

Is Dating Dead? Modern Dating Among Emerging Adults in Croatia

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, a romantic relationship starts with two people going on dates and developing emotional and then physical closeness. However, social developments and social media have begun to change that. Therefore, the main aim of our qualitative study was to outline modern dating scripts and forms of casual sexual relationships among Croatian emerging adults, and to identify the needs they fulfill. We conducted four focus groups with young people aged 18 to 25, of whom some were unemployed, some employed and some were university students. The results suggest that emerging adults in Croatia equally choose the traditional dating script and modern casual relationships, such as open relationship, friendship with benefits, fuck buddy, booty call, and one-night stand. Long-term relationships are seen as a step before marriage or cohabitation, and some young people try to avoid them until their career and other life circumstances are stable enough. In that sense, casual relationships can be satisfying, at least temporarily. However, they can also be confusing because different people seem to define them in different ways and, accordingly, have different expectations. The present study broadens our understanding of romantic relationships in emerging adulthood, and as one of the first Croatian studies on this topic, makes an important contribution to the field of personal relationships. It can serve not only as a reference for future studies but also as a base for developing prevention programmes that strengthen romantic competence and develop communication skills for emerging adults.

Key words: Romantic relationships, dating, casual sexual relationships, emerging adulthood

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the most common way of choosing a partner in the Western world has been through dating. However, dating as a script that guides one's behaviour toward a potential lifetime partner has been changing according to modern lifestyles. It is not surprising that due to these changes, emerging adults nowadays are involved in many different forms of casual sexual relationships, such as booty calls and friends with benefits (Balbi, 2017; Claxton and van Dulmen, 2013). It is important to understand the underlying needs that are being met by these forms, as well as how they affect young people. Is dating dead? Does it slowly give way to various modern forms of socialising and choosing a partner? Or is it just postponed? Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to identify modern dating scripts and forms of casual sexual relationships and to find out if they meet the same needs as traditional dating. We do so in the context of Croatian society, a society in transition from collectivistic to individualistic, with strong traditional values.

1.1. Socio-Cultural Context

To fully understand the dating patterns of young adults, it is essential to consider the social context that shapes human behaviour. Giddens (1991) focuses on the development of "high modernity," characterised by rapid changes such as globalisation, disembedding, heightened risk awareness, and reflexivity. Under such social conditions, personal and romantic relationships are the key areas where individuals find "forms of self-exploration and moral construction" (Giddens 1992:144). While freedom and individualisation allow for a choice in how and whom one loves, they also allow for the possibility of avoiding love and falling out of love. Moreover, intimate relationships, especially casual sexual experiences, are left without clearly defined expectations, leaving parties uncertain of whether the encounter was truly casual and focused on sex or indicative of an emotional connection (Illouz, 2019). However, modern dating patterns are described mainly in terms of individualistic American culture and only in relation to collectivistic (Asian) cultures. Therefore, it is important to broaden our understanding of modern dating patterns by including samples from other cultures.

Studies conducted among Croatian students (Šverko, 2008; Tomljenović and Stilin, 2012) indicate that Croatian society is still rather collectivistic, but is considered a society in transition. Looking at the educational structure of Croatian youth, most participants (60%) have completed secondary school, 23% have completed elementary school, a 17% have a university degree (Gvozdanović et al., 2019).

These numbers suggest the pattern of prolonged education. When it comes to romantic relationships, Croatian emerging adults still believe in the institution of marriage, with one-fifth of participants seeing their future in a marital union with children, while alternatives to a marital union are not quite as popular in Croatia as they are in the rest of Europe (Gvozdanović et al., 2019). On the other hand, a trend toward postponing marriage and increasing divorce rates can be observed. Data on Croatian society show a decrease (12.90%) in the number of marriages and, at the same time, an increase (35.60%) in the number of divorces (Pekač and Petrić, 2015; Majstorić, 2019).

1.2. Dating

Dating is a way of starting a romantic relationship, defined as spending time with a person we have a romantic interest in or are sexually attracted to. Dating first occurred in the United States and other Western societies at the beginning of the 20th century as a part of the marriage market, as future spouses compared the resources and commitment of potential partners and chose the best suited of them (Bredow, Cate and Huston, 2008). Some authors in the American culture distinguish dating from courtship. While dating refers to spending time with potential partners, courtship refers to the “mate selection leading to long-term partnership” (Owens, 2007: 269). According to Owens (2007), dating precedes courtship, which begins when a relationship becomes exclusive. In theory, if dating lasts more than a month, it grows into a romantic relationship (Furman and Shaffer Hand, 2006).

