersonal aspects, mobile intimacy has become increasingly fluid. Intimacy has been freed from its sharp boundaries by expanding and diversifying in a way that could mean a different thing to each individual in a postmodern society. As the position of the concept of intimacy in the minds of individuals has shifted, the positions and ties of individuals in society have also changed. Most people have many remote links, or 'weak ties,' connecting them to the outside world in this networked individualism (Urry, J., 2010). Networked individualism has brought new opportunities but also new burdens.

2.4.2 Mobile Relationships and Intimacy

In their book Mobile Lives (2010) Elliott and Urry, elaborate on three major transformations, namely globalization, the transformation of intimacy, and the reinvention of personal life. Mobile intimacy indicates today's love and relationship issues and explores human practices, which can be called micro-practices, by taking into account these macro-level transformations. All these factors affect the way individuals perceive the world and reflect on their personal preferences. Along with technology, cultural elements have also transformed and gained new forms. One of them is the way romantic relationships are experienced and lived. The slow, static, and binary nature of

communication in the past has been replaced by fluid and faster forms (Zygmunt Bauman, 2000). Mobile intimacy is described by different components such as moving beyond national borders, creating new possibilities for relationships and sexualities with fluid forms, and also containing randomness and contingencies in itself. Intimacy in a mobile form gains different components which form around the self, relationships and various networks. Characteristics of mobile intimacy involve contingencies, continuity and ruptures according to the function of interaction itself. It changes and transforms relationships among families, partners, colleagues types of relationships. It helps also to discover oneself and the others as communication processes occur. As the tools became portable, individuals began to integrate into the various social environments and gain new forms, which Chayko (2017) defines as sociomental as it encompasses both interpersonal and mental processes. Although this process existed before the mobilization of technology, it can be said that these tools accelerated these dynamics. Due to their portabile nature, mobile devices have changed the nature of relationships and they tend to become more intimate as they are strengthened in the actual environment. Social media accounts provide people the chance to see others and find out the most recent details about them. Online tools make it easier for people to communicate by taking time and space out of the equation. People can share little amounts of information and communicate with one another in any location, day or night. Intimacy requires all of these elements, and online behaviors produce new derivatives in place of offline practices (Chayko, 2017).

Globalization has impacted on human relationships, specifically with reference to the changing dimensions of time and space between people, places and cultures. In the book Mobile Intimacy, Elliot, A., and Urry talk about the rise of "liquid love" and mobile intimacy, where intimate relationships are more flexible and negotiable, and can be easily disposed of. This is seen in the increasing popularity of "top-pocket relationships," "living apart together" couples, and distance relationships. The rise of globalization has led to a reinvention of personal life, with a growing acceptance of "relationship experimentation," and a radical break with traditional neighborhood cultures. All the tools that enable and lead communication - technology that increasingly filters all areas of life - have mobilized the self, social ties and relationships. The current age of complex mobility systems is leading to a reorganization of personal and social life, affecting not only social institutions and organizations but also the self. This is causing a transformation of identity, including stretching of the self in both psychological and social terms, based on factors such as plasticity, portability, contingency, communication, affect storage, and intimate, sexual, and gender re-imaginings. In light of other changes, the self has gradually evolved into a mobile form and social ties increasingly gain mobile forms accordingly. They are principally experienced in the minds of the participants even though social group ties occur in individuals'

physical environments. Humans are highly inventive in making social relationships and that other elements might step in even in the absence of external cues and stimuli. By using the Social Information Processing theory (Walther, 1996) as an example, Chayko indicates that intimacy can be achieved in a variety of ways without the use of touch (Chayko, 2017, 92). Writing styles, nicknames, profiles, and avatar pictures can all reveal a lot about a person. This idea shows that we can learn a lot about a person even from only a text because of the manner in which we communicate without actually being physical.

These tools provide opportunities for potential alternatives to disrupted or interrupted interactions in different ways and form novel memory constructions. Personal discoveries and memory constructions become possible with the touch of the mobile nature of technology since they affect the speed and time of interactions. The nature of mobile intimacy contains reflexivity (Giddens, 1990) since it first starts with an individual with self-reflection process and it follows an action which consequently takes the other part to the inside of the frame. Another significant consideration about mobile intimacy is that it helps individuals to stand up solely as a human being free from many social norms such as gender roles, nationalities and the other societal roles. This has caused the 'masculinization of sex' and the 'feminization of love', which have made adultery more frequent and more likely to be part of a portable personhood in the context when multiple mobilities generate opportunities outside neighborhood surveillance and regulation (Lawson, 1990 as cited in Elliot, A., and Urry, 2010). However certain gender roles have been carried and sustained in the online environment. Being a woman has been attributed to nurturing and caring. Therefore, women can use technology for these features to her purpose to show and feel affection. Hampton, et al., showed from Pew Research (2011), that ''women who use Twitter, email, and mobile photo sharing report lower levels of stress than those who do not because these tools make it easier for them to keep an eye on their friends and loved ones''.

All types of relationships are developed based on specific dynamics. The process results in the creation of an interaction network as the person starts to feel close to the other individual as they discover similarities. Since online interactions are based on sharing, users tend to remain in touch with others who share and like similar posts to them. In fact, McKenna (2002) et al., indicates that relationships are more likely to last online when interactions are based more on common interests and traits than on physical characteristics (as Chayko cited in 2017, 93). Since people can easily change certain aspects of their appearance, they may feel more at ease, open, and uninhibited when they are online. The usage of words, even of images and videos, are ambiguous; they demand interpretation; one must interact with them in order to derive meaning from them. Online interactions can easily develop into interesting, amusing, and even flirty relationships that lend

themselves to romantic or sexual encounters since they are less concerned with physical appearance or performance.

2.4.3 Annihilation of the Sense of Place

Nowadays relationships are fundamentally remote, however the feeling of togetherness through digital proximity has been given and is maintained by many affordances. Being together is not necessarily represented by a specific geographic location. Being connected to the internet makes people feel immobile, even if they are physically mobile. This interconnectedness results in a multifaceted existence and new ways of defining one's place in the world. Malinowska calls this as 'spatial multitasking' – the mode of being here (in real life) and there (online) at the same time – solves many limitations of distance, location, and geo-policies that are used to confine us to given spatial contexts (Malinowska, 2022, 38-39). Today individuals experience online and offline existence simultaneity in daily interactions. Comparisons that seemed more realistic in the past are no longer relevant. Even though the offline world still largely makes up the individual's experience and is considered to be of main importance, online alternatives can help with some communication and interactions that are difficult to take place in the physical environment. Furthermore, these two places have taken on an intricate form, influencing and being influenced by each other and integrated into lives, especially for the generation born into this technology.

People need communities and cultural elements to be able to feel that they belong and share common ground with others. Technologies can facilitate the recovery, recapture and reconstruction of significant emotional elements of the 'remembered life' or 'self-told relationship', either because such technologies assist in sustaining many relationship connections at-a-distance or because they are productive of new kinds of construction of memory. Communications technologies partly function as objects of affect storage and retrieval. In reality, in today's fast-paced, mobile culture, people may not come together very often, and social groups become too geographically distributed, or their participants are too busy, for members to meet face-to-face more than infrequently. But that does not imply they stop being connected when they are not gathered. Groups can stay even when physicality is scarce or absent, and even when members come and leave (Chayko, 2017, 64). Individuals spend more connected time with one another in addition to face-to-face conversation – not as a substitute for it, but as an option to it. Researchers Rainie and Wellman (2012, as cited in Chayko, 2017, 221) suggest that families may have less "face time" than in the past, but they have more "connected time".

2.4.4 Social Acceleration and Its Effect on Relationships

When it comes to relationships, the capitalist mode of production also mixes with technological advancements, in the area of communication. Relationships today are more fluid, transitory, and quickly experienced and consumed. Before all these changes, a person's lifetime acquaintances in the feudal production system were confined to the neighborhood where they resided, but as cities grew and technology advanced, this number increased to unpredictable levels. Capitalism and the modernization process that emerged with the economical developments led to a social acceleration. This marked the nineteenth century as a period of mobilization, as Marx pointed out and described in the Communist Manifesto how production and consumption in the capitalist structure affect the social structure, Marx and Engels stated that this effect influences the most fundamental of social life and accelerates human relations.

> "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the relations of society as a whole. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and movement distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" (Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, 1978,8).

Technology has deeply affected the experience of romantic relationships and has given new forms. Thanks to the speed it provides, more people have entered and exited the lives of others. This acceleration affects relationships on a deep level and social life experiences many changes in a short amount of time. Social acceleration took many forms, argues Malinowska (2022, 54), "a visible symptom has been the culture of fastness rendered first in the idea of fast-food, and by fast work, fast travel, etc. A natural follow-up of this trend is the emergence of fast love – a phenomenon inspired by technological acceleration, new media practices, and new forms of physical time." Fast love includes both the old slow mode and the digital speed, and it does not reject these two because it can produce informational discourses that will present them all. Data gathering and analysis examine human emotions while processing and displaying anticipated outcomes to the user. In the virtual world, people build profiles about themselves as they produce data. These profiles are then used to show people personalized and targeted ads, products, and potential partners. More importantly, the simultaneity of beginnings and endings has led to unclassifiable accumulations of relationships, and asynchronous communications.

2.4.5 The New Nature of Having Experiences: Ubiquitousness

Nowadays the digital world gives individuals an opportunity to record, display, and update their lives online. Therefore, users look at and experience the physical world differently to share and carry those experiences online. There is a difference between living with a mobile device and without it in terms of the experience and how certain memories are remembered thereafter. Individuals take walks to indicate and order things to indicate their location or to record or share their memories. This changes the experience profoundly. As social theorist Nathan Jurgenson (2012) indicates in his article 'Facebook Eye' in The Atlantic, ''Today, we are in danger of developing a "Facebook Eye": our brains are always looking for moments where the ephemeral blur of lived experience might best be translated into a Facebook post; one that will draw the most comments and likes.''

2.4.6 Making and Unmaking Social Bonds on Dating apps

Love is a practice between two people and as a cultural framework which develops itself around desire, has always been technologically mediated. Since the online world has brought new possibilities for the limitations of time and space, the practices have also changed and formed new forms along the way. Human emotions and the ways to express them in daily interaction have been significantly impacted by the integration of digitalism and new media, therefore thinking of love as an organic activity would complicate the impact of technology. As Dominic Pettman (2017) indicates in the interview ''Love Materialism, Technologies of Feeling in the 'Post-Material' World'', love always needs to be expressed and experienced through instruments. Technology only provides it with a number of tools and alternatives. Romantic relationships are now more mediated and social media in particular enables a new sort of digital traction. Breakups may appear less difficult now that there is an alternative way to do them other than face to face. Due to this reason it can also be more difficult because one can be followed, tracked, or only reminded. Besides, there are highly general and dispersed sexual talks, emphasizing the interchangeability as much as or maybe more than the individuality of the lover. Similar to this, a Pavlovian effect can occur when an anonymous message notification's "ping" substitutes for the voice of the loved one. Furthermore, the ways of connecting that are proposed by tech companies and their financial partners are the reason for the excessive and constant communication. This constant presence makes it harder to distinguish between personal emotions and public display. Anything shared is recorded and monetized, and the routine of daily life can't compare to the excitement that new technology, especially dating apps, promises. Instead of the 'organic' encounters often seen in romantic movies, the use of algorithms to find a partner has become the norm. Social media introduces individuals to

new ideas, perspectives, and ways of life, although it also has the downside of trapping them in an echo chamber. One example of this is the growing acceptance of polyamory, which has been facilitated by the ability of the internet to spread awareness of alternative forms of romantic love (Malinowska and Gratzke, 2018, 14-16). People have gradually become engaged in technology, and curious about the idea of personalizing their emotions through programmed tools which patternize their dating and romantic experiences. As Malinowska aptly indicates, ''Nobody considered the media a part of an emotional and intimate exchange. Let alone its active participants. Now, with ''intelligent'' media – the media that are more interactive and seemingly more autonomous – the share of mediated emotions gets more complex'' (Malinowska, 2022, 5). As mentioned before, even if it mostly includes the other; all the forms of love as an experience, loneliness, pain, happiness, and pleasure, are all happening in the mind. The common point of 'in real life' (IRL) communication and online communication is that emotional processes take place in the brain. Thanks to technology, it is gradually becoming a situation that can be experienced without the presence of another. For this reason, the individual can experience many different emotions thanks to the responses from the screen in front of him, even without his physical presence on the other side. Thus, the experience of the individual with tools shapes and diversifies the dynamics of the relationship.

2.5 The Digital Self

The lives and sense of identity of individuals have undergone profound transformations as a result of significant historical events such as the Scientific Revolution, the invention of the printing press, and the emergence of capitalism. Consequently, love has been transformed into a means of achieving social mobility, as the concept of sexuality has become increasingly disentangled from prevailing moral norms. A reality in which the institutions, processes, and social contracts that shape and control people's lives filtered into the fundamental ambivalence of what the individual desires in life and in love. As Illouz argues in her book 'Why Love Hurts'; ''At the end of the nineteenth century it was radical to claim that poverty was the result not of dubious morality or weak character, but of systematic economic exploitation, it is now urgent to claim not that the failures of our private lives are the result of weak psyches, but rather that the vagaries and miseries of our emotional life are shaped by institutional arrangements'' (Illouz, 2013, 4). Everything that goes wrong in an individual's life cannot be connected to dysfunctional childhoods or insufficiently self-aware psyches, but the set of social and cultural tensions and contradictions that have come to structure modern selves and identities (Illouz, 2013). However, since happiness and identity formation are directly related to institutionalization in modernity, love is also exposed to these facts.

Cultural constructions namely gender identity and its struggles comes from the institutional and culturally embedded dilemmas and ambivalence of modernity. When relationships get formed, personal problems do not disappear, one may feel bored, anxious, or angry; and have painful arguments and conflicts with the other; or, finally, go through the confusion, self-doubts, and depression of break-ups or divorces. Even though all of these experiences have a collective character, nowadays there is an insistence on how they are the result of faulty character or insufficient maturity. The rise of clinical psychology in the twentieth century solidified and granted scientific legitimacy to this notion of romantic problems as a function of psychological failings. Even though the separation of relationships or the divorce of marriages are attributed to the individual's personal failure and inadequacy, such experiences cannot be isolated from external cultural frameworks.

Illouz describes this fallacy as,

> "By juxtaposing the ideal of romantic love with the institution of marriage, modern polities embed social contradictions in our aspirations, contradictions which in turn take a psychological life. The institutional organization of marriage (predicated on monogamy, cohabitation, and the pooling of economic resources together in order to increase wealth) precludes the possibility of maintaining romantic love as an intense and all-consuming passion. Such a contradiction forces agents to perform a significant amount of cultural work in order to manage and reconcile the two competing cultural frames. This juxtaposition of two cultural frames in turn illustrates how the anger, frustration, and disappointment that often inhere in love and marriage have their basis in social and cultural arrangements" (Illouz, 2012, 14).

2.5.1 The Self as an Online Profile

According to Slavoj Zizek (2015), the individual, as a user, creates a digital identity that one can manipulate, describe and organize many of his features which one wants or does not want to have. This identity is a reflection, a representative of that person. A created 'persona' meets another through an electronic medium which Zizek describes as this online dating's problematic "aspect of self-commodification or self-manipulation which does not meet the individual's purpose which if it's finding a love. He says, "When you date online, you have to present yourself there in a certain way, putting forward certain qualities. You focus on your idea of how other people should perceive you. But I think that's not how love functions, even at the very simple level. I think the English term is 'endearing foibles' — an elementary ingredient in love. You cannot ever fall in love with the

perfect person. There must be some tiny small disturbing element, and it is only through noticing this element that you say, 'But in spite of that imperfection, I love him or her.'" It can be said that the online tools allow users' to create his/her own desired identity and search for their desired one which is not usually what real self is. Furthermore, following what is shared by others regularly shapes the experiences of users in terms of learning and taking examples from the experiences of someone which has formed a type of multifaceted mentality and identity.

2.5.2 Memories

Social ties and relationships frequently outlive and transcend physical reality. We can sense a connection to those who lived before us when we hear their stories (such as those of our ancestors or historical figures). In some circumstances, images and videos might aid in strengthening such ties. These kinds of spatial and temporal linkages can be made more expansive and intensely by presenting stories on blogs and social media. Individuals can continue to be visually and cognitively present even after they have physically disappeared if they are represented in video, music, and pictures. This experience of presence can be enhanced by digital technologies in several ways (Chayko, 2017, 209). The deceased is still alive in many ways on the social, mental, and psychological levels. We can keep in touch with the people we broke up with, or we can develop a communication bond with those with whom we are connected in a platonic sense, exactly as in the example of communication with a dead person. ''Sometimes we maintain our sociomental connections simply by feeling that we are "carrying" others mentally with us and thinking about them in that way. We may "play out" actual or fantasized scenarios in which we are sharing an actual experience with absent others.'' (Chayko, 2002, 96). In addition, despite the end of the relationship, the separated partners continue to have a place in each other's lives through memories - and technology-enhanced photos, videos, creating profiles and blogs, etc. Many parts of identity, which can be described as bonds even if they were ended, such as being an ex-lover, ex-friend, ex-employee, etc. continue to take place in such areas and affect individuals' lives in some unnoticed ways. Therefore, technologies reinforce and somehow reify these parts of people's lives which in the past were erased easily since they did not strengthen by addressing different senses. All of these can be argued to have widened and enhanced individuals' lives in unprecedented ways.

2.5.3 The Brief and Blurred Nature of Interactions

Mobile tools serve as social lubricants that break the dull and monotonous pace of daily routine and might expand to all aspects of life. These entertainers, according to Chayko (2008), compose gossip, humor, and flirting which permeate the flow of everyday life encounters and increase one's life. The individual can be active in another environment while being present in work, class, or a

group meeting. All of these small contacts tend to make life more enjoyable and stirring. The nature of cyber flirting, according to Ben-Ze'ev (2004, 149–50), is a form of verbal dance containing non-physically sexual relationships in which sexual boundaries are not clearly defined and sexual hints can be easily formed. Thanks to the ambiguity and frequency of all this flirty discourse the lines between friendly talk and flirting can be hard to separate.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative Approaches to the Study Digital Intimacies

I chose a qualitative analysis method for my research, as it allowed me to explore more comprehensive and nuanced experiences of young adults and their diverse perspectives in dating culture influenced by technology (Creswell, 2013). In order to achieve this, I decided to use the method of online semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews helped me capture diverse perspectives and gain a detailed understanding of the subtle impact of technology on dating culture. As for the analysis of the produced data, the use of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)) enabled me to uncover underlying processes and identify cultural patterns that emerged from the data, which provided me insights into the broader cultural and social implications of technology's impact on dating among young adults. The flexibility of thematic analysis allowed me to adapt to new themes and ideas that emerged from the data.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. In-depth Interviews
'In-depth interviews' is a commonly used method in qualitative research that involves conducting a face-to-face or phone conversation with a single participant, with the aim of gathering detailed and rich information about their experiences, perspectives, and views on a specific topic. The primary benefit of in-depth interviews is that they allow researchers to explore topics in depth, using open-ended questions that encourage participants to share their thoughts and feelings in their own words" (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Their unstructured nature gives the interviewer a freedom in which they do not follow a strict set of questions or a predetermined questionnaire. Instead, the interviewer guides the conversation based on the participant's responses, following up on their comments and exploring topics in more detail. The flexibility of in-depth interviews allows researchers to follow up on interesting topics as they arise and adjust questions based on participant responses, leading to a deeper understanding of the research topic" (Patton, 2002). Open-ended

questions are used to encourage the participant to speak at length and to provide detailed, in-depth responses. The interviewer may ask questions such as, "Can you tell me more about that?" or "What was your experience like?" to gather rich, descriptive data. This can be achieved by showing genuine interest in the participant's responses, using active listening techniques, and avoiding any judgmental or dismissive attitudes. In-depth interviews require interpretation by the researcher to understand the underlying meanings and themes within the data collected. In-depth interviews are particularly useful for exploring complex or sensitive topics, as they allow researchers to build rapport with participants and create a safe space for them to share their experiences" (Marshall and Rossman, 2015). Building rapport with interviewees takes effort, and that achieving complete neutrality in interviews can be difficult due to the interviewer's role in shaping the interaction and the content of the interview.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a type of qualitative research method that involve a mix of structured and unstructured elements. Semi-structured interviews usually include a set of predetermined questions that serve as a guide for the interviewer. These questions provide a framework for the interview and ensure that certain topics are covered. However, the interviewer is free to deviate from the set questions if new topics emerge or if the participant's responses warrant further exploration. While semi-structured interviews include a set of predetermined questions, they still allow for some degree of flexibility. The interviewer can follow up on a participant's responses with additional questions or clarify a point. This allows the interviewer to gather more in-depth information and explore new avenues of inquiry. Semi-structured interviews often include open-ended questions that allow the participant to provide detailed, in-depth responses which these questions are designed to encourage the participant to share their experiences, perspectives, and views. Semi-structured interviews provide a structure for the interview, ensuring that certain topics are covered and that the interviewer stays on track. This structure also helps the interviewer to compare the responses of different participants, as they are asked the same or similar questions. Like in-depth interviews, establishing empathy and rapport with the participant is important in semi-structured interviews. The interviewer needs to create a comfortable and safe environment for the participant to share their experiences and perspectives. The data collected through semi-structured interviews also requires interpretation and the researcher must have a deep understanding of the topic to be able to accurately interpret the data; and identify themes and patterns within the responses (Marshall and Rossman, 2015, 116-162).

3.2.3. Online Interviewing

In the social sciences, the Internet has become a useful research tool, providing new avenues to investigate human interactions and has greatly expanded the possibilities of conducting research with individuals and communities; providing a virtual social arena where practices, meanings and identities can intermingle between researchers and participants in ways that may not be possible in the real world. It has changed and multiplied the environment in which knowledge is created and research is conducted. ''Electronic virtuality is now embedded within actuality in a more dispersed and active way than ever before'' (Hammersley, 2006, 8). Advocates of postmodernism see the Internet as a blurring of the distinction between the virtual and the real world. This has created both hyper-reality and hyper-identity, leading to a loss of distinctions and consequent sense of fragmentation (Maclure, 1995).

During the interview a social construct is created between interviewee and interviewer along with the questions and answers. While giving answers, interviewees tend to demonstrate and reinforce their social norm. It is one of the possible ways that are available to understand experience and talk about the ''topic''. However, as has been suggested earlier, this can be only a fragmented representation of real life experiences and happenings. ''We do not reveal ourselves by collecting narratives, we create selfhood through narrative and biographical work'' (1997, 11-12). This does not necessarily reopen the discussion over realism and anti-realism, but it can point us in a direction we can consider the production and negotiation of experience (biography, emotion, identity, knowledge, opinion, and truth). From this point on the actual work appears as an everyday life basis. Self-disclosure in interviews can be extracted as a component of the active, practical work of daily living. As Silverman et al., cited as ''Realities are fabricated, out of words, texts, devices, techniques, practices, subjects, objects, and entities are no less real because they are constructed'' (Rose, 1998, 168).

As Denzin, (2012) cites,

> 'In the collaborative or active format, the interviewer and respondent tell a story together. In this format a conversation occurs. Indeed, the identities of interviewer and respondent disappear. Each becomes a storyteller, or the two collaborate in telling a conjoint story.' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, 76–77).

3.3 Research Design

I conducted the interviews between June 2022 and November 2022 at the University of Padova. I have worked to collect the data and then separated it into sub-groups to analyze my specific research question. To collect information, I have conducted a face-to-face interview with my

interviewees in person in Padua. Since I was in Italy I had contacted all Turkish participants on online video-meeting platforms such as "Zoom" or ''Skype''.

The interview was composed of 10 main questions with related probes and its aim was to capture the ideas and thoughts of the interviewees on topics like romance, relationship, dating, hook-up, mobile dating, dating apps, social media. This helped me to understand some differences between the online and offline types of interview methods.

3.3.1 Recruitment

For understanding the outcomes, recruitment details are important. Finding a knowledgeable informant had not been a big problem for me in terms of Turkish volunteers. However, since the process is forged as a snowballing technique, my participants come from relatively similar cultural backgrounds, which resulted in my sample not being widely diversified. Majority of the participants are students and middle class families who have the opportunity to reach digital tools without a problem and also have a wide variety of chances to socialize in big cities such as Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara. For Italian participants, getting socialized gave me the opportunity to find interviewees. I have met with them in my dormitory, at parties, cafeterias and different social events. Therefore it can be more diverse than my Turkey sample since Padua is a student city and students come from different cities.

3.3.2. Sampling

The sample for this research consisted of 20 people 10 Turkish and 10 Italian -which 5 male and 5 female each- between the age 20 to 30. More specifically, the participants divided as shown in Table 2. I assigned pseudonyms names in all transcriptions to maintain participants' anonymity.

Table 2: Scheme of the Interviewees Sampled

Male	
Italian	Turkish
Davide (22, H)	Sergen (21, G)
Luca (22, H)	Mehmet (22, H)
Stefano (23, H)	Kaan (23, G)
Nicola (24, G)	Deniz (24, H)
Matteo (30, H)	Cihan (24, G)

I asked a series of questions on income, education and occupation in order to understand the socioeconomic status of participants. Most respondents provided responses that classified them as belonging to the broad 'middle grouping', with being a university student or graduate, or in the early stages of their career.

3.3.3 Interview Script

The interview script (outline shown in Table 2) consisted of questions that helped me to understand each of their stance in the dating scene and this gave me the possibility to create a profile. My questions were about their individual perspectives and experiences towards dating, relationship, marriage, and family. In this way, I aimed to gain a sense of how they ascribe meaning to their experiences, construct their identities and have opinions about how they create their own social realities.

My interview questions were about the experiences and ideas of the participants, covering topics such as love, intimacy, dating, sexuality, and marriage. With compassing the broader social norm 'How does technology affect on intimacy, relationships and dating culture; there were questions measuring openness to online socialization, sharing, and communication, background their relationships, social media habits, willingness to meet new people through internet, projections on prospective relations, expectations on relationships, expectations from mobile dating platforms, social interconnectedness among different online mediums, numbers of people that they date, intercourse habits, frequency of feeling intimate with their dates, preferences of people who they want to spend time with, level of self-representation for both others and themselves, when do they open, get personal, or give secrets to their dates, the difference between enjoyment from face to face interactions versus online interactions, and general sense of trust the people they date. I asked questions about the nature of participants' lives in a highly digitized world and how online tools affect their interactions.

The list of questions helped me in a number of ways, including by reminding me of the inquiries I ought to make and by providing some order and focus to the conversation. Sometimes I have produced new questions, by elaborating already available ones. My list of questions is generated in negotiation with the relevant academic and non-academic literature. I have extracted many questions from the process of literature review and my questions mutated along the way. For instance, initially I had this 'How much do you think being a virgin is important?' question and after 3-4 interviews I had realized and decided to remove because it sounded very irrelevant to the participants. Which it highly indicates the societal change in Turkey since it contains an interwoven

culture with Islamic rules and virginity was and is still highly valued in some parts of the country, which does not seem to be prevalent in my sample group (Constable, 2000 cited in Arnett, 2012).

Table 2: General Outline of the Interview Questions

The Outline	The Questions
Introduction	As a beginning, can you please describe yourself? ● Age ● Relationship status ● Gender ● Sexual orientation ● Education status ● Occupation
Relationships	● How would you describe your current relationship status? ● How do you see today's relationships? What are your own experiences or in your social circle? ● What do you think about being a couple? ● Do you believe 'the one'?
Online Dating	● Do you have any experience with knowing/starting flirting with someone while using social media? Can you tell me about your experiences? ● Do you think there are certain gender expectations in these settings? For example, male sends the first message, etc.? ● How important do you think the location factor is in online dating? How

	do you look at the possibility of dating someone who is out of reach for you? ● Do you have any experience with dating apps? Can you tell me about your experience(s)? ● As we all know, the Covid-19 has limited our socialization and dating opportunities. Do you think these tools have become unnecessary now that we are getting back to normal?
The Relationship and Social Media	● Can you tell me about the role that social media has had in your relationship? ● Have you ever felt that the nature of social media that keeps us updated all the time from each other removes the mystery from your relationship? ● Do you wonder and look at the social media accounts of your past relationships? Do you think doing this makes it harder to leave a relationship behind?
Intimacy and Sexuality	● Do you think the pandemic has permanently damaged needs like intimacy and sexuality? ● In your experience, does sex create an emotional interaction? For instance, do you think the intensity of satisfaction depends upon the degree of closeness you feel towards the other? ● Do you think sex is a private act that should be experienced with only one person at a time?

	- Do you think there are certain gender-based expectations in sex? If yes, what? - Do you have any experience with online sex? Do you think it is necessary when couples are far from each other? - What about porn? Do you think watching porn while in a relationship is some kind of cheating? - What are your ideas about masturbation?

3.3.4 Procedure

Before the beginning of the interview, I had informed all my participants that the dialogue will be recorded for transcription purposes only, that their identity will not be revealed (all the interviews are anonymized) and that, since the interview script contained some personal questions, they will be free not to answer if they do not feel comfortable. I always explained why I am recording since it will be a long conversation with lots of details, therefore it will be helpful for me to take notes during the interview.

I started each interview by introducing myself and telling a little about myself and thereafter, I continued by asking them to introduce themselves with basic features and collected detailed demographic information from the participants. In order to collect as much material as possible, I have used some probes to make the participants touch on some topics that they did not spontaneously talk about.

In addition to the collection of the research subjects' responses, I also took notes by examining their reactions, facial expressions and the effect of various external stimuli on them during the interview.

The interviews lasted for about 1 to 1.5 hours each. I routinely begin by getting out my phone and asking their permission to record and re-explaining issues of confidentiality and anonymity.

All my interviews with the Turkish participants were conducted online in Turkish. Afterwards, I translated them into English after transcribing them into a text.

As the researcher of this study, I had several years of observation on the online social and dating scene. I have interacted with members of these online platforms to investigate how they co-create their reality given the circumstances of their current situation and in this way I have the chance to see the thoughts, attitudes, motives, and intents of the participants as well as how they understand the social reality in this way. As James and Busher (2009) states, ''As researchers immerse themselves in virtual communities to discover insightful findings about participants' private lives and social worlds, conversations about these lives can be broadened and democratized, rather than simply becoming records of human experience'' (James and Busher, 2009, 22). Moreover, after the interview and during my thesis writing period I have continued to observe my circle and taken notes after the interview process ended, and added my own personal experience to enrich my observations.

3.3.5 The Environment

Face to face ones generally were in the private rooms therefore they were calm, quiet and focused. But some of them were in the garden or cafeteria so we had to stop several times for various distractions. Sometimes immediate and isolated environments were necessary. For example one interviewee invited me into her house and in the middle of the interview her boyfriend came to house and she was a little bit hesitant to speak about the part on Tinder since according to her boyfriend didn't like in that period of her life. Therefore we spoke in hushed tones. Online interviews were relatively uninterrupted and focused since they happened during interviewees free times. The participants who are 'online' and participating in the meeting became one of the main elements that formed and expanded the reality of my research. As a result, reality has expanded for me as a researcher with the opportunity for individuals that I could meet online. At the same time, I have immersed myself into these applications and observed dynamics and practices from inside, which helped me to compare my insights through others' reflections.