How a person behaves in a romantic relationship is determined by his or her script of romantic relationships. According to the traditional script of romantic relationships in the USA (Holmberg and MacKenzie, 2002), when two strangers with similar socio-demographic characteristics meet, they start talking and, after a while, an attraction occurs. If it is mutual, they eventually go on a first date. If everything goes well, they start dating, holding hands, hugging, and kissing, that is, the relationship becomes more physical. Partners learn about each other’s values, care about each other, and disclose more personal information, which altogether makes their relationship more exclusive. Eventually, they meet each other’s friends and finally have sexual intercourse, after which they meet each other’s families and start planning the future together (Holmberg and MacKenzie, 2002). A similar pattern is found in the Croatian context: two people who are dating first meet each other’s friends, then they have sex, meet each other’s family, and finally start planning the future together (Krznarić, Huić and Kamenov, 2013).

Being in a romantic relationship potentially meets diverse needs: intimacy, sex, emotional involvement, companionship, security, and self-worth. A romantic part-

ner is someone we can rely on, with whom we can share our deepest thoughts and feelings, but also someone we can have fun and be physically intimate with (Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992). Therefore, it is not surprising that Sedikides, Oliver, and Campbell (1994) found that the most important benefits of being in a relationship are companionship, happiness, and feeling loved or loving another. Women, more than men, experience self-growth and gain more self-understanding, as well as more positive self-esteem when in a relationship (Sedikides et al., 1994). Singles, on the other hand, can feel rejected and even be stigmatised (Erber and Erber, 2018). However, being in a relationship can be stressful as partners may worry about the relationship and need to make both social and nonsocial sacrifices (Sedikides et al., 1994). What is important is whether partners' needs are met; if so, partners will be satisfied with their relationship. Research confirms that sexual satisfaction, as an indicator of fulfilled sexual needs, correlates positively with relationship satisfaction (Sprecher, 2002). The same applies to the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, three basic human needs (Patrick et al., 2007).

1.3. The Triangular Theory of Love

Dating can be explained within the theoretical frame of Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1986). According to this theory, every interpersonal relationship can be understood in terms of three components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. While intimacy refers to feelings of closeness, trust, and happiness, as well as mutual understanding and emotional support, passion is the motivational component of love. It consists of both psychological and physiological arousal, but also the need for self-esteem and self-actualisation. Finally, commitment has a short-term and a long-term aspect; it covers the decision to be in a relationship, as well as the commitment to maintain it (Sternberg, 1986). Differences between interpersonal relationships result from the extent to which each of these components is present in a relationship. More precisely, the triangular theory of love distinguishes eight kinds of love: nonlove (involves none of the components), liking (only involves intimacy), infatuated love (only involves passion), empty love (only involves commitment), romantic love (involves intimacy and passion), companionate love (involves intimacy and commitment), fatuous love (involves passion and commitment), and consummate love (involves all three components).

These kinds of love can apply to all kinds of interpersonal relationships, including friendships and romances. While in short-term romantic relationships, passion is generally high, intimacy is moderate, and commitment is low, in long-term romantic relationships both intimacy and commitment are generally high, and passion decreases (Sternberg, 1986). Therefore, while dating includes intimacy and

might be characterised as romantic, companionate, or even consummate love, more informal forms of dating, those based on a sexual relationship, could be characterised as infatuated or fatuous love.

Lemieux and Hale (1999, 2000, 2002) tested the triangular theory of love extensively. They confirmed the three-factor structure of love on both 233 students involved in a romantic relationship and 213 married individuals in the USA. Moreover, they found that intimacy and passion negatively, and commitment positively correlated with the length of the relationship, consistent with the theory's assumptions. They also concluded that exclusively dating and married participants reported higher intimacy than participants who were casually dating. Cassepp-Borges and Pasquali (2012) confirmed the three-factor structure on a sample of more than 1500 Brazilians, and Sumter, Valkenburg and Peter (2013) did the same on a sample of more than 2700 Dutch people. Furthermore, Dutch adolescents reported the lowest levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment, while young, middle, and late adults reported similar levels of commitment, with late adults reporting lower levels of intimacy and passion (Sumter et al., 2013). The contribution of Sorokowski and colleagues (2017) in validating the triangular theory of love is even more interesting. They tested the theory among 159 members of the traditional hunter-gatherer tribe Hadza of Tanzania and found that higher commitment is related to greater reproductive success in both men and women. More recently, they confirmed the triangular factor structure of love, as well as the temporal dynamics of the love components on a sample of more than 7300 participants from 25 countries from all inhabited continents, including Croatia (Sorokowski et al., 2021).

Therefore, data on couples who are in a relationship confirm the theory. But can it also explain short-term relationships that start with completely different expectations from the partner and the relationship itself? Rodrigue and colleagues (2018) focused on the three components of love in short-term relationships. Specifically, they measured how acquaintances, friends, non-dating partners, and ex-romantic partners involved in casual sexual relationships differed in terms of perceived passion, intimacy, and commitment. Casual sexual relationships were indeed characterised by high levels of passion, but also by medium levels of intimacy, which means that these relationships can indeed be described as romantic or infatuated types of love. While non-romantic partners, i.e., partners that are in love, but are not dating, engage in sexual activity more frequently than friends, friends engage socially more frequently than acquaintances (Rodrigue et al., 2018). Bisson and Levine (2009), on the other hand, found that friends involved in casual sexual relationships perceive moderate intimacy, as well as low passion and commitment. However, their sample consisted of only 90 participants aged 18 to 40, while Rodrigue and colleagues (2018) sampled more than 400 emerging adults. Thus, con-

sistent with Sternberg's triangular theory of love, people driven by passion engage in various short-term relationships. What do researchers know about these relationships?

1.4. Casual Sexual Relationships

In the 1960s and 1970s, when contraception became more available, premarital sexual intercourse became more common, and, because of these changes, dating came to be more casual (Cere, 2001). Moreover, group dating occurred and allowed singles to decide if someone in their group of friends had the potential to become their partner (Bredow et al., 2008). At the beginning of the 21st century, social media and dating apps changed the well-established patterns of traditional dating (Bryant and Sheldon, 2017). According to Bogle (2008), American students no longer date, but hook up with a stranger, an acquaintance, or a friend during a night out. The term "hookup" in this context encompasses anything from kissing and touching over or under the clothes to having sex. After the hookup, the two can start seeing each other and define that they are a couple, but they can also skip the dating phase (also known as the quick jump) or end their relationship (Bogle, 2008). Wentland and Reissing (2011) defined these casual, mainly sexual, relationships in more detail; namely, they differentiate between one-night stands, booty calls, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits. While a one-night stand is sex between two strangers or acquaintances who usually meet in a bar and are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, a booty call is a relationship in which two people who know each other occasionally call or text the other person just to have sex. Fuck buddies engage in sexual activity regularly, usually when they hang out with each other, while friends with benefits can hang out without engaging in sexual activity, although they do have sex regularly. Fuck buddies and friends with benefits are usually not under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs when engaging in sex (Wentland and Reissing, 2011). According to Claxton and van Dulmen (2013), one-night stands, booty calls, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits are different forms of hookups. Balbi (2017) identifies not only casual sexual relationships among American millennials, but also forms of casual dating, namely talking and seeing each other. While talking refers to two people beginning a romantic relationship, but not being exclusive with each other, seeing each other constitutes a step further by including the possibility of a relationship in the future. However, 55% of her 74 participants aged 18 to 34 reported that they were in a monogamous relationship.

Sexual pleasure is the most common motive for engaging in casual sexual relationships (Lyons et al., 2014; Karlsen and Træen, 2013), but there are also

numerous other predictors: substance use (Claxton, De Luca, and van Dulmen, 2015; Lyons et al., 2014;), low desire for self-disclosure and mutual dependence (Sanderson and Cantor, 1995), feelings of being too busy for commitment and too young to be tied down (Lyons et al., 2014), avoidant attachment style (Brennan and Shaver, 1995), as well as high neuroticism and extraversion, and low agreeableness and conscientiousness (Gute and Eshbaugh, 2008). Moreover, men who strongly believe that sex does not hold meaning (Olmstead, Pasley and Fincham, 2013) and women who have stronger physical motivation for sex (Armstrong and Reissing, 2015) engage in casual sexual relationships more often. Finally, religiosity predicts less frequent engagement in casual sexual relationships for women but not men (Owen et al., 2010).