3.3.6 Hardships and Limitations

The interview that takes place in the physical environment provides a common synchronization of embodiment in terms of setting the space and time. Since the participants and I -as a researcher-shared similar physical realities, the fluency of communication worked in a similar process for both sides.

The other problem was the language barrier: since it was conducted in English, Italian subjects sometimes had a hard time giving deep and insightful answers to some of the questions, since English is for them a second language.

During the online interviews, I have encountered certain compatibility problems during the online interviews. Internet disconnections, various stimuli in the participant's physical environment -notifications or people around the participant- sometimes interrupted the flow of our communication.

One time there was off-tape talk in which after the interview, the participant wanted to add something which she thought it's important for my research and did not feel comfortable expressing it during the recording.

A significant consideration for my research is the dynamic nature of individual identities within the age group I study, as they transition from young adulthood to adulthood. Given the focus of my data collection on experiences and cultures, it is important to acknowledge that variables such as age, the rapidity of technological progress, and the intersectionality of diverse cultural groups will inevitably impact the durability of the data I collected.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis and Grounded Theory

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding complex social phenomena as they occur in their natural settings, and from the perspective of the individuals and groups involved. As Guest et al. (2012), stated, thematic analysis, grounded theory, and the building of cultural models, necessitate a greater level of involvement and interpretation from the researcher. First of all, grounded theory is a set of methods that consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ''grounded in the data themselves'' (Charmaz, 2006, 2). This requires a flexible and iterative approach, with the researcher constantly revising and refining their research questions and methods in response to the data collected. Qualitative research aims to explore social realities rather than testing predefined hypotheses or theories. Qualitative research typically involves collecting data through methods such as observation, interviews, and focus groups, and analyzing that data using techniques such as coding and thematic analysis (Flick, 2009). The goal of the grounded theory approach is to compare themes systematically while also tying emergent theory to data points. The unique strengths of qualitative methods of data collection are their ability to search for a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Illingworth, 2006).

Grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology are all elements of applied thematic analysis that have been combined into a single methodological framework. The strategy often adapts what are thought to be the more beneficial strategies from each theoretical and

methodological component to a framework of practical research. Secondly, similar to grounded theory and the creation of cultural models, thematic analysis requires a higher level of involvement and interpretation from the researcher. Finding and describing implicit and explicit concepts inside data, or themes, requires more than simply counting explicit words or phrases. Typically, the chosen themes are expressed as codes, which are subsequently connected or applied to the raw data as summary markers for later analysis (Guest et al., 2012). The process follows as: (1) read verbatim transcripts, (2) identify possible themes, (3) compare and contrast themes, identifying structure among them, and, (4) build theoretical models, constantly checking them against the data (Bernard and Ryan 1998, as cited in Guest et al., 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006) identify two layers of thematic analysis; semantic and latent. Semantic describes the surface of the data and does not go much further than what the participants have said. However, the latent layer delves into the levels which involve the ideas, dynamics and perceptions beyonds the conversation.

Being an interpretivist, for the story one tells, and its effect on the intended audience can be considered as the centerpiece of this method. This point is aptly illustrated in the following passage from Geertz (1973):

> Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the deeper it goes the less complete it is... There are a number of ways of escaping this—turning culture into folklore and collecting it, turning it into traits and counting it, turning it into institutions and classifying it, turning it into structures and toying with it. (29)

4.4.2 Codes and Themes

Along with these guidelines, I implemented qualitative analysis, more specifically thematic analysis, to analyze my interview data and go deeper as the latent layer has suggested. After reading the interviews to familiarize with the data: I have started an initial coding, for them to be refined in concordance with all the findings and took note of the words that appeared frequently and determined them as keywords. Since the thematic analysis is based on comparisons, I looked for the common points that appeared in the interviews and compared differences when they appeared and thereafter determined the commonalities and differences. Successively the codes were grouped into themes.

Overall, these following (Table 3) are the themes and codes that I have spotted from all the interviews.

Table 3: The Themes and The Codes Appeared from Interviews

Themes	Codes	Description
Uncertainty: Navigating Identity in a Fragmented and Uncertain World	Unclear Life Maps: Navigating the Uncertainty of Postmodernity The Blurred Lines of Modern Dating and Relationships The Need for Certainty	The intricacy of contemporary relationships and interactions can be attributed to several factors including the absence of a well-defined roadmap, a multitude of relationship types, and the overwhelming burden of choice overload.
The Rise of Individualism and the Erosion of Societal Rules	The Paradox of Choice: The Impact of Endless Options on People's Lives Individual Priorities and the Importance of Personal Space in Relationships Absence of Deeper Connections The Rise of Social Equality Movements	The effects of individuality on contemporary relationships are identified with the desire for personal autonomy, fluctuating identities, isolation, rejection to categorizations, and the ambivalent influence of individualism on the formation of profound connections.

	Being against Labeling and Categorizations Extreme Individualism	
Self-awareness in the Age of Online Diversity	Self-Awareness and Personal Growth: Understanding Needs, Limits, and Aspirations Gender Awareness and Challenges to Traditional Gender Norms Self-Discovery and Relationships Changing Attitudes towards Marriage: Financial Pressures, Traditional Expectations, and Personal Priorities	There is a growing awareness of the impact of online tools on various societal norms, including those related to marriage, gender, social categorization, and relationship styles.
Individualism and Its Consequences in Online Interactions: Alienation, Loneliness, and Disconnectedness	Absence of Emotional Depth The Nature of Online Interactions and the Disinhibition Phenomenon FOMO: The Pressure to Keep Up in the Digital Age	The digital world is perceived as lacking emotional depth and the capability of providing meaningful connections, therefore leading to alienation and detachment from reality.

	The Negative Effects of Watching Porn: Creating Unrealistic Expectations and Feelings of Alienation	
Social Pressure: The Impact of Patriarchy, Dating Apps, and Social Media	The Impact of Gender Roles on Women's Behaviors Online and Offline

The Impact of Gender Roles on Men's Behaviors Online and Offline

The Impact of Peer Pressure in the Age of Mobile Technology | Digital media and societal expectations affect individuals' decisions to pursue relationships, the need to conform to norms surrounding relationships and marriage, and the pressure to fit in and pursue marriage as the ultimate goal, which raises concerns about their impact on individuals' sense of self-worth. |
| The Impact of the Pandemic on Dating Culture | Emotional Impact: Looking for More Meaningful Interactions

Emerging Digital Practices: How Social Media and Dating Apps Helped People Staying Connected

Relationship Priorities Re-Evaluated During the Pandemic | The pandemic caused people to experience loneliness and seek meaningful interactions, and led to self-reflection. The pandemic caused an increase in technology usage and a shift in focus from social to digital elements. |

Dating Apps Born Out of Need	Using Dating Apps as a Source of Information for Decision Making	Dating apps seem to have emerged as a response to various needs; including the lessening of social circles over time, the impact of the pandemic, and needing for connection and new experiences. Dating apps provide opportunities for people who may be shy or uncomfortable with traditional flirting and allow users to connect with others outside of their close social circle.
	Seeking for Connection	
	The Importance of Location in Dating	
	The Need for Approval, Reward, and Satisfaction in Online Contexts	
	The Factors Affecting User Decisions for Using Dating Apps	

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the analysis from the interview data has been structured and findings have been grouped into contexts related to love relationships, dating, intimacy, and sexuality. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, their flexibility in the contemporary era allows for their infiltration into each other in some contexts. Throughout the analysis, changes in the dating and relationship development scripts can be observed. The opaque nature of interactions and the lack of clarity make it difficult to define relationships and their place in someone's life. Actions that once used to be associated with dating such as going out, staying over, showing affection, or expressing emotions can be interpreted as a willingness for a relationship, which it seems an undesirable thing before making sure what someone wants from their lives or being sure of their feelings. This cautiousness can represent self-awareness, introspection, and the observation of others, which are inseparable parts of daily practices facilitated by mobile media.

In this chapter, I will try to follow an interrelated approach between new intimacy and relationship practices to mobile dating tools and their affordances.

I will start by illustrating the cultural background of Turkey and Italy to be able to better understand the changing dating and romantic practices through time. Not only are dating patterns evolving, but so are the norms and behaviors around love, marriage, and cohabitation. Therefore, in different cultural settings, the social stigma associated with dating technologies can be persistent and has an unequal impact on users. Therefore it will be useful to look at the backgrounds and current situation of societies to make comparisons with studies that have been done on a large scale.

Most studies on online dating focus on Anglo-American cultures and how mobile dating technologies have permanently altered the dating scene. However, these studies overlook how dating routines are greatly varied by the traditional face-to-face cultural scripts that direct the interactions between potential partners. Altan-Olcay (2009) and Ilkkaracan (2008) pointed out that gender and sexuality have been at the center of Turkey's development for the past 200 years (as

cited by Cöbek and Ergin, 2021). When it comes to Turkey; patriarchy, gender roles and cultural scripts are deeply embedded in an individual's daily lives and decisions. In their study from 2002, Özbudun and Keyman (2002) explore the impact of cultural globalization on Turkey's economic and social life. They argue that this process has enabled the coexistence of Western values and Islamic traditional norms, resulting in multidimensional impacts that generate different discourses and strategies. This coexistence also creates peculiarities in different spheres of social life, and the authors suggest that cultural globalization is not a unitary but a multidimensional process that makes possible the coexistence of modern values with Islamic traditional norms, symbols, and discourses. The authors highlight the role of cultural globalization in the revitalization of tradition and the expression of differences through the discourse of tradition, locality, and how it creates a platform for the democratization of Turkey by ending the hegemony of secular culture and creating a more pluralistic and multicultural society. Ultimately, Özbudun and Keyman (2002) conclude that coexistence is the form that characterizes the interactions between the global and the local, and understanding and accepting this fact is crucial for establishing democracy in Turkey.

A recent research conducted by Gurmen and Eren (2019) showed that young adults in Turkey have trust concerns regarding online dating. The study found that 83% of participants do not trust people they meet on online dating platforms, while 90% agreed that people on these platforms could be fake or indicate false information. Despite these negative views, the study also revealed that online dating is not considered the worst option for seeking romance, though it is not the most preferred way of matchmaking in Turkey. While there is a stigma attached to online dating in Turkey, negative attitudes towards online dating may come from a preference for traditional ways of developing romantic relationships.

In Italy's case, a recent study (Genova, 2018) discusses the social behaviors mechanisms in which Italian young people are embracing today, as well as creating new social forms, and the meanings associated with their actions. According to the article, in the early 2000s, these processes became more clear and were linked with trans-disciplinary reflection on the consequences of globalization. Symbolic events in the passage to adult life (educational and occupational achievements, residential independence, birth of a child) are being postponed and the age boundaries are moved to include in the concept of 'young adults' until the age of 40. 'Uncertainty,' 'risk,' and 'choice,' are the words that arose as separate descriptors of the millennial society, and were now also emphasized as characteristics unique to the young people's experiences (Genova 2018, cited from Cesareo 2005; Garelli, Palmonari, and Sciolla 2006; Buzzi, Cavalli, and De Lillo 2007). If the majority of young people continue to identify their Catholic faith, over half of the population asserts various positions, a significant decline from previous decades. Yet, aside from

statements of belonging, the major conventional forms of religious participation, such as regular attendance at mass or membership in religious associations, seemed to represent only a small percentage of Italian adolescents. This is not to say that youth are uninterested in religion; rather a small percentage of young people claim that religion is not important in their lives. Their interest and relevance increasingly seems to be represented in novel methods and practices that differ from traditional ones in the spiritual dimension of life; often more individualized than, or at least external to, rigid and structured forms. It can be said that the growing complexities and rising uncertainty in their life patterns indicates the position in Italian society which corresponds with the greater worldwide social shifts of this period.

As we will see from research findings, similar to Turkey, in Italy lots of young people seem hesitant to admit they use these apps as society has not overly accepted it yet. Relationships in Italy are often slower-paced than in other countries, with couples taking their time to get to know each other before committing to a more serious relationship.

4.1 Uncertainty: Navigating Identity in a Fragmented and Uncertain World

Uncertainty indicates a pattern which is characterized by the breakdown of traditional social structures and a lack of stable and clear answers about life's purpose, meaning, and values. This uncertainty of modernity seems to create struggles to define identities since there are no longer traditional social structures to rely on and norms to define identities. It is even more challenging for emerging adults, as they try to navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world; find meaning and purpose in a society that is often fragmented and uncertain.

4.1.1 Unclear Life Maps: Navigating the Uncertainty of Postmodernity

Actors' wants remain rooted in a basic security system, as Giddens (1979, 219) stated in his formulation in the Stratification Model, actors' wants remain rooted in a basic security system, largely unconscious and established in the first years of life. Giddens continued by saying; 'where routine prevails, the rationalization of conduct readily conjoins the basic security system of the actor to the conventions that exist and are drawn upon in interaction as mutual knowledge. Social institutions do not self-replicate, they persist only because individuals continue to practice them in a routinized way Giddens contends that it is always agents and their behaviors that replicate or alter structures. The absence of a linear or socially defined life path, or, using Giddens' definition, the absence of a 'routinized way' of living, indicates a deviation from the conventional trajectory of school, work, marriage, and family.

Thinking about marriage is hard in this period with all these crises, wars etc. (Adriana, IT, 30)

Have you taken a look at the economy and the environment lately? The thought of raising a child in the current state of things doesn't really appeal to me. Perhaps in the future, but only if certain political and ideological changes occur. I'm not entirely hopeless about it, and I'm not opposed to adoption, for instance. However, I completely exclude the possibility of undergoing fertility treatments to have a child of my own (Nicola, IT, 24)

In a similar vein, the same participant responded to my question 'What do you expect from your relationship?' as;

Life in this age is uncertain with various crises and marketplace and relationships might not be able to adapt. So I try not to project my relationships too much in the future. (Nicola, IT, 24)

Everything was more certain: finding a job, getting married, fixed and linear. (Mine, TR, 21)

Since people are getting detached from conventional identities, definitions are also becoming unclear; plans are getting ambiguous. There is no road map to be followed, such as union, engagement, marriage, or children, which are traditionally a requirement of being heterosexual and monogamous. Ever since I realized that being gay pushed me away from all this standard line, I started to have my own unique perspective. (Sergen, TR, 21)

Different plans in life makes interactions uncertain because the future is not clear as in the past. For example, I don't know if our relationship will continue when my boyfriend goes to Erasmus next year. (Greta, IT, 25)

However, one participant stated her religious belief gives her certainty about her life purpose and the path to follow. When I asked her 'What about marriage? How important is it to you? Is it a point that you want to reach someday, like a dream?' she responded me as;

Yes. I am a religious person. I am a Catholic. I see marriage more than as a religious point. It's like going on the top of all the love of a relationship. It doesn't mean that 'if you don't marry, you are not in love with the partner', I'm not saying that, but for me it's a ceremony that with friends and family you can represent your love. My dream is to -my impossible dream- it's a marriage in the church. Since I was a little girl I went to church every Sunday. It's an important part of my life. And my

sexual orientation. Just at the beginning was a problem, but not for the other people, for me.. But when I understood that my sexual orientation and my religious orientation could live together, from that moment I understood that it was fine to believe in God and believe in true love for me. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

It can be seen from this response that even though religious norms are weakening, they are still part of the cultural texture and affect an individual's point of view to the world.

The uncertain and fragmented nature of postmodernity makes it difficult for young people to make decisions about important life events such as education, work, and relationships. In the past, it was easier to find someone and get married. Condemned/awarded with a free choice, the individual has become the controller of their biography. As families get shrunk, children gain importance and the teenage years expand which 20s become a period to discover not to decide and settle. Therefore young people increasingly turn to alternative lifestyles, such as remote work styles or non-traditional relationships, as a way of navigating the uncertainty of postmodernity. Since life is changing fastly, wars, global warming, economical instabilities, diseases, and many other unpredictable events are happening every day therefore it's harder for people to consider interactions as certain.

4.1.2 The Blurred Lines of Modern Dating and Relationships

The nature of the flow of interactions seems so fast that it feels like there is no meaning to name all of them. The traditional rules and definitions of dating and relationships are becoming increasingly blurred, leading to confusion and uncertainty for many people. While this may be challenging, it also presents an opportunity to explore new forms of connection and interaction, free from the expectations and limitations of traditional norms.

I think that people are lonely, the definition of being in a relationship has become very blurry especially lately. I feel that today's relationships are sometimes shallow and sometimes not well thought through. Even people in relationships don't seem to realize exactly what they're going through. (Sergen, TR, 21)

When I asked one participant 'How do you define your relationship status?' she responded me as;

Currently, I'm single, but kind of connected to someone. It's hard to explain. It's like a complicated situation. We are both single, but somehow we're still seeing each other. Seeing each other? Maybe, I don't know. (Maria, IT, 20)

The difficulties in showing affection and expressing interest in someone are due to the uncertainty of the starting and ending of interactions, the lack of clear definition, and the fear of being ghosted or rejected. This uncertainty seems to be eliminated by the comfort of using dating apps, which provide an opportunity for interaction without expectation. Ghosting another phenomenon which is increasingly gaining popularity among mobile dating practices. According to my observations and from the interviewees' responses, after the interaction is over or from one side to the other, people usually tend to disappear with the intention to avoid any awkward situation.

> People do not respect our borders. If someone is sending me a message like in Hornet. After talking a little and another part showing his photos, and let's say I don't like it, I don't want to answer, but at least in terms of respect I say thank you, I don't feel any connection. Even if that person first says okay. After 10 minutes, he writes again: where are you? Which neighborhood are you in, let's meet and have sex. Hop, penis photo and then the second penis photo. I just said I didn't feel it. Here, I have to ghost. So it has a feature to prevent harassment. (Sergen, TR, 21)

When I asked the participant 'How do you see today's relationships?', 'Do you have any expectations for a relationship?', and 'What should the relationship be like for you?' she responded me as;

> Showing affection is hard because there is the possibility of being ghosted, the starting or ending is unclear. It's even unclear if there is something between each other or not. Even calling flirt isn't a preferred terminology for today's interactions. As if it defines the interaction too much. Interactions are fluid, hard to define or have expectations; sitting on a base is hard. However, it's the same reasons that I like using dating apps. Because now clarity is comfortless. Dating apps give you the opportunity to interact without expectation. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

My question 'Have you talked about an important topic for you while using the dating app or during the meeting?', one respondent responded me as:

> I'm meeting with that person to spend time for fun, to spend quality time, and I don't want something emotional or private to get in the way and ruin the relationship. If you tell them something important about you they're gonna think that you have feelings for them. So I don't expect the other side to say anything. (Miray, TR, 23)

As Arnett mentioned in 2012 how dating scripts have been changing and even gradually diminishing. Even the terms "date" and "dating" have fallen out of fashion, replaced by "going with" or "hanging out with" or "seeing" someone (as Arnett 2012 cited from Furman and Hand,

2006). Recently this can be a much salient pattern since young adults are reluctant to give easily a name to their interactions or showing emotions interpreted as an advanced step.

4.1.3 The Need for Certainty

For many, uncertainty is disturbing and people need guides, maps, and roads to feel safe and grounded. People want to take control of their lives, reduce unpredictability. The pandemic has added a new layer of uncertainty to the chaotic world. During the pandemic there was an uncertain atmosphere in general; covering several areas of lives such as education, work etc., people wanted stability in their lives.

> If I ever want to be a mother, I think it will be because of my need to be loved. And the reason why I might one day want to get married and start a family is because I think that one day when I lose my parents I can cope with this loss better if I set up my own family. I just wish for a little bit of family from a point like this. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

My question 'What effects do you think the pandemic has had on relationships? How has your relationship life been affected by this?' some responses were:

> During the Pandemic, people decided to stick with their choices, for instance they moved their relationships into new phases by starting to live together. (Nicola, IT, 24)

> People broke up or got married by wanting something stable during uncertain times. (Matteo, IT, 30)

> My relationship started before the pandemic and went on during the pandemic and that we survived. It was kinda a test to see how well we managed to. For us it wasn't stressful, we were able to find a balance and we had the chance to meet to see each other. It wasn't different before the pandemic. We stayed together. (Davide, IT, 22)

4.2 The Rise of Individualism and the Erosion of Societal Rules

In the capitalist consumerist culture societal rules and religious predictions are diminishing while mass consumerism, and individuals gain importance. Individualism explores the diversity, idiosyncrasy, and uniqueness of being an individual in a modern society. Information has been circulating and multiplying in an enormous amount therefore there is no single truth to hold on to it.

4.2.1 The Paradox of Choice: The Impact of Endless Options on People's Live

As Illouz (2013) stated individuals constantly subjected to an endless effort of introspection to decide, make analysis for options, which in an environment presented endless choice and free will. The abundance of choice in the process of decision-making suggests clearly that the greater availability of options inhibits rather than enables the capacity to commit to a single object or relationship (Illouz, 2013, 91). However many choices and opportunities give a feeling of overwhelming in which choice overload leads often not to choose as Illouz (2019, 31) described a 'negative choice'.

> In the past our parents didn't have too many choices but now everywhere is full of possibilities. You always have options on your phone, so why should I restrict myself with a relationship/marriage? (Miray, TR, 23)

> What if there is someone better out there? It was a reason for me not to have a relationship for a long time. Dating apps are like endless catalogs, you are confused with all these choices, tall guy, muscles, blue eyes, etc, but then I realized that's not what I was looking for. (Mine, TR, 21)

> There is no stability in this era, people and their needs are changing. (Gizem, TR, 24)

> Too much choice can be either good or bad, it depends on you. For example, having a relationship is still hard, which you think it's easier with all these choices and you may feel less insecure. At the same time because there are lots of choices, too many stimuli and more options you may not focus on anyone. (Matteo, IT, 30)

Based on the data collected from the interviews, it appears that individuals are faced with a seemingly infinite number of options in the contemporary world, which has generated a sense of ambivalence in their lives. The abundance of choice is viewed by participants as both advantageous and disadvantageous. While they appreciate the freedom to explore different possibilities and the accessibility of numerous options, they also find the excess of choices overwhelming, making it difficult to concentrate on any one thing. The market economy facilitates the generation of an infinite number of choices within a colorful and diverse atmosphere for consumer culture (Illouz, 2019, 29-32). Dating apps, for example, offer users an extensive pool of potential partners, but this surfeit of choices can lead to confusion and even counterproductive outcomes, such as unrealistic expectations and feelings of insecurity. However, the abundance of stimuli and choices may make it difficult to focus and result in choice overload. On the other hand, the availability of multiple

options provides individuals with the opportunity to discover and redefine their idiosyncratic tastes, preferences, and desires which this seems to create a paradox.

4.2.2 Individual Priorities and the Importance of Personal Space in Relationships

In contemporary times, individual choices and priorities have become a focal point, surpassing societal considerations. The majority of participants in the study expressed a desire for personal autonomy and private space as an essential component of their lives. Although they viewed being in a relationship positively, they emphasized the importance of preserving their personal space and preferences. Participants stressed the need for increased freedom in selecting their relationship style, coupled with the requirement for maintaining their own personal space while cohabiting with their partner.

> As individuals are realizing their individual tastes, different desires for sex are also getting diverse. Kinky fantasies are gaining popularity and I see like vanilla sex is being criticized for being too ordinary. (Melis, TR, 25)

> I need to feel free in a relationship. I shouldn't feel trapped. Being able to open for a change, feeling comfortable and expressing myself is very important in every way I want. (Melis, TR, 25)

> Greater freedom to choose your relationship style. (Nicola, IT, 24)

> I think I would like to live with my partner sooner or later but I also need my own space. (Maria, IT, 20)

> A relationship should allow you to grow; shouldn't force you to focus on the relationship too much. (Matteo, IT, 30)

4.2.3 Absence of Deeper Connections

The rapid advancement of globalization and technology has led to the expansion of societies on a broader scale. Online platforms have facilitated connections between individuals and provided access to diverse online communities and cultures, offering opportunities for belongingness and affection. Nevertheless, these interactions often lack stability and permanence, resulting in feelings of alienation and a desire for deep interpersonal connections with family and friends.

> Because of a rising trend of individuality, people struggle to create deep connections. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

According to Ben Ze'ev online relationships have paradoxical aspects since people had never had access to such an ambivalent type of romantic relationship. He lists these paradoxes as ''distance and immediacy; lean and rich communication; anonymity and self-disclosure; sincerity and deception; continuity and discontinuity; and marginal physical investment and considerable mental investment'' (Ben Ze'ev, 2014, 27).

From the interview analysis, it can be added to this list another paradox that explains how individuals feel lonely and they prefer to be alone at the same time. Increasing individualism makes people feel isolated and therefore lonely.

4.2.4 The Rise of Social Equality Movements

The LGBTQ+ rights movement has helped to challenge rigid definitions of gender and sexuality, allowing people to explore and express their identity in new and diverse ways. The increasing acceptance and recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity has also contributed to the fluidity of identity. People are now able to celebrate and embrace multiple aspects of their heritage and cultural background, rather than feeling pressure to conform to a single cultural or ethnic identity. Furthermore, online tools give new ways and possibilities for individuals to express themselves freely without social norms.

> Sexuality gains different dimensions and practices become more accessible. In a conventional society such as Turkey, it is hard to have different identities so online provided a place for different sexual orientations to reflect and experience their identities. It gets normalized increasingly as it gets prevalent. (Deniz, TR, 24)

> In my city, Izmir, I see that there has been a big change recently. 2 years ago everyone's face was blurred. Just body photos down the chin, or random sunset photos. While people are trying to talk in such secrecy, now even government officials can sign up with their photos. There seems to be more awareness about it. I guess it's like if you see me, it means you're also here, how can you judge me? But I can see these restrictions are decreasing; people don't mind sharing their faces and creating public profiles. (Sergen, TR, 21)

4.2.5 Being against Labeling and Categorizations

The participants in the study expressed a reluctance to identify and categorize themselves, as they valued their unique qualities and characteristics over their social identity or gender. They placed greater importance on autonomy and self-determination. Individualism challenges societal expectations and norms by encouraging individuals to embrace their individuality and resist conformity. Rejecting labels and categorizations enables people to explore and express their unique

identities, free from the constraints of societal expectations and stereotypes. Participants were unwilling to categorize or label their gender or relationship styles and viewed these categories as malleable and open to change, with the ability to be experienced freely.

> I like men, but I don't want to exclude that in life I can fall in love with a woman. So I don't define myself in a strict way. Like I'm intersexual or sexual. I like men, but I'm totally open to everything. (Chiara, IT, 25)

> Even writing something about myself in bio makes me stressed to carry those characteristics. Everything you write in your bio is basically the first impression, the other one on the phone chooses whether or not to communicate/match with you. And you are responsible for what you write. For example I indicated in my bio as 'friends with benefits', so I am expected to act accordingly. It's also perceived as 'she doesn't want a relationship, it means she is relaxed. Afterwards, if I show some affection, it is interpreted directly as, 'Oh, she has feelings for me, probably she wants a relationship'. I don't like those interpretations. (Miray, TR, 24)

When people are labeled and categorized, they are reduced to a single characteristic or stereotype, ignoring the complexity and diversity of their experiences and perspectives. This seems to lead to a loss of individuality and a sense of being oppressed or marginalized by dominant cultural or social norms.

Dating apps can be seen as a reflection of the emphasis placed on individual choice and autonomy. By using these apps, individuals are able to curate their own dating experiences and select potential partners based on personal preferences, rather than relying on societal norms or traditional methods of matchmaking. In this sense, dating apps can be seen as a tool that enables individuals to exercise their individualism in their dating lives.

4.2.6 Extreme Individualism

'Choice structures modes of social intelligibility. For example, the "mature and healthy self" is one that develops the capacity to make emotionally mature and authentic choices; to flee compulsive, addictive behaviors; and to transform them into a freely chosen, informed, self-conscious emotionality' (Illouz, 2019, 30).

Individualism emphasizes personal responsibility for one's own circumstances and outcomes. All the big decisions now have burdened on self like never before and this emphasis is often reflected in wellness culture, therapy, and self-help culture. These practices often focus on individual actions and choices as the key to creating a better life, rather than addressing systemic issues and larger societal factors. The focus on individual actions and choices in these practices is in line with the

extreme individualist perspective that the individual is solely responsible for their own outcomes. This focus can lead to the belief that personal problems can be solved through individual effort, without recognizing the role of larger societal issues in creating and perpetuating harm.

> Everything seems like individuals' capabilities which causes victim blaming. (Melis, TR, 25)

> You need to use these dating apps if you want a relationship, you have to make an effort otherwise you may miss your chance to meet with someone.' (Zuhal, TR, 25)

It appears that the partner choice here, in the 21st century, is solely controlled by the individual, who is liberated from external factors such as family and traditions. Dating apps seem to satisfy this need by enabling individuals to connect with others and giving a sense of belonging in society.

4.3 Self-awareness in the Age of Online Diversity

As one of key figures for the development of symbolic interactionism, American sociologist George Herbert Mead develops his theory of the self and emphasizes the importance of self-awareness in social interaction. In his study *Mind, Self, and Society* which was published posthumously in 1934, Mead emphasized the role of self-awareness in social interaction and proposed that the self emerges through a process of interaction with others, and individuals must be aware of their own thoughts and feelings to effectively communicate and interact with others. He argued that communication involves not just the transmission of information, but also the use of symbols and gestures to create shared meanings and understandings. Individuals use symbols to communicate with others, but they also use them to communicate with themselves, to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings. Through the process of social interaction, individuals develop a sense of self that is shaped by the social world around them. This sense of self is not fixed or innate, but rather is constantly changing and evolving in response to new experiences and social contexts.

4.3.1 Self-Awareness and Personal Growth: Understanding Needs, Limits, and Aspirations

The state of awareness can be covered by an outcome of a broader trend of individualism which encourages individuals to be self-aware, to think critically about their own beliefs, values, and feel free to question or articulate their diversity and demand them. Individual values give opportunities for freedom, independence, and self-expression, and lead individuals to seek out their own personal truth and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. This self-awareness helps individuals make informed decisions about their lives and relationships, and to live in accordance with their own values and beliefs. Since there is much diversity on online platforms, individuals have the

opportunity to compare, take lessons and level up themselves. People are more conscious about their needs, limits, desires and future plans. According to some participants, being in a relationship is preventing you from discovering and understanding your true self.

> I see that people are more aware of their needs and they put priority for themselves and they know what they want from their partner, from their relationship. (Adriana, IT, 30)

The proliferation of technology and the effects of globalization have enabled individuals to connect with others from diverse geographical locations and access information and perspectives that were once beyond reach. This has broadened people's understanding of the world and challenged traditional norms and beliefs, making it easier for people to explore and express different aspects of their identity. However, despite the benefits of these advancements, they appear to be contributing to the erosion of certain relationships, since the essence of relationships is often associated with stability and commitment.