Hookups can have both positive and negative outcomes depending on expectations and sexual satisfaction, with positive ones being more common than negative ones (Wesche, Claxton, and Waterman, 2021). Both personal (Lewis et al., 2012) and peer approval (DeLuca et al., 2015) are related to more positive outcomes. Furthermore, hooking up with a previous (i.e., familiar) partner is also related to more positive outcomes (Snapp, Ryu and Kerr, 2015). On the other hand, not knowing a partner well and not being sexually satisfied predict negative outcomes of casual sex (Wesche et al., 2021). Regret is more frequent after a poor-quality casual sexual experience and among women (Fisher et al., 2011). Women are also more prone to experiencing negative emotional outcomes of casual sexual relationships, probably because they feel manipulated and used as sexual objects or because they feel frustrated by the lack of clarity and communication (Dubè et al., 2017; Lovejoy, 2015; Wesche et al., 2021).

2. AIM OF THE PRESENT STUDY

During emerging adulthood, at the ages 18 to 25, young people try to find out what they want from life, including their romantic partners (Arnett, 2000). Literature, as described earlier, identifies diverse ways of finding romantic partners and developing relationships with them. However, these studies were mostly conducted among college students in the USA and Canada, and only a few of them investigated more than one form of casual sexual relationship in the same study (Claxton and van Dulmen, 2013). Croatia, as a country in transition, offers a unique opportunity to gain a better insight into how the rapid social changes of late modernity affect the dating script in a country that is leaning towards the West but still holds on to traditional values.

Therefore, the main aim of the present study is to describe dating scripts and identify casual sexual relationships among Croatian emerging adults. We reached

out to those who still depended on parental care (college students) but also those who had started their careers and could be more financially independent. Furthermore, we wanted to compare satisfaction with traditional and modern dating scripts. Since this was the first study attempting to answer these questions in the Croatian context, we conducted a qualitative study focusing on four research topics. We wanted to a) identify ways of meeting potential romantic partners, b) describe dating scripts and identify casual sexual relationships among emerging adults at the ages 18 to 25, c) identify ways of defining romantic relationships, and d) describe how modern dating scripts and casual sexual relationships affect relationship satisfaction among emerging adults.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

Our sample was purposive and included typical cases of emerging adults living in a large urban area. We approached them with the help of psychology students who were instructed to recruit emerging adults aged 18 to 25 who were employed, unemployed, or attending university. We did not specify whether participants should be single or in a relationship. By using these general demographic characteristics of typical cases, we tried to ensure the transferability of our conclusions about the patterns among Croatian emerging adults living in large urban areas. However, we did not ask psychology students to record the degree of separation based on whether a potential participant was their friend, an acquaintance, or a friend of their friend. Thus, we could not control for the social network homogeneity that could have implications for understanding the general pattern. To our knowledge, participants were recruited primarily through personal networks. Thus, it is possible that the pattern would be different if the sample were more heterogeneous.

A total of 28 emerging adults whose mean age was 23 ($M = 22.71$; $SD = 1.462$) participated in the focus groups. Among them, 13 were women and 15 were men. According to Eurostat (2015), about 44% of people aged 20–24 are part of the education system, 39% are employed and 19% are unemployed. In our sample, 15 participants (7 women) were students, six (3 women) were employed, and seven (3 women) were unemployed, indicating that the structure of the sample approximated that of the population relatively well. Thirteen participants were single, with none of the unemployed participants being in a romantic relationship. Finally, two of our male participants described themselves as gay. They reflected on both homosexual and heterosexual dating patterns (based on their friends' experiences). Therefore, we interpreted their responses in terms of the general pattern identified

by the heterosexual majority. It is important to note that although we did not specifically look for participants who grew up in various parts of Croatia, some of our participants indicated that they grew up in rural areas. Moreover, they told us not only about their own romantic experiences, but also about those of their friends, some of whom still live in other parts of the country. We believe this adds to the transferability of our results.

The first focus group consisted of 7 non-students, the second of 6 non-students, there were 7 students in the third, and 8 students in the fourth group. Most of the non-students graduated from college. The number of female and male participants was equal in all groups, except for the second focus group, which included four male participants.

For the most part, participants did not know each other; only in two cases did two acquaintances participate in the same focus group. The moderator was the first author of this paper, who did not know the majority of the participants. Although five of them were her acquaintances, her impression was that this fact had not affected the results. All participants were informed about who the moderator would be and what topics would be discussed upon their agreement to take part in the focus group. Regarding the power dynamic between the participants and the group moderator, all of them were of similar age and the moderator tried to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Indeed, the participants seemed relaxed and willing to share their opinions.