> Identity changes and it changes fastly and this creates problems for relationships. Because when you change they say, 'oh you changed a lot' and they feel disappointed.' (Melis, TR, 25)

> I think that during our ages especially, in our 20s, it looks like it's very difficult to create new relationships because as far as I see a lot of people who have relationships have them from their teenagers. OK, you can meet a lot of people, but then it's very difficult to find the right one. It looks like a lot of people right now may have a lot of difficult to create new relationships, probably because we're changing, we're creating new identities and also since we are students in general it looks like we live in uncertainty because we don't know where we're gonna be in a few months and few years. So it's very difficult to think about the future. (Stefano, IT, 23)

4.3.2 Gender Awareness and Critics to Traditional Gender Norms

The participants stated greater understanding of the expectations and norms associated with gender. For example the expectation that men should be strong and independent, while women should be nurturing and emotional. It also refers to their recognition of the ways in which gender shapes their experiences and influences the perceptions of others. The awareness of gender roles and stereotypes involve a critical examination of these expectations and norms, and a questioning of their validity and impact on individuals and society as a whole. Majority of participants tend to challenge some notions that certain practices such as dating scripts, or interests are inherently masculine or feminine, or that gender should dictate the careers or hobbies one should pursue.

When I asked one participant ''Do you think there are roles in a relationship where men and women differ? and, ''As a woman, do you have expectations of what a man should be like in a relationship?'' she responded me as;

> When I think on the basis of my own relationships, I cannot assign such gender stereotypes, but I think it is present in society. Since individuals create their own patterns in their minds, they tend to label that gender or cultural pattern to the other person regardless of what the truth is. Even if the intention of that woman or man is not related culturally or gendered reasons, socially and culturally predefined implications are attributed to the actions. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

Another response was;

> I think that the role of the man is in 2022. Again, a little bit patriarchal. I think that during the years we did some steps. Not long steps, right that we need steps.. But I think that women today can say that they fight for their rights. They did it before the pandemic, but after the pandemic more. Because during the lockdown staying home. For days and days also the men understood, for example, the housewife work. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

> Males are very sexual oriented and they are more direct, they can be very kinky but for women it's generally like, here is your flower, you smell like the ocean etc. Because what society makes them to expect. For me it's easier to date with men instead of women because I don't think that women are very direct when it comes to what they actually want. There are also societal effects but at the end of the day it's not my responsibility to fix that shit. Men are easier to communicate with, they are clear about what they want from you and what kind of expectations they have. For example if I go on a date with a man I know that if you gonna hook up or not I know that at the end of the date. But for women you never know. It's kinda too much work to solve mysteries with women. (Kaan, TR, 23)

> There is this belief that women who use dating apps are considered bad. For example women look for rich men or followers. Even my ex-boyfriend said that if we hadn't met from this Tinder, we could have had a very different relationship. (Mine, TR, 21)

> When the girl sends the first message to a guy, he tends to consider it like she is too enthusiastic. (Maria, IT, 20)

> Sometimes it happens as a categorization rather than an expectation, for example even if the behavioral intention of that woman/man is not related to their gender or social identity, the other person categorizes it that way in his mind because of the determined social and cultural norms. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

> Women who use dating apps are considered disposable for guys. Also there are certain expectations sexually just because you're a woman. For example women expected to send nude. (Greta, IT, 25)

Some participants stated a stereotype towards someone who uses dating apps is being criticized or condemned. When I asked one participant 'Do you think there are some stereotypes towards using dating apps?' he answered me as;

I think even if it's diminishing, yes there are. As far as I understand it's something related to Italy. I don't know about other countries, but Italy, especially compared to the USA for example, has a cultural limit like the cultural way of seeing these apps, perceiving these apps in a bad way, and a lot of stereotypes. Many people use them, but a lot of people don't talk about it. Especially among girls, so I think we're gonna use them more; if they're going to be accepted. In Italy it is much more stereotyped. It depends on the population you pick up, but I think it's more stereotypical. For example, international students use it to meet new people, it would be more accepted if we perceived it as a connection with new people too. So it would be more accepted because there would be less expectations, probably less gender expectations. Also because sexuality is very linked to expectations and also uncertainty. So in Italy, I think sexuality is still perceived a little bit conservative way. (Stefano, IT, 23)

Another stereotypical matter is watching porn mainly attributed to male as it's a masculine practice. When I asked 'What do you think about masturbation? Is it okay to do it even in a relationship?' One participant replied me as:

I think it's OK. This is my view that we have a lot of implicit religious influences though. It's absolutely clear if you look at girls they never admitted that they masturbate. We may not talk about that, but we do. That said, yes says that she watches porn, she masturbates, or she uses her sex toys. OK, yes. She is curious and she's so open to talk about that. Then, some people tend to associate some sexual traits with her. Like, she's more open in terms of sexual experience so she is kind of dangerous. (Stefano, IT, 23)

4.3.3 Self-Discovery and Relationships

Nowadays, with all of the tools and information that young individuals are exposed to, they are able to evaluate and question their desires, and constantly discover different aspects of what they want and do not want in a relationship. Online tools are agents that provide them with too many options and variants.

I can see the difference from the past, when people had such a passion for commitment, if you have a lover, you should always be mine, will always stay with me, no one else can touch or even look at you. There was such a situation, but as time passed, it started to loosen up a little more. I think open relationships have started to increase a little more nowadays. (Cihan, TR, 24)

I feel like people are more aware of the meaning of a relationship like they give the proper importance to it. Social media brings awareness to relationships, in the past there were not too many examples to compare and criticize your relationship. For example, you want to show your relationship is good and also the bad things that happen in a relationship. It is not just about. I want to share the happy things that happen. (Luca, IT, 22)

Before social media wasn't as known and now that we see those things, they're more spread, they're more known. People posting stuff about like, relationship issues and they're like, oh, this person is toxic, so maybe we relate to them. They've always been there, but we just didn't see them as much. (Maria, IT, 20)

Relationships give you a feeling that you have someone to hold on to. You also have the freedom to stay or go; so you stay voluntarily. (Adriana, IT, 20)

Nowadays there is a greater freedom to choose your relationship style, you can demand and create your own relationship, you don't have to stick with social norms. (Nicola, IT, 24)

I have been in a relationship for 7 months and we are living together. I'm absolutely happy because I feel I found a family dimension that is not from my original family, but from the one I'm creating, building with my partner together. So I can't be happier. (Chiara, IT, 25)

For me, a relationship is like having a best friend with whom you are going to bed together. In humanity, it was less about feeling and more about meeting coupling and having children for the labor force. It was something useful. Now it's not about that, it's about a choice, needing someone and feeling this need to be together. It's kind of an experience not an obligation. (Davide, IT, 22)

Relationships give you a feeling that you have someone to hold on to. You also have the freedom to stay or go and you stay voluntarily. (Adriana, IT, 20)

4.3.4 Changing Attitudes towards Marriage: Financial Pressures, Traditional Expectations, and Personal Priorities

Recently young adults tend to think about marriage critically and are cautious about this subject matter. Today they are facing increasing financial pressures, such as student loan debt, high housing costs, and job uncertainty, which can make them cautious about taking on the added financial responsibilities that come with marriage. In Italy, and even though it may be relatively less in Turkey, the traditional expectations and pressures to get married have diminished, and many young adults feel that they have more freedom to wait until they are ready and have found the right person.

The participants seem to put a greater emphasis on their careers and personal growth, and they seem to feel that they need to focus on their priorities before they can fully commit to a marriage. They have seen their parents or other family members go through difficult marriages, which mostly make them cautious about stepping ahead for getting married. Moreover, with the high rate of divorce and exposure of this news on social media, some young adults are cautious about getting married because they fear that their own marriages may not last. When I asked the participants; 'What about marriage? How is it important to you?', they answered their opinions towards the awareness of rationally and legally approved sides of marriage.

I think of marriage as just financially easy. It's also mainly religious in my opinion. The concept of marriage was created kind of based on religion and financially. I don't think in my life I would need to sign up with paper to prove my love to someone. Of course, if they wanna do something like a little celebration to like it's like an anniversary thing. I don't think it's that big of a deal. If you have kids, for example, and you want the partner to take care of them financially, let's say there is a divorce, they have to take care of the kids too. So I think I don't really have to prove my love to someone by signing a paper. So much more important things in life to experience with your partner than marriage. (Maria, IT, 20)

I don't really believe in marriage. I don't really believe there are stages as first we are dating then we are fiance and we get married. Not like a step, it's a continuum. So it's not that the day before I married that person completely changed after getting married. It's something you construct daily. I don't have an opinion on whether I want to get married or not, I just don't care. (Davide, IT, 22)

Ah, I'm so young. It's not a point that I must be this way, because this is society that wants a woman to get married before 30. No, no, no, no, no. It's always my life. I don't like to have to get married to him only to demonstrate him with the most important gesture, social gesture that shows how much I love him. But if things will go well then I'm not so strict. I have to marry at 30, at 35? Otherwise my life will be ruined because I haven't gotten married. No, it happens. I would like to, but not so fastly. (Chiara, IT, 25)

I don't think I would prefer marriage. I feel that a signature or that acceptance would have restricted me. We are in a phase where this is no longer an obligation. In general, because it's something that gets so much attention I have started to find it even more unnecessary. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

Since marriage adds security to one's life, it is still a socially defined path for many and people seem to want to reach there sooner or later.

I like the idea of having certain basic rights. And also I like the idea of being able to visit a person I'm with when something happens to them and they're in the hospital or just kind of things. I think it's a great symbolism put on. (Nicola, IT, 24)

I think it's a post-constructed concept and not realistic. The only benefit according to me is security, it can be an economic benefit for financial procedures or someone considered to be legit to share when getting a home loan. I don't think it has much to do with romance or love. And thinking about family and having children; from my current point of view it almost feels like something harmful to himself and to the world. It's like there's no need. (Sergen, TR, 21)

4.4 Individualism and Its Consequences: Alienation, Loneliness, and Disconnectedness

Focusing on individualism can lead to alienation, loneliness, and a lack of connection with others, particularly among young adults who prioritize their own interests and goals over those of the community or society. This often results in feelings of disconnectedness, not fitting in, and a lack of sense of purpose or belonging. While individualism can value unique qualities and self-reliance, it can also lead to a self-centered perspective that disregards the needs and feelings of others.

4.4.1 Absence of emotional depth

People tend to present themselves differently online, and it makes it difficult to interpret the tone and intent behind their online communication. According to general responses, online interactions lack the emotional depth and nuance that is present in face-to-face interactions. This can lead to misunderstandings and a sense of disconnection from others. Turkle (2011) has argued that online communication can be misleading and that people may present a different persona online than they do in person, which can lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

According to the logic of the market we do not have any social ties, and the more we accept this the less we can maintain close friendships. So here there is a case of paradoxical social behavior in which a high level of social contacts prevents the formation of deep relationships.

The internet, especially dating apps and social media are places often for people to present a curated and idealized version of themselves. Social media has become a place where people often post only their best moments and experiences, creating a distorted and unrealistic view of their lives. This leads to feelings of inadequacy and a sense of not measuring up to others when comparing their own experiences to what they see online. Therefore my question 'Do you think dating apps are superficial?' intends to answer the question if these tools are considered for participants as a lack of depthness or not.

They can be superficial, but also since we tend to evaluate a person according to their appearance, outfits etc. in reality can be superficial. So, it depends on each person. Also, I believe cyberbullying is common for the same reason since people don't consider online is real and think that they can say or do whatever they want. (Greta, IT, 25)

There is too much noise, which sometimes makes it feel like it's not real. As if there is no other person on the other side. Now you don't have the feeling of talking with a real person sometimes you have just the feeling of doing random things on your own phone. That's why people tend to ghost, tend to not be as I said before, you may have a great conversation and then they just stop talking with you randomly. Feels like sometimes there is just a game. (Matteo, IT, 30)

In a similar vein, when I asked one participant: 'What happens when you feel like this does not seem like not going anywhere? Are there any people you stay friends or stay in touch with from the people you went on a date with? Or do you prefer to cut off contact completely?' as a sub question of 'Do you have any experience with using dating apps?' he responded me as;

I prefer not to stay as friends usually because it's not a point to use dating apps, I already have many friends so if that person is so interesting getting my attention, okay I might be friends. But if we don't have the conversation which is the case most of the time and I stop texting and end the conversation. Padova is a small place so I come across the people I meet in random places and it's kinda weird after you stop talking. (Kaan, TR, 23)

And another participant responded as,

I usually like to be friends if we don't continue dating/hooking up etc. It is also because we are familiar with the gay scene in Izmir. Everyone can be someone with whom each other has hung out before, or it can be someone we know in common because it is a small community. A very characteristic feature of the gays in Izmir is that none of us have grudge in each other. If we were together 5 years ago, if we are with someone else now, we all still follow each other: mostly out of curiosity. (Sergen, TR, 21)

As can be observed from these two responses online intimacy can be affected by culture, geographical proximity, personal preferences, etc. Therefore it can be said that online intimacy is also connected to offline criteria.

4.4.2 The Nature of Online Interactions and the Disinhibition Phenomenon

The nature of online interactions which are considered mostly anonymous and impersonal, lacking the accountability and personal connection that comes with in-person interactions. Thus follow a sense of disinhibition, where people usually engage in behaviors that they would not normally do in real life, such as cyberbullying or spreading misinformation. According to the Online Disinhibition

theory (Suler, 2004), people tend to feel freer to express themselves online due to the perceived anonymity and lack of face-to-face interaction which can lead to a sense of disinhibition, where individuals may engage in behaviors that they would not normally do in person, such as aggression, bullying, or sharing personal information.

> It's about the design of the apps. Meaning that I want to communicate a little bit and share a beer with them before having to see them naked or see their genitalia. But in Grinder you can send. I experienced it as a bit more of a safe space on Tinder, you can't send unsolicited photos, that's a blessing for me. From that standpoint, because on Grinder I receive many nude pics and take away all of the surprise. I don't wanna see you naked before seeing your face. So, like, just don't, please don't unless I ask. (Nicola, IT, 24)

4.4.3 Online Sex

Illouz (2019) argues that the body has become a means of expressing emotions, and emotions becoming detached from sexual interactions. This means that some people may engage in sex solely for physical pleasure, without emotional intimacy or connection being a priority. Consequently, interpreting sexual experiences as a way of gathering information for relationship establishment becomes a potential practice. However, this approach seems incompatible with digitally mediated interactions. Many participants noted that online sexual practices lack clarity; it is unclear when virtual sex begins and ends, such as with sexting messages. Additionally, most participants who tried online sex found it to be artificial and lacking in intimacy. They felt as if they were being recorded, or as if there was no one present with them.

> I tried and didn't like it because I don't consider it as real. In a sense, it's like flirting, yes. In a sexual way, it's like teasing the person. But I don't see it as a sexual connection. I think when I think of sex and sexual interactions, it's mainly physical. Since we agreed on sex is a need, you need some kind of relief. Maybe you can do masturbation. Maybe you can watch porn. So all of them are ways of doing it. Yeah. It's a way of, like, satisfaction. (Maria, IT, 20)

> It was like I'm exposing some parts of myself. We probably are not supposed or don't feel comfortable with exposing, but.. Since I am directly to a person I don't know so well, so if you were in a relationship it would be definitely more accepted. In my long term relationship, it happened but it was really tender. It was less sexual and more intimacy involved emotions, closeness. I didn't feel bad afterwards. (Stefano, IT, 23)

4.4.4 FOMO: The Pressure to Keep Up in the Digital Age

The nature of the internet and social media involves an overwhelming and never-ending flow of information, leading to a sense of information overload and a constant need to keep up. This can result in feelings of anxiety, stress, and being overwhelmed by the digital world

> There is this fear as a gay person which includes the anxiety not to find someone since you are not straight and the society creates an atmosphere which is mainly dominated by straight people. So, sometimes I feel like I need to use these apps if I want to find someone. (Nicola, IT, 24)

4.4.5 The Negative Effects of Watching Porn: Creating Unrealistic Expectations and Feelings of Alienation

Watching porn seems to present a distorted and unrealistic view of human sexuality and relationships, which can create unrealistic expectations and distorted perceptions of what is normal and acceptable in sexual experiences. Porn can be addictive in a way that leads to compulsive behavior, which can interfere with one's daily life and relationships. This can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and a sense of being disconnected from one's own life and from others.