3.2. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

In the pilot study, we individually interviewed four psychology students (two of whom were female), whose mean age was 23.5, to gain better insight and test the questions we planned to ask the participants in the main study. We conducted the main study in March 2018. We initially planned to carry out four focus groups following the recommendation of Namey et al. (2016), who showed that three focus groups were sufficient to identify all the most prevalent topics within a data set. We were willing to expand the sample if new information appeared in the last group. However, this was not the case, confirming that the data collected in the four initial focus groups was sufficient to illuminate the topics relevant to the general profile of our study participants: young Croats living in urban areas, who nevertheless differed in their financial (in)dependence and partnership status.

In the first two focus groups, we gathered students, and in the other two, participants who either worked or were unemployed. We opted for this categorisation because most students are financially dependent on their parents and do not have the means to start a family of their own, unlike their employed peers. Compared to

their unemployed peers, students are less likely to find a job soon and thus become financially independent. On the other hand, students also have more opportunities to meet someone in person, which makes it easier for them to meet potential partners, while others have to establish themselves professionally. However, students and non-students did not differ much in their opinions, so we were able to achieve theoretical saturation in both subsamples. Interestingly, we found that students were more likely to be in a relationship compared to non-students.

The focus group discussion covered four topics: meeting potential romantic partners, forms of dating, defining romantic relationships and satisfaction with romantic relationships (see Appendix 1 in the online Supplement for the focus group discussion guide in the original in Croatian, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/index.php/rzs/libraryFiles/downloadPublic/280>). The discussions were semi-structured, allowing interesting insights to be investigated in depth. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour each (51 to 81 minutes). The moderator encouraged openness and respect for different opinions in all groups. The discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Our epistemological approach to data analysis was post-positivist. Thus, after reading the transcripts of the discussions in detail, two independent researchers coded the transcripts to maximise objectivity. We used a hybrid method of inductive and deductive analysis, i.e., we started with the topics defined based on the literature and relevant to our research problems. The codes were then organised into subcategories, the subcategories were organised into categories and the categories were divided into these predefined topics (see Appendix 2 in the online Supplement to the Coding matrix using examples from the transcript excerpts in the original in Croatian, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/index.php/rzs/libraryFiles/downloadPublic/280>). During that iterative process, the coding plan was adjusted in agreement with all the authors of this paper and both the prevalence and importance of the codes were considered. We identified four topics: ways of meeting potential romantic partners, forms of dating scripts, predictors of choosing dating scripts, and characteristics of long-term romantic relationships.

The topics regarding romantic and sexual relationships required the participants to share intimate information about themselves. Therefore, the participants were informed that these topics would be discussed during the focus group and were asked to provide verbal consent for participation. They were also asked not to disclose information about others outside the group. The focus groups were recorded; however, the recordings do not contain any personal information. The same person moderated all four focus groups and she guaranteed the privacy and protection of personal data to the participants. The transcripts were anonymised by excluding any references to the participants' names. Only the first author knew the

identity of the participants and kept their names in a separate file. In line with the post-positivist paradigm, we also considered potential sources of bias, which we identified in the fact that the moderator and two transcript coders were emerging adults, so their experiences and expectations could have influenced the interpretation of collected data. To control for this, we included the third researcher who is not in this specific age group.

4. RESULTS

The results suggest that among emerging adults living in large urban areas, there are two major forms of dating – traditional and modern, and that participants' responses differ depending on the form of dating. We will present the results by four topics while also taking into account the forms of dating. Different opinions were considered in the analysis and presented as different forms or aspects of dating.

4.1. Ways of Meeting Potential Romantic Partners

The participants suggest that the traditional dating script begins with meeting a potential romantic partner in an everyday situation or via a mutual friend or acquaintance. Everyday situations include approaching either a stranger or an acquaintance at school, at the faculty, in a library, at work, on vacation, while walking a dog or practicing sports.

I think it depends a lot on the atmosphere, and the atmosphere in the clubs is such that I drink, dance, have fun, and the atmosphere with friends and at work is more that I do something with my life, lightly chill, hang out and have a warmer approach to communication. (Participant A, female, student, in a relationship)

Even though some participants mentioned the possibility of two strangers meeting in an everyday situation, six of them stated that this was not a usual way of encountering a potential partner. The majority considered that introduction via mutual friends or acquaintances, regardless of whether it was a spontaneous encounter at a party or a planned blind date, was the easiest and the most frequent way.

I think all of us [participants] have a friend who played a role in the introduction of us and our partners, no matter where we met them. (Participant A, female, student, in a relationship)

According to our participants, the so-called modern dating scripts usually start by meeting a potential partner in a club or online, through social media or a dating

app, with dating apps replacing nightclubs. However, most participants stated that both nightclubs and dating apps were used to meet someone for a one-night stand.

I have a friend who is not in a relationship and is often on Tinder, and she mostly met all of her one-night stands through Tinder. And then it's either some kind of kissing or sex, or when a guy approaches her, then she goes on a date, but realises that it wouldn't work out. (Participant B, female, student, in a relationship)

4.2. Forms of Dating Scripts

Once two emerging adults meet each other and feel a romantic interest in each other, they start going on casual dates. These dates typically include having a drink, going to a restaurant and seeing a film. The two male, homosexual participants also mentioned visiting each other's house and having a night out. After some time, partners become physically intimate and start a romantic relationship.

They go on dates and, after a while, when they get to know each other well enough, they decide to be together. (Participant C, female, unemployed, single)

The alternative traditional dating script implies initial friendship between potential partners; more precisely, the two hang out with mutual friends, hook up and start dating, or become friends who eventually fall in love with each other.

I don't know, the concept of dating is generally unfamiliar to me because I didn't go out for coffee with someone to be with someone. I just met someone and we continued after we got drunk. (Participant D, male, employed, in a relationship)

Traditional dating usually means that the partners get to know each other and develop intimacy gradually, with sex being a major step for intimacy development.

In most cases, it was too much for me to, all of a sudden, see someone every day, whether that person thrilled me or not. (Participant E, female, employed, single)

According to participants, when partners choose the traditional dating script, they assume that they are dating and therefore do not need to define their relationship.

My boyfriend and I didn't define that we were dating, like "are we officially in a relationship now?" It was somehow clear that we were. (Participant F, female, student, in a relationship)

Emerging adults who follow the modern dating script either start talking on social media to get to know each other or immediately engage in a casual sexual relationship. Talking can result in casual dating or can be followed by a hookup, which will lead to a casual sexual relationship or a stable romantic relationship. In both cases, this process is usually quite intense.

A lot of people I know follow this pattern, Facebook, dating, sex, relationship, but it [relationship] can develop very quickly and then it will be one after another. The definition of a relationship may take a while, but it would all happen quickly. (Participant G, male, student, in a relationship)

Based on the descriptions provided by our participants, we differentiate casual romantic relationships and casual sexual relationships. Casual romantic relationships include an open relationship and friends with benefits, while casual sexual relationships include fuck buddies, booty calls and one-night stands. The former (casual romantic relationships) implies a certain emotional closeness but lacks exclusivity. Specifically, an open relationship is a mutual agreement that partners can see other people and/or have sex with them.

We're "in a relationship," but that doesn't necessarily mean you can't be with someone else. (Participant H, female, unemployed, single)

An individual may have more than one long-term partner, but also one long-term partner and multiple one-night stands. Therefore, different people will fulfill his or her various needs.

He or she will spend more time with one person, and with the other one will not be so invested emotionally, but more physically. (Participant I, female, employed, single)

Friends with benefits are friends who spend time together (often, but not necessarily, in groups), but are also sexually intimate. This form is quite similar to an open relationship; however, partners are less emotionally invested and have lower expectations from the other person because they did not define that they are in a relationship.

Maybe it's like a relationship, but without commitment. (Participant H, female, unemployed, single)

On the other hand, casual sexual relationships imply a lack of emotional closeness and focus on meeting sexual needs. A fuck buddy is (usually) an acquaintance with

whom a young person is sexually intimate but is not emotionally attached to. What also differentiates this modern form of dating from the traditional relationship is the lack of plans for the future.

I think it differs [from traditional dating] in sex and emotions and emotional involvement. For example, I would never sacrifice myself for a fuck buddy, I wouldn't invest effort. It's always about sex and you try to ignore everything else. (Participant J, male, unemployed, single)

While eight participants think that friends with benefits are the same as fuck buddies, others claim that fuck buddies spend time together only when having sexual intercourse, whilst friends with benefits casually hang out.

A booty call means having a sexual relationship in which partners contact each other only when they want to satisfy their sexual needs. It can be defined as a form of relationship that fuck buddies maintain.