> When you're very young it affects you seeing the women in the porn or even men like anyone can see there and they look at certain bodies. For example a certain body part and they think yeah, that's the way they should look. And then they start thinking, oh, like my vagina looks different, my boobs look a little bit off, but what they don't know is that most of these people maybe had surgery or lighting, position. (Maria, IT, 20)

> I reached the point that to me it doesn't mean anything like, it's just like smoking a cigarette, so possibly when after some time I don't even remember what I watched, which was the actor's video. (Luca, IT, 22)

> I think it's from the points where the disconnection from real life is at the highest level. Because there really is artificiality in pornography. So much that I sometimes ask myself would I really do in real life some of the things I watch? This is a very scary thing. My relationship with porn is just a fulfillment. Just as the Hornet is a tool to meet with someone for your need to have physical contact, to have sex: pornography is also a tool to provide this, if you want to spend time alone with yourself for masturbation. Especially in our society there is so much to do, to explore, because sex is a taboo, the awareness, a sexual education which needs to be done is not done. (Sergen, TR, 21)

According to general responses, exposure to pornography at a young age can lead to unrealistic expectations about the appearance of one's body, which can result in feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

4.5 Social Pressure: The Impact of Patriarchy, Dating Apps, and Social Media

Both women and men feel pressure from patriarchal society, which makes people feel obliged to respect traditional gender roles. For this reason, I created the codes "pressure on a woman" and "pressure on a man" to identify all types of pressure they have felt. Because of these societal pressures, participants tend to consider being alone as not good for them. Many of them stated that, due to this pressure, they used dating apps and social media puts pressure on them to pursue relationships. Even if there are no strong and one-typed societal rules, nowadays there are different pressures.

4.5.1 The Impact of Gender Roles on Women's Behaviors Online and Offline
When I asked 'Do you think gender roles are still valid?' and 'Do you feel gender differences online?' I have collected some general answers on how women feel pressured or expected to act in a certain way both offline or online.

> I don't use dating apps because I wouldn't feel safe if I meet with a guy from a dating app. I need some assurance like a friend circle or familiar environment. In Turkey femicides are common, so the fear of not feeling safe is always here. (Gizem, TR, 24)

> I feel the need to hide that I am using dating apps because it is considered bad for a woman. Besides, as a woman in Turkish culture living without a marriage is a problem. So if I want to live with my boyfriend some day I have to hide it from my family or we need to get married. (Mine, TR, 21)

The responses provided by the participants offer significant insights into the cultural variations that exist between Italy and Turkey. In light of the profound influence of gender roles and religious scripts on Turkish culture, there remains a pressure on women that still continues to exist. This cultural dynamic is manifested in the frequency of femicides, which engenders a pervasive sense of insecurity.

> I don't want relationships, it requires too much sacrifice. Relationship is a burden for a woman. In Turkey you have to be caring for men who are not grown up. They're too much linked to their mother. Also you have to be a mother for them. Individuality is not possible with this type of relationship. I also don't want to get married but I want children, so I am thinking of an adoption option but I don't think that my family would support this. But at the same time in our family one of my cousins did this as a single woman and even if the elders rejected in the first place they accepted it in the end. So maybe they are starting to accept differences. (Miray, TR, 23)

I also think most people when they post on Instagram or any type of social media, once they share their relationships, they are sharing the good side and it's always amplified, kind of showing off. Hey, I have a perfect relationship but in reality, those are the most problematic you know? (Maria, IT, 20).

4.5.2 The Impact of Gender Roles on Men's Behaviors Online and Offline

The questions: 'Do you think there are certain gender expectations in these settings? For example, male sends the first message, etc.?' or 'Do you think there are certain gender-based expectations in sex? If yes, what?' were responded as;

Of course, I send the first message, there could be some exceptions but in general, I usually send the first message. I definitely want this to go away. I wish it wasn't like that, let the man send the first message. I can't accept this, I don't want to accept it. I don't like to get into such things, like stereotypes. (Mehmet, TR, 22)

I think they still exist in sexual encounters. For example, there is a perception that a woman's orgasm depends on the performance of the man, and that's why there are so many expectations. But in my opinion, orgasm is something that can occur with the effort of both sides. (Melis, TR, 25)

Women do oral sex and men don't have to. Men have to do physical activity during sex. Women are less during sex about pleasure and men praise themselves like I care about making you satisfied and they act like they know what you want and don't even ask what you like. I think men expected to be in control and deciding what to do and you just expected to be there. (Greta, IT, 25)

It seems that according to the general social expectations, men should have knowledge and experience of sexual activities. He must be experienced, the inexperienced male is almost seen in a lower status.

4.5.3 The Impact of Peer Pressure in the Age of Mobile Technology

Peer pressure is more salient than ever through mobile tools since constant exposure to other people's lives makes people compare themselves with others. This pressure mainly formed around the responses that the pressure comes from social media and idealized lifestyles.

I think they have definitely changed from the past. Also within these two years the pandemic also affected a lot of relationships. Mainly before social media was less of an influence on relationships and nowadays it seems like everyone like influencers are portraying the type of perfect relationships where like everything is perfect, they don't have any problems and people look up to them. So they end up having high expectations. And it's a bad set of mindset because no relationships and no connection whatsoever is as good as they show it on social media. (Maria, IT, 20)

During teenage years there is a peer pressure to have sex thus feeling the necessity to use dating apps. (Kaan, TR, 23)

There is an expectation to be in a relationship, as if when you don't have a relationship you're not complete. (Melis, TR, 25)

Being lonely is problematised in a society where people approve through their relationships and marriages. Seeing these on social media stresses me from time to time. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

Social media makes you wanna have relationships. When I see other people's relationships on social media, I feel like how nice it is. Then I wish I had a relationship which happens from time to time. For example, I am sick right now, if I had a girlfriend right now she could take care of me at home, she would make me soup, you know? (Mehmet, TR, 22)

Relationships are one type and people feel to fit in or not approved by society. Marriage is still a prevalent path in Turkey. All the patterns and ceremonies are one-typed. For that reason I don't want to conform and follow this path. It's like I don't want to do it since everyone is doing it. (Gizem, TR, 24)

Like if you're alone you're not loveable and likable enough (Davide, IT, 21)

Dating apps are like a rule to meet with new people (Cecilia, IT, 24)

Marriage is a dictation from society and it's more visible with social media and celebrations, ceremonies etc. friends shared and it puts a pressure. It is romanticized, I don't want to get married to prove my love to society. I can get married someday because it's legally advantageous. (Adriana, IT, 30)

I tried Wapa but I prefer Tinder. Wapa was bad as a bisexual woman because they hate you from the fact that you're bisexual not a lesbian. I felt more accepted on Tinder, and I used Bumble but didn't do anything with that. (Greta, IT, 25)

4.6 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Dating Culture

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted dating culture, leading to changes in the way people connect, communicate, and prioritize their relationships. With social distancing measures in place, more people have turned to online dating apps as a way to connect with potential partners. This has led to an increase in the popularity of video dating and virtual events, as well as the development of new apps specifically designed for remote dating.

4.6.1 Emotional Impact: Looking for More Meaningful Interactions

Overall, the responses highlight the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on dating and relationships, as well as the role technology has played in connecting people during a time of social distancing and isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic created an emotional void for some individuals, leading them to seek meaningful interactions and relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased feelings of loneliness and isolation, prompting some people to turn to online dating apps like Tinder to connect with others. The COVID-19 pandemic may have also heightened awareness of the importance of social connection and relationships.

> The pandemic created an emotional void therefore people looked for meaningful interactions. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

> During the pandemic I was alone in my family house. Yes I had my family with me, but it wasn't enough for my need to have deep interactions. So I wanted a relationship and I used Tinder. (Chiara, IT, 25)

> After the pandemic, I actually started to spend a little more time on these applications because of feeling this deep loneliness. In fact, by isolating me, it made me realize my loneliness a little more, and I can say that it was a factor that made me look for someone and start my relationship. Since the pandemic has brought this awareness, I can't think of a roadmap how it would be if it wasn't. (Sergen, TR, 21)

4.6.2 Emerging digital practices: How Social Media and Dating Apps Helped People Staying Connected

There was no possibility to meet new people in the offline world. However, as human nature, people still need to feel belonged and accepted to solidify their places in the world. For that, they need approval from society and social circles. With people physically separated from each other, messaging apps like WhatsApp, and Telegram or dating applications (Tinder, Bumble, Grindr etc.) have become more important for staying in touch and finding partners for several reasons. All these tools allow people to send text, voice, and video messages to each other in real-time and help them to interact with new people which they may never have the chance to meet otherwise. Dating apps added features related to the pandemic to help users navigate the new dating landscape. For example, Bumble added a "Virtual Dating" badge to indicate that a user was open to virtual dates. Bumble also hosted virtual speed dating events, and Hinge hosted virtual happy hours.

> Tech usage increased and new types of digital dynamics emerged and our digital habits changed/increased. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

Apart from relationships, talking about dating, it really changed in some way because we were obliged to stay at home so we used a lot of technology in that sense. We learned to focus on other elements rather than elements, social elements. For example, knowing a person from a profile, maybe video chats etc. Paying attention to their social media usage, their profile and inferring their personality.' (Stefano, IT, 23).

I used Tinder during the pandemic in the beginning but I thought there was no point if there was no possibility to go outside to meet with someone. But after a while Tinder launched this free thing you could use tinder premium for free and you could show yourself at a different location. You could see different parts of the world. I used Tinder again and went to different countries. It was fun. I talked with a lot of people. I really wasn't expecting anything. It didn't make sense. I couldn't see them so I just focused on friendship. I found some fun sexting friends but I didn't feel anything towards them. (Greta, IT, 25)

4.6.3 Relationship Priorities Re-Evaluated During the Pandemic

The pandemic has forced many people to re-evaluate their priorities, including their relationships. Some people have been drawn closer to their partners as they spend more time together, while others have realized that they are not as compatible as they thought. The pandemic has also led to delays in major relationship milestones, such as moving in together, getting married, or starting a family, as many people focus on staying safe and healthy during the pandemic.

Sometimes we had difficulties in meeting even for long periods of time, so we communicated as much as we could on social media. Our emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy was increasingly disintegrated, so we tried to rebuild it. Some of them may have lived together and had other negative and positive effects in that process. We were in the part that stayed further away from each other during the pandemic process. (Deniz, TR, 24)

Staying in lockdown isolated me from too many stimuli, and it helped to make self reflection. I realized that I had too many distractions preventing me from thinking about my wishes and desires. For example, I had too many dates which removed my attention from myself. (Greta, IT, 25)

Even though I knew I am lesbian, I had a relationship with a guy for 4 years. I wasn't thinking or denying, I don't know. However during the lockdown I had a lot of time to think about myself and I took courage and talked about it with my boyfriend. He understood and supported me, so we decided to stay as friends. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

The pandemic was like a test for relationships. It destroyed the equilibrium of relationships since there was no possibility to meet it suddenly turned into long distance relationships. Or many couples who live together broke up in this period probably they didn't want to spend their lockdown with that person and the lockdown factor catalyzed this decision. There was a friend of mine who broke up a 9 years relationship. Because every day with the same person would be stressful or if the 2 people are too far away and not to be able to have meaningful communication having only cell phones or so on. (Davide, IT, 22)

4.7 Dating Apps Born Out of Need

In the past, people relied on meeting others through friends, family, work, or social events. However, as society became more mobile and people spent more time on their phones and computers, there was a need for new ways to meet potential partners. Thus, dating apps were born out of a need to connect with others and find potential partners in a modern world where many people are busy with work, social obligations, or live in areas where it is difficult to meet new people. Dating apps fill this need by offering a convenient and accessible way for people to connect with others who are also looking for relationships. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, dating apps have become even more important as people seek to connect with others while adhering to social distancing guidelines.

4.7.1 Using Dating Apps as a Source of Information for Decision Making

Dating apps provide certainty by offering users the specific information they are likely seeking when looking for someone to match with. Dating apps can be a source of information because they allow users to create detailed profiles with information about themselves, such as their age, location, interests, and hobbies. This information can be used to find potential matches with similar interests and backgrounds. Additionally, dating apps often have messaging features that allow users to communicate with each other before meeting in person, giving them the opportunity to learn more about each other and gather additional information. Some dating apps offer features such as personality quizzes and compatibility tests that can provide users with more information about potential matches. Overall, dating apps seem to provide a platform for users to gather and exchange information that can be used to make informed decisions about who they choose to interact with and potentially date. In general, participants complain about uncertain interactions, but social media and dating apps allow them to collect information in a way that differs from real-life encounters with undefined gazes, looks, and so on.

Furthermore, as I have stated before on Giddens' Structuralism Theory (1984), and how structures are maintained and modified by the usage of agency, similarly to the way a structure influences a person's autonomy. These interview data can be representative of some parts of how users' responses and actions can have a significant impact on the development and evolution of platforms' algorithms, as platforms seek to optimize user engagement and deliver content that is relevant and valuable to their users. Many participants stated their disturbance on unsolicited photos and messages. In response to these, for instance, Bumble developed a message filtering algorithm designed to automatically detect and flag messages that contain potentially inappropriate or offensive content. Similarly as Nicola (24) criticized, Tinder does not provide sending photos even after matching, however Grindr users' can send messages and photos even without matching.

Since when both sides are swiping right the match has been provided, it gives certainty for an individual so there is no fear of rejection. (Mine, TR, 21)

Dating apps, also social media can be very useful because sometimes some people can lack the ability to go to places, and meet people. Or maybe they don't have the courage to go up to someone and be like, hey, do you wanna grab a coffee or ask for their number. So definitely social media has helped 'cause it breaks that glass, that awkwardness. Apps help a lot because you match with the person and you have a talk before you meet them. And it's way easier in a sense they already know what you're looking for and you're not risking. We all have our own insecurities and maybe we're like, what if I go up to the person and I tell them and they maybe don't like me physically? On dating apps and social media, they kind of see you already, so if they match with you, you already know that they like you physically, which is a big thing already. (Maria, IT, 20)

Dating apps are helpful because you know when you match the other person likes you too. You know you see the person in the picture and you know they saw you. Yeah, if everything goes smoothly, you know that if you hit on them, their response is going to be yes. That's why you have a high probability. With other interactions. I don't know if in a club or these kinds of things a much more subtle way of connecting is a playoff, gazes and smiles and the approach is slower or you don't know the consequences like it's much more unpredictable. (Nicola, IT, 24)

Some people are shy or simply don't like to flirt. In that respect dating apps give the opportunity to start from the fact that the other person also likes you. And there is a difference between meeting on social media and matching on a dating app. Social media is just a means to meet in real life, it is always the real life at the end. It is like I noticed this girl on social media and then we got to know each other as if we are meeting in real life. Similarly, I think if you meet in a real life context it's not given directly that you like this person or not, it's not clear that you are flirting or you want to have

something with them. In dating apps you are straight to the point, you both are in the same context. So different maybe lies only in the fact that it's clear that I am interested. It's like instead of meeting in a circle of friends and then going privately, you start privately. (Luca, IT, 22)

In response to user feedback and concerns about the quality of matches, Tinder has made changes to the algorithm to prioritize factors like shared interests and mutual friends, which are seen as indicators of compatibility.

Dating apps show mutual tastes and preferences which gives me comfort when I meet with a stranger. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

You show your intention, if it's sex, the meeting usually ends with sex. (Kaan, TR, 23)

You can collect info about their personality. And I like when they share their music and I can tell that we have similar tastes. (Luca, IT, 22)

You can see mutual tastes, in the physical world you can't read people in their faces what they like or don't like. (Miray, TR, 23)

The showing of similarities seems to provide a sense of familiarity and assurance among users of social media and dating applications.

Social media and dating apps have become prominent sources of information about people's lives, serving different purposes for their users. Among these purposes are the practice of stalking behavior or keeping oneself updated on other individuals. These behaviors are prevalent among some users who view these platforms as a means to satisfy their curiosity about others, including their ex-partners, new dates, or old friends. The participants in the study perceive social media and dating apps as a source of information that satisfies their desire for knowledge about others.

Sometimes I wonder with this gossip instinct and I look at some people what they are doing or where they are now. (Cihan, TR, 24)

Sometimes I just wonder what my ex is doing years later, as someone who has been so important at some point in my life. (Melis, TR, 25)

I just have this curiosity to know: 'What is he doing?' or 'Who is his new new partner?' In another situation, you would never know. I mean, if you don't have social, you never know if that piece maybe you know if he's alive or not, but you don't know what does he do. Since it was my ex boyfriend that really behaved badly with me, I was really hurt. So, I'm curious. And then maybe you are looking for something like for him to be in a bad situation, like to be with someone you can

consider less important, less intelligent, less beautiful than just like you feel relaxed and heal something inside you. (Adriana, IT, 30)

Stalking is also a way for tracking the partner/date. Some participants have stated that they regularly check if they share something on social media when they have not responded to their messages and they tend to interpret this as a bad signal on their connection such as lack of attention.

You can evaluate how or if they care about you. if they wake up in the morning and they share a story and they didn't text you the good morning, you're like, what the FCK? (Luca, IT, 22)

I am really, really stalking. Like if I know someone I want to know everything about them. So I go through their profile pictures, the history on Instagram and Facebook and my boyfriend is not very social, so I can't collect much information from there. (Adriana, IT, 30)

4.7.2 Seeking for Intimacy

The participants talked about many restrictive features for having intimacy in their lives, since the narrowing of the circle of friends after graduation, the inability to interact with anyone for a long time due to the rapidity of mobility and spreading of everyone to other places created limited choices. Addition to that during the COVID-19 pandemic meeting with new people was a limited possibility.

I am working and I don't have time to travel or have social events. Now we are inside the application because we need to meet new people. Because it is not very likely to meet with someone in the street directly. We have some context, a reason and someone that is also online. It's like a rule today. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

I used it because I want someone I can establish intimacy with. I like the idea that you have a person when you are good and also bad and when you want to talk to someone it is good to have someone who cares about you. (Greta, IT, 25)

There is no other possibility. We are living in 2022, and it is not like you can go to a bar, write a number on a napkin, or the person across from you, send you a drink. There is no other choice - where will people meet? Especially in our early twenties, there is a gap that occurs during periods when relationships, and even serious partnerships, are a bit more traditional. We are talking about a point where social life after university disappears, and you can change cities, even when finding a job. You can change countries, be unemployed, and live with your family for a long time. Today, the possibility of meeting new people through social interaction decreases almost to zero. (Sergen, TR, 21)

While young adults may be delaying marriage and committed relationships, it seems that desire for love and intimacy has not disappeared; as they are more settled in their lives, they may be more ready to commit to romantic relationships and marriage.

I have observed that many individuals approach with caution the idea of engaging in a romantic relationship due to perceived significance. The motivations for dating vary among individuals, with some seeking purely sexual encounters, while others adopt a more ambiguous stance. Asking about each other's expectations before starting dating or hanging out is a common activity among individuals, with the aim of not wasting each other's time. One example of a particular dating practice that I have witnessed in my circle of friends is the concept of "hug dates." According to their definition, individuals meet with the person they spent time with during a particular period solely for the purpose of hugging and laying down together. This practice does not necessarily involve sexual intimacy and is regarded as a means for individuals to express their need for emotional intimacy by openly communicating it to the other person. However, such interactions do not usually involve sleeping together, regardless of whether the individuals involved have previously had sexual encounters. This is because the act of sleeping in the same bed is often perceived as a significant step towards establishing a romantic relationship between two people.

4.7.3 The Importance of Location in Dating

The participants emphasized the importance of location when it comes to finding a match, since physical proximity allows for more frequent and intimate contact. They also stated that using dating apps was an effective way to meet new people during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown periods which was a time when in-person socializing was limited. Therefore, mobile dating provides a stability to reach out to people; it's always accessible through mobile phones, and this feature gives people an opportunity to be socially and romantically flexible.

> I used Tinder during lockdown to meet new people. It was the only way for me to get to know new people since I got back from abroad recently and the lockdown had started; I felt trapped. I set my radius to 5 km to meet people around me except the ones I already know. I have matched with a guy (who is my boyfriend now) and we started with long walks and long talks around the neighborhood. I think these long walks allowed us to get to know each other at length. (Adriana, IT, 30)

> It is very important because I am not someone who can communicate from a distance, and maintain a relationship. I also have a hard time making friends from afar. Matching with someone long distance means nothing to me. So even if I don't plan to match and meet right away, my main intention is eventually to meet. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

It really depends on you and your main purpose. In my case I wanted to meet the person that is the love of my life. So I want him/her to be next to me, the match that I can reach out as close as possible. (Chiara, IT, 25)

Location is very important because if you're planning to see that person romantically. Personally, I cannot do distance, I need to see the person frequently. I need to have physical contact, so I do think it's very important for me. But if it's just a friendship I can go everywhere. I don't have a problem, but in relationships I would say like maximum. It's so weird because if I go out with them and I know they live far away, I also automatically think, oh, we can be friends no more. (Maria, IT, 20)

Factors such as a busy lifestyle, limited time availability, and a preference for minimal effort in partner search suggest a preference for local matches. The geographical proximity affordance of dating apps, therefore, contributes to expanding users' options and diversifying their partner selection.

From my point of view, location is very important. If he wants to have sex with me from 47 kilometers away; what can I do for you? Get in your car and come. There are those who tell me to take the metro. It's not worth anyone. If it's over 1 kilometer, I don't bother to answer. Because I will not take public transport or ask someone else to come to me on public transport. But if it's within walking distance, we can meet. (Sergen, TR, 21)

It is important because I am working a lot and I have a very busy life so I don't have not much time to meet with someone who lives far away. In the future if I have a much relaxed work routine I can travel more and then I can broaden my radius. (Cecilia, IT, 24)

I didn't want to put too much effort to find someone, it should be close to meet. (Greta, IT, 25)

4.7.4 The Need for Approval, Reward, and Satisfaction in Online Contexts

Social media platforms and dating applications keep their users in their platforms through the implementation of psychological strategies in which incorporates principles of operant conditioning and satisfies individuals' needs and desires. Operant conditioning is a behaviorist theory introduced in B.F. Skinner's 1938 book "The Behavior of Organisms" as a means of understanding how behavior is shaped by its consequences. Lindström et al. (2021), argued that users of social media are subject to operant conditioning, whereby they receive positive reinforcement, such as likes, comments and messages, for engaging with the platform. This reinforces their behavior and increases their usage, potentially leading to addictive patterns. The platforms also satisfy individuals' needs and desires, such as the need for social connection and validation, through

features like messaging and profile customization. Furthermore, many applications use negative reinforcement, such as notifications or reminders, to discourage users from leaving the platform.

> I think online is a part of alienation. I realize that I tend to evaluate myself based on how many responses I got or like how many people I had matched with etc. (Nicola, IT, 24)

> Having too many matches is flattering, feeling good because someone likes you - (Mehmet, TR, 22)

> Actually, I'm not very good with technology, I miss a lot of things. But I am very active on Instagram. It's not because of the motivation to miss something, but for example, sometimes when I share a post in a story, I like to watch those likes and responses. (Zuhal, TR, 25)

4.7.5 Factors Affecting User Decisions for Using Dating Apps

User factor highlights different factors for deciding, maintaining or abandoning to use dating apps. First of all, the age, gender, education level, income, and location of users can influence their usage of dating apps. According to the responses it can be inferred that an individual has an active role to direct and manage it.

> These apps are tools and you shape them according to your personality. I think for men it is so hard to find a match. Sometimes I downloaded it and then as soon as I did I deleted it. Because I don't like it, I don't see myself as a person who finds someone on Tinder on dating apps. The usage of these channels shaped and differed according to the individual. (Luca, IT, 22)

> It's normal that people are using dating apps. I can only say that I wouldn't do it because I don't strive to find someone. I think it's useful if you have motivation. So, if something is bad it's not the platforms' fault, it's the users' fault. (Davide, IT, 22)

> They can be superficial, but also since we tend to evaluate a person according to their appearance, outfits etc. in reality can be superficial. So, it depends on each person. (Greta, IT, 25).

> Well during the pandemic? I did not use it. I think I've used it maybe once or twice 'cause I was still going through the break up. But I used it mainly to meet people in a friendly way and just to have connections because I was bored and I wanted to meet new people and talk to them. (Maria, IT, 20)

> I don't think that these tools are superficial. They are just tools to meet with new people. You can create according to yourself, you can go deeper, depending on your intention. (Adriana, IT, 30)

> I downloaded Tinder with the insistence of my friends. But it took only one day and then I deleted it. I felt like I couldn't connect with anyone in this way. I just think that the person I could look for also wouldn't look for me on Tinder. I am a very introverted person. In general, unless I seriously like

someone, I don't want to meet anyone like this, I don't feel comfortable. It's hard for me to meet someone I've never met. It feels more like something that needs to evolve on its own, organically. I am talking about all types of relationships, not just romantic relationships. In fact, this can be problematic, because it also develops in its natural flow on these apps; taking a step doesn't prevent it from being in its natural flow. (Melis, TR, 25)

Motivation indicates that several reasons such as expectation or personality traits affect why users turn to dating apps. For example seeking relationships, friendship, or casual encounters can directly impact usage patterns.

I would say I have two motivations. First, on the very surface, yes sex. I am in an open relationship. I have an active sex life. These apps are what make this happen. And another reason I've only just realized is the approval I get from others, the compliments others give me. Even if I say 'why are so many people writing', inside, I feel like 'yes, someone likes me, someone wants to be with me.' There is also a confirmation and that mechanism works. (Sergen, TR, 21)

It works for me until now because I don't want something clearly defined or stable. I want to spend a good amount of time and have good sex. And I can usually get this. (Miray, TR, 24)

Personally, I want to see, I like to know the person first, and that's why it didn't work for me. It is different to meet on social media though because for example there you can just reply to a story and it's more ambiguous. In Tinder you have to flirt therefore it wasn't for me, i didn't like this performance expectation. (Luca, IT, 22)

The frequency and duration of app usage, as well as the time of day and location of use, can provide insights into user behavior and preferences.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, it is evident that the concept of intimacy has evolved and given rise to new practices. Historically, intimacy was associated with the emotional support provided by a partner in a romantic relationship, which could take various forms such as attention, emotional support, friendship, and protective love. However, it can be inferred from both theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence that contemporary individuals are less inclined or able to provide all of these types of intimacy to a single person.

The introduction and the literature review parts are gathered recent studies on the impact of digital platforms on intimacy and dating practices. It explores how cultural norms are changing in the era of digital intimacy, and the ways in which digital identities are constructed and presented by dating app users. The review delves into the rationalization and marketization of loving and dating practices, including the role of algorithmic matching systems in partner selection. Additionally, it discusses the affordances and user experience of mobile dating apps, including the field of data mining and ethics, gamification, competition, and monetization. The review also considers the impact of location affordance on the reconfiguration of physical and digital space, as well as pre-interaction behaviors and relationship development in mobile dating. It also aims to explore some studies on the impact of choice overload on user behavior and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on dating culture and emerging digital patterns such as ghosting. Overall, this literature review offers insight into the complex and rapidly evolving landscape of digital intimacy and its impact on contemporary dating practices.

As Hochschild (2012) and Illouz (2013) discussed in their works, while social and cultural changes may be making it more difficult for young adults to prioritize romantic relationships, the

desire for love and companionship remains a central aspect of human experience. They both stated similarly that while young people today face more pressure than ever to succeed in their education and careers, they struggle to balance these different aspirations and goals, often feeling torn between the desire for personal fulfillment and the pressure to conform to traditional societal expectations. Hochschild (2012), the modern society places a high value on individualism, independence, and career success, which can make it difficult for young adults to prioritize romantic relationships and marriage. She indicated the ways in which gender inequalities persist within households despite societal and economic changes. She contends that young people are redefining what it means to be in a relationship and are seeking out new ways to balance intimacy and autonomy in their romantic lives. Illouz (2013) proposes that the search for love and romantic relationships has become more complex and challenging and people today are more individualistic and have higher expectations for relationships. In the absence of stable romantic relationships, as she stated, people tend to look for other forms of intimacy and connection, such as friendships, hobbies, or online communities. Overall, their contributions suggest that in contemporary society while social and cultural changes may be making it more difficult for young adults to prioritize romantic relationships, the desire for love and companionship remains a central aspect of human experience.

In my thesis I aimed to explore the impact of mobile dating technologies on the romantic relationships and dating practices of emerging adults in Turkey and Italy. My research questions were: 'What are the effects of mobile dating technologies on the patterns and experiences of emerging adults in their romantic relationships and dating practices?'and 'How do these changes reflect a paradigmatic shift in the way romantic relationships are experienced?'. Since my target was to investigate how the societal shift is mirrored in romantic relationships and dating behaviors among emerging adults (aged 20-30) in Turkey and Italy through the use of digital media, particularly mobile dating, I needed deep and insightful information on how young people give the meaning to their experiences and how these have been changing with the effect of digitally mediated tools and how these changes reflect a paradigmatic shift in the way romantic relationships are experienced. I have collected data through online in-depth interviews conducted from June to November 2022 and with thematic thematic analysis, to investigate the changes in intimacy and dating culture among young adults. I have discovered that the use of mobile media and its ever changing nature have led to a transformation in the way emerging adults experience intimacy, dating, and relationships.

The Mobility Paradigm encourages conducting more interdisciplinary and intercultural studies in order to see what lies beyond Western culture and its influences. The concept of the

Mobility Paradigm provided a comprehensive framework for my research, facilitating a critical examination of the interrelatedness of various concepts. Moreover, it served me a lens to frame my research questions and explore how macro-level factors, such as globalism, capitalism, modernism, politics, technology and notions as time, space, diverse socio-geographic contexts, impact the most intimate relationships between individuals: love, sex and intimacy.

The aim of the theoretical framework was to develop a comprehensive model that encompasses the dating practices of young adults and their experiences in romantic relationships facilitated by mobile technologies that are integrated into their daily lives. The modern world has undergone significant global changes, including factors such as globalization, capitalism, consumerism, and hedonism, that have impacted the values and beliefs of young people globally. The shift towards individualism has resulted in a central paradox of modernity, where individuals strive for independence but also experience a sense of alienation. Young people have responded to this paradox by increasingly adopting a bicultural identity, engaging with both local and global cultures through interactions with people from around the world. In this context, love, intimacy, and sex have also evolved, with technology playing an increasingly important role in shaping how individuals form relationships. The emergence of mobile intimacies and the digital self has altered the ways in which people connect and interact, presenting both opportunities and threats to intimacy and relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had significant consequences on intimacy and relationships, generating uncertainty and threatening ontological security. Taken together, the interplay between society, technology, and individual experience creates a complex landscape for love, intimacy, and sex in the modern world. A group of influential sociologists including Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Eva Illouz, and Zygmunt Bauman have been studied on how they explored various facets of modern love and relationships. While Giddens believed that pure love - based on emotional connection and personal choice - has emerged in modern societies due to the erosion of traditional social structures; Beck introduced the concept of "reflexive love", which requires an awareness of the risks and uncertainties inherent in intimate relationships. Bauman saw modern love as becoming "liquid", with a lack of stability and durability, and Illouz highlighted negative emotions such as disappointment and resentment due to overwhelming choices in relationships. All these interpretations on societal changes have been intertwined with the rise of smartphone technologies and mobile applications, which have created new patterns of relationships and dating. Sociologists also discussed how mobile technologies have changed the nature of relationships in the 21st century, with mobile relationships being formed without traditional structures and characterized by the accumulation of different meanings in different situations. However, mobile relationships also face a tension between the demands of the global mobile economy and the socio-cultural order of intimacy, while it can lead to a backlash against intimacy and a hollowing

out of emotional content in relationships; it also indicates new unpredictable patterns and practices waiting to be discovered.