A booty call is a fuck buddy who you call only when you need sex. (Participant K, male, employed, in a relationship)

The difference between these two modern forms of dating is that fuck buddies reveal personal information to each other, while booty call includes minimal contact between partners. What differentiates a booty call from a one-night stand is that one-night stands happen only once, no matter how well partners know each other.

Even though we managed to identify numerous forms of modern dating, the participants were not able to agree on the definitions of these forms. It seems that they differ in terms of emotional involvement, as well as mutual commitment, but for some of them, all casual relationships are the same. Thus, it is not surprising that modern relationships often leave partners with a vague idea of what to expect and how much to invest. The result of this confusion is “the talk”. It refers to discussing the potential uncertainties, expectations, and exclusivity of the relationship, thus determining the further course of their relationship.

I think, at least from my experience, I think there is a certain point in the relationship, especially when there are some disagreements, there should be a conversation about “what are we, what is the status of our relationship”. (Participant L, male, student, single)

The participants agree that “the talk” is more common in the case of casual relationships, such as friends with benefits, than in the case of casual dating. Moreo-

ver, they agree that it has a crucial role in defining the future course of one-time-thing relationships, such as one-night stands.

There is another type of “the talk,” regarding one-night stands, you later meet for a coffee date. Then it’s not a conversation about whether we’re in a relationship, it is a conversation about whether we’re going to try to be in a relationship.” (Participant M, male, employed, in a relationship)

I also think that there is the opposite side [of “the talk”], the one after something happens, you go and say “but this is not serious”. (Participant H, female, unemployed, single)

Such casual experiences have many consequences that can reflect on various areas of young people’s lives. One of the main consequences of modern forms of dating is the unfulfillment of expectations and needs. It is important to emphasize that girls are more likely to be left with unmet expectations. Specifically, one or both partners involved in some form of casual sexual relationship may develop feelings for the partner, which is why participants believe that such relationships function only in theory or in the short term.

It seems to me that it only works in theory [casual sexual experiences], but not in practice because sometimes someone gets caught up [with feelings] and it either falls apart or is forced because one side wants to have sex until he/she finds something else. But it seems to me that 95% of these cases are doomed from the beginning. (Participant N, male, student, in a relationship)

I think it depends on the need we have at the given moment. Sometimes we can have only a physical need, satisfy it, and be happy with ourselves. I think that the problem arises when we have an emotional need, and we want to satisfy it through a physical need, so it is not complementary. (Participant O, female, employed, in a relationship)

Most participants believe that the previously mentioned consequences can significantly affect their self-image. That is, the image of oneself may be distorted, and the person may be dissatisfied and feel incompetent if the expectations of the people involved in such a relationship are not consistent.

If you look at self-satisfaction, it can be that if you have a lot of experience with casual relationships and you didn’t find someone who wants to be in a long-term relationship with you, then you may wonder “is something wrong with me, why does no one want to be with me”. (Participant C, female, unemployed, single)

However, casual sexual relationships, according to participants, can have many positive aspects. For example, participants state that modern dating is fun, relaxing, reduces stress, and is in line with the pace of the modern world.

It's the 21st century, we all live fast, sometimes we just don't have time to bond, and everything in-between, and these informal ways of communication, relationships, dating or just fucking or something, simply suit [our needs] ... (Participant P, male, student, in a relationship)

Moreover, in these relationships, young people feel fewer obligations and can effortlessly end them. Because they are less invested, there are fewer emotional consequences involved when such a relationship ends. Lastly, participants stated that casual sexual relationships provide an opportunity to practise skills for future long-term relationships. In a way, they provide experiences in which young people crystallise their needs and learn what they expect from future relationships.

I think it can sometimes affect our self-esteem and self-satisfaction in a good way because you don't feel obligated to be in a serious relationship and you don't plan immediately, you don't feel obligated to compromise even when you aren't ready for a compromise. Sometimes these informal relationships can affect future relationships in a positive way, because you know what you want, and you feel more self-confident. (Participant H, female, unemployed, single)

Considering all the characteristics and consequences of modern forms of romantic experiences, there are numerous potential outcomes of such relationships. Casual sexual relationships can terminate with restoring friendship, as stated by two participants. On the other hand, it can grow into a long-term romantic relationship or lead to a complete breakup.

While several participants believe that the traditional dating script is more common among people aged 18 to 25, some of them believe that the modern dating script is more common. Most of the participants consider that the traditional and the modern dating script occur just as often among adolescents and emerging adults nowadays.