Overall, in light on all of these theoretical informations and current researches, my research findings are as follows;

Individuals seem to prioritize self-love, self-protection, and personal growth, resulting in a heightened focus on the relationship with oneself. Moreover, each individual seems to have the liberty to determine their own definition of intimacy and the extent to which it features in their lives. This does not necessarily imply the disappearance of love, but rather suggests that romantic relationships may be postponed to later stages of life due to extended periods of personal development and self-discovery experienced by emerging adults.

Dating apps play a vital role in facilitating, mediating, and shaping interactions and the formation of relationships among individuals. Due to their affordances, these apps introduce new terminologies and practices in dating culture and provide young people with an opportunity to connect with strangers. Among these apps, Tinder has formed a virtual community among its users. The term 'community' is used here to refer to new formations that are the subject of conversation in social settings and create new phenomena for interactions. "In naturalistic settings, such as virtual communities, researchers can gain knowledge about the meaning of action taking place" (James and Busher, 2009, 22). As a researcher interested in online culture, I want to understand how participants' experiences are linked and molded by cultural and social factors that are both real and virtual, public and private, and online and offline. To capture this connectedness, I aim to use an approach that can explore the spaces where participants' physical situations and behaviors intersect with their online usages. Tinder use has become a popular topic of conversation in many social settings, and participants often use the word 'Tinder' to refer to 'dating apps' in general. These facts indicate that Tinder has become a cultural phenomenon with its own set of words and practices. This sense of community gives the members a feeling of belonging without even gathering or identifying their members and a sense of understanding towards each other.

However, my research journey reveals that while platforms structure interactions through their affordances, users' behaviors and cultural influences also contribute to their reconfiguration. For instance, due to the reluctance of individuals to label themselves with specific titles, dating apps have incorporated new options like 'prefer not to answer' or 'still thinking.' Similarly, during the pandemic, these apps have adjusted to the prevailing circumstances by promoting virtual dating and recommending social isolation. Moreover, Grindr has positioned itself as a social networking app

rather than merely a dating app, as non-binary individuals tend to prioritize intimacy over dating, flirting, or hooking up.

Throughout the research, I have discovered that "individualism" and "uncertainty" are two increasing trends that are closely related and mutually influenced. These phenomena are the result of long-standing historical consequences, but their acceleration and exacerbation can be attributed to digitally mediated tools.

The rise of individualism has brought about uncertainty in the general environment as societal and traditional norms are being questioned, changed, and multiplied. Consequently, individualism enables people to become self-aware and identify external factors that surround and affect them. These emerging patterns have circulated around the world with the aid of technological advancements and globalization, impacting cultures, generations, and identities. All of these broad changes have impacted individuals' perceptions regarding intimacy, dating, and relationships.

The proliferation of online tools and networks has enabled people to form communities and networks, changing the definitions of relationship types and communities. Nowadays, individuals can have various relationships without external sources defining them, and communities seem to be forming by involving similar traits. For example, LGBTQ+ members form a significant part of the community worldwide with their unique experiences, language, and history.

In the digital media era, the concepts of time and space have undergone significant changes, as mentioned above. The blurring lines between public and private times have led to new layers of the time concept in individuals' minds. While people are engaged in one activity, such as work or meetings, they also experience intimate or private moments through their smartphones, leading to the complex intertwining of physical and online presence. These dynamics affect notions such as online socializing or matching, making them faster and more effortless. Another example of the impact of digital media on relationships is the emergence of "fast sex" in individuals' lives, which has blurred the definitions of relationships, or as one participant referred to it, "a complicationship." The definition and purpose of sex are no longer solely defined by the interaction and are not necessarily romantically connotated.

Moreover, gender norms have been and are changing. For instance, the idea that men are the ones who seek fast sex is no longer relevant, as many women now claim sex without fear of negative perception.

Another observation that I have made before and during the interview process provided me evidence for the fluidity of identities, as evidenced by one participant who identified as a lesbian

before the interview but had a boyfriend during the interview. This finding sheds light on individuals' reluctance to label themselves, as it aligns with my code 'Being against labeling and categorizations'. However, it should be noted that these statements and findings may have geographical limitations and may not represent different cultures and societies.

The impact of digital media on relationships is further discussed, including the emergence of "fast sex" and changing gender norms. Since Tinder came forward during my research process, it seems relevant to touch upon and study specifically about Tinder. I have come to realize that dating rituals have multiplied and changed through digital tools.

Moreover, perceptions towards new practices such as using mobile apps for dating have become more accepted over time. These practices have gained new definitions involving fast, easy, and effortless socializing without necessarily excluding old practices. This has created new ways of doing things. Ultimately, these terms are intertwined and interpenetrated, implying that an individual's definition of intimacy involves friendships, flirting, and homosocial factors that are not strictly defined.

Finally, the rise of mobile technologies and dating apps have transformed the dynamics of intimate relationships and social norms around romantic relationships which deserves attention. However, their impact extends beyond romance, with the potential to lead to the formation of non-romantic and non-sexual relationships, such as friendships or professional connections. Further research can investigate how these technologies shape cultural attitudes towards intimacy and relationships, as well as how they differ across various communities and demographics. Another interesting topic for further studies can be suggested about break up activities: especially ghosting, which gradually filters in the online and offline interactions of individuals. Furthermore, geolocation technologies are increasingly used to initiate and maintain intimate relationships, including non-romantic intimate relationships. Researchers may explore the impact of geolocation technologies on sexual practices and examine how they facilitate new forms of sexual exploration and expression, particularly through dating apps. Finally, the impact of geolocation technologies on the way people experience space and place deserves attention, particularly in how these apps alter our perceptions of public and private spaces. Further research on these topics will provide valuable insights into the implications of mobile technologies on the formation and maintenance of intimate relationships and their effects on broader societal attitudes and behaviors.

6. TABLES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Table 1: Participants' Sexual Orientation Definitions

Definition	Abbreviation
Heterosexual	H
Lesbian	L
Gay	G
Bisexual	B
Not Defined	N.D

Table 2: Scheme of the Interviewees Sampled

Female		Male	
Italian	Turkish	Italian	Turkish
Maria (20, L)	Mine (21, H)	Davide (22, H)	Sergen (21, G)
Cecilia (24, L)	Miray (23 N.D)	Luca (22, H)	Mehmet (22, H)
Chiara (25, N.D)	Gizem (24, H)	Stefano (23, H)	Kaan (23, G)
Greta (25, B)	Zuhal (25, H)	Nicola (24, G)	Deniz (24, H)
Adriana (30, H)	Melis (25, B)	Matteo (30, H)	Cihan (24, G)

Table 3: The Themes and The Codes Appeared from Interviews

Themes	Codes	Description
Uncertainty: Navigating Identity in a Fragmented and Uncertain World	Unclear Life Maps: Navigating the Uncertainty of Postmodernity The Blurred Lines of Modern Dating and Relationships The Need for Certainty	The intricacy of contemporary relationships and interactions can be attributed to several factors including the absence of a well-defined roadmap, a multitude of relationship types, and the overwhelming burden of choice overload.
The Rise of Individualism and the Erosion of Societal Rules	The Paradox of Choice: The Impact of Endless Options on People's Lives Individual Priorities and the Importance of Personal Space in Relationships Absence of Deeper Connections The Rise of Social Equality Movements Being against Labeling and Categorizations Extreme Individualism	The effects of individuality on contemporary relationships are identified with the desire for personal autonomy, fluctuating identities, isolation, rejection to categorizations, and the ambivalent influence of individualism on the formation of profound connections.

Self-awareness in the Age of Online Diversity	Self-Awareness and Personal Growth: Understanding Needs, Limits, and Aspirations Gender Awareness and Challenges to Traditional Gender Norms Self-Discovery and Relationships Changing Attitudes towards Marriage: Financial Pressures, Traditional Expectations, and Personal Priorities	There is a growing awareness of the impact of online tools on various societal norms, including those related to marriage, gender, social categorization, and relationship styles.
Individualism and Its Consequences in Online Interactions: Alienation, Loneliness, and Disconnectedness	Absence of Emotional Depth The Nature of Online Interactions and the Disinhibition Phenomenon FOMO: The Pressure to Keep Up in the Digital Age The Negative Effects of Watching Porn: Creating Unrealistic Expectations and Feelings of Alienation	The digital world is perceived as lacking emotional depth and the capability of providing meaningful connections, therefore leading to alienation and detachment from reality.

Social Pressure: The Impact of Patriarchy, Dating Apps, and Social Media	The Impact of Gender Roles on Women's Behaviors Online and Offline The Impact of Gender Roles on Men's Behaviors Online and Offline The Impact of Peer Pressure in the Age of Mobile Technology	Digital media and societal expectations affect individuals' decisions to pursue relationships, the need to conform to norms surrounding relationships and marriage, and the pressure to fit in and pursue marriage as the ultimate goal, which raises concerns about their impact on individuals' sense of self-worth.
The Impact of the Pandemic on Dating Culture	Emotional Impact: Looking for More Meaningful Interactions Emerging Digital Practices: How Social Media and Dating Apps Helped People Staying Connected Relationship Priorities Re-Evaluated During the Pandemic	The pandemic caused people to experience loneliness and seek meaningful interactions, and led to self-reflection. The pandemic caused an increase in technology usage and a shift in focus from social to digital elements.
Dating Apps Born Out of Need	Using Dating Apps as a Source of Information for Decision Making Seeking for Connection	Dating apps seem to have emerged as a response to various needs; including the lessening of social circles over time, the impact of the pandemic, and needing for

	The Importance of Location in Dating	connection and new experiences. Dating apps provide opportunities for people who may be shy or uncomfortable with traditional flirting and allow users to connect with others outside of their close social circle.
	The Need for Approval, Reward, and Satisfaction in Online Contexts	
	The Factors Affecting User Decisions for Using Dating Apps	

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ANNEX

THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As a beginning, can you please tell me about yourself?

    ● Age

    ● Relationship status

    ● Gender

    ● Sexual orientation

    ● Education status

    ● Occupation

2. Relationships

1) How would you describe your current relationship status?

    ● Single

    ● Divorced

    ● Never married

    ● Married

> *If the respondent has no relationship:* how would you describe your current situation, such as looking for a relationship or going dates but not looking for one?

2) How do you see today's relationships? What are your own experiences or in your social circle?

- Respondent's expectations

- Negative/positive experiences

- The point of view towards the differences between the way relationships were lived in the past and those in the present

- The effects of the Pandemic

3) Do you think there are some factors or roles where men and women differ in a relationship?

> If the respondent is a man, what are your views on how a woman should be in a relationship?
> If the respondent is a woman, what are your views on how a man should be in a relationship?
> Are there any factors that pull or push you to be in a relationship in today's world?

4) What do you think about being a couple?

- Obstacles to be a couple

- Motivations to be a couple

- Loyalty

- Motivations for marriage

- Whether seeking for bonding or not

> Do you have criteria for an ideal couple, and if so what are they?

> ➢ What do you think about 'the one'? Do you believe that there is someone out there that was created just for you?

> ➢ How do you view the idea of living together? What is your expectation about that?

> ➢ What about marriage? How important is it to you? Is it a point that you hope to reach one day, that you dream of?

> ➢ What does having a family and children mean to you?

> ➢ Do you think that virginity is an important criterion at the point of marriage?

> ➢ What are your views on meeting and getting married through social media or dating apps?

> ➢ Do you feel any social pressure to be in a relationship and get married etc.?

3. Let's talk about online dating *(could be social media platforms or dating apps)*

- The main motivation for trying online dating (or if the respondent never tried, why?)

- Expectations

- Which social media platform / dating app is generally preferred by the respondent?

- Frequency of using these tools

- Gender roles

- Location/Distance factor

- Intimacy

- Bonding (Seeking for meaningful bonds)

1) Do you have any experience with knowing/starting flirting with someone while using social media? Can you tell me about your experiences?

> ➢ How did you feel during this meeting?

➢ Do you think you could express yourself as you wish to that person?

2) Do you think there are certain gender expectations in these settings? For example, male sends the first message, etc.?

3) How important do you think the location factor is in online dating? How do you look at the possibility of dating someone who is out of reach for you?

4) Do you have any experience with dating apps? Can you tell me about your experience(s)?

➢ *If the respondent has used it;* are your experiences positive or more likely to be disappointed? And which dating app is your most used and preferred one?

➢ Have you talked about an important topic for you while using the dating app or during the meeting?

➢ What's the best time to meet someone you talk to on the dating app?

➢ How many people on average do you meet on dating apps or social media at the same time?

➢ Have you ever used the dating app to check out people nearby when you're out? If yes, how often?

➢ Are there any subjects that you keep from the people around you, but have already talked with people you have just met? Can you give an example, or examples?

➢ Do you believe that you have found the intimacy you are looking for in online dating?

➢ When going through profiles that may interest you, how exactly do you decide to get in touch with someone? I mean, let's say one of the women whose profile you're flipping through is good-looking but doesn't have exactly the kind of profession or education you would like, what do you do? Do you get in touch with her?

➢ What happens when you feel like this does not seem like not going anywhere? Are there any people you stay friends or stay in touch with from the people you went on a date with? Or do you prefer to cut off the contact completely?

> *If the respondent has never used it;* do you know someone who uses online channels to meet with someone and go on dates? If yes, what do you think about these experiences?

> Do you think there are any differences from meeting and going on dates in other ways such as meeting through friend networks or social circles?

5) As we all know, the Covid-19 has limited our socialization and dating opportunities. Do you think these tools have become unnecessary now that we are getting back to normal?

4. The relationship and social media

- Jealousy

- Main communication tool with the partner

1) Can you tell me about the role that social media has had in your relationship?

> What do you think about exposing your relationship on social media, sharing beginnings, private moments or breakups? Do you think there are some differences according to gender?

> What do you think about your partner's social media? Does he/she take actions or have some expectations that make you uncomfortable or jealous?

> What do you think about the abundance of choices on social media and dating apps affects relationships/love in general?

> How often do your romantic relationships start online?

2) Have you ever felt that the nature of social media that keeps us updated all the time from each other removes the mystery from your relationship?

3) Do you wonder and look at the social media accounts of your past relationships? Do you think doing this makes it harder to leave a relationship behind?

5. Intimacy and Sexuality

- Trustability

- Privacy

- The natures of the experiences (positive and negative)

- The effects of the Pandemic

1) How do you show if you are feeling close to someone?

2) Do you think the Pandemic has permanently damaged needs like intimacy and sexuality?

3) In your experience, does sex create an emotional interaction? For instance, do you think the intensity of satisfaction depends upon the degree of closeness you feel towards the other? If the respondent has had online dating experience; how often did your dates end in sex?

4) Do you think sex is a private act that should be experienced with only one person at a time?

5) Do you think there are certain gender-based expectations in sex? If yes, what?

6) Do you have any experience with online sex? Do you think it is necessary when couples are far from each other?

7) In your opinion, being away is a big problem for a relationship? What can be done to establish intimacy in a long distance relationship? Have you ever had such an experience?

8) What about porn? Do you think watching porn while in a relationship is some kind of cheating? What elements do you think can be added to the definition of cheating online? Do you think actions like looking at erotic photos or sexting can be considered as cheating?

9) What are your ideas about masturbation?