I would say it's somehow the same. Most of my friends follow the classic pattern, they go on dates and then end up or don't end up in a relationship. But again, I know a lot of people who follow a different pattern, so I'd say it's the same. (Participant Q, female, student, in a relationship)

Our participants could not agree on whether there are age differences in the frequency of traditional and modern dating scripts either. Some of them think that traditional scripts become more frequent with age, while others think the same about modern scripts. Most of them think that there are no age differences.

4.3. Determinants of Choosing a Dating Script

Emotional maturity and the matter of current priorities stand out as the primary motives for starting a serious romantic relationship. The majority of participants stated that young people “get tired of casual sexual experiences” over time and that they become ready for serious romantic relationships once “they have professional stability so they can take care of the family in the future.” The influence of social expectations and gender roles are also relevant motivational factors in starting and participating in serious romantic relationships. The pressure of social expectations is more visible among the heterosexual population and females, while the participants agree that it is normative for men to start long-term relationships somewhat later than women.

For men, it is somehow “normal” that they enter long-term relationships later in life, while women have social and psychological pressure to worry about it in their late twenties – as to how, what, and where. (Participant J, male, unemployed, single)

Given the stated, it is important to emphasise that several participants consider marriage and cohabitation to be the primary purpose of long-term relationships. This illustrates the previously described importance of social expectations and gender roles in defining romantic relationships.

I don't see a point in a long-term relationship if you are not planning to have something more, it's just a waste of time if you don't see yourself in something as serious as marriage. (Participant C, female, unemployed, single)

The primary purpose of both casual sexual and casual romantic relationships arises from sexual needs while excluding the emotional component to at least some degree. As emerging adults look for professional stability, their careers occupy most of their capacities, leaving them with little time and energy for romantic relationships. For that reason, some of them choose modern dating scripts. Other motives for choosing modern scripts are fear of intimacy and leaving other options open. The majority of our participants believe that the main motive for choosing a casual relationship is a compromise.

I think most of these relationships generally happen because at least one side hopes for something more than that. (Participant R, male, student, in a relationship)

Among our participants, some individual characteristics were also related to defining the relationship. For example, it seems that younger people more often assume that they are in a relationship, for example after the first kiss, and that there is no need for a definition when the relationship develops from friendship. Furthermore, some participants state that it is usually women who initiate “the talk,” while others point out that initiating the exclusivity of a relationship does not depend on gender, but rather on the level of interest each of the partners shows. In other words, “the talk” will be initiated by the partner more interested in sustaining the relationship at the given moment.

In every relationship, there is one side that may be a little more [into it], from my experience. At first, maybe one side is more “into it,” then later it turns around and so on. But mostly, I think it may have something to do with who’s a little bit more interested at the moment. (Participant E, female, employed, single)

4.4. Characteristics of Long-term Romantic Relationships

The participants agree that stable, long-term romantic relationships should be characterised by ongoing dating activities, mutually prioritised relationships, and reciprocated efforts.

I think that it can be when you are planning your time, your schedule according to that other person. It’s not only “if we manage to find time, we’ll see each other,” you are purposely scheduling your time for that person. (Participant H, female, unemployed, single)

However, the participants acknowledge that to have a successful, healthy relationship it is crucial to find a balance between shared and private time, i.e., joint activities and personal space.

In my experience, it seems to me that you have to... I think both partners should have their own lives, some interests of their own because if they are overly attached to each other, I don’t think it’s sustainable in the long run. (Participant S, male, students, single)

Involvement in all the main aspects of partners' lives, as well as plans for the future, is also a characteristic that distinguishes long-term relationships from short-term ones. The former includes going to formal events together, travelling together and moving in together. It also seems relevant to introduce the partner to friends and family. One participant stated that he takes into account whether his friends consider his partner to be a "good person". (Participant G, male, student, in a relationship)

While all these aspects are undeniably important in establishing and maintaining long-term romantic relationships, most participants agree that the key to such relationships is a sense of closeness, mutual trust, and support.

And if anything happens, you know (s)he will always be there, to help you, as support. Maybe if a certain situation happens, then you'll see that (s)he was there for you, (s)he helped you, that's how you know it's something real. (Participant C, female, unemployed, single)

5. DISCUSSION

The main aim of the present study was to outline dating scripts among Croatian emerging adults and identify the needs these different forms of dating satisfy. Several findings deserve special attention: first, our data suggest that traditional dating scripts that include going on dates, and modern dating scripts that consist of casual sexual and romantic relationships are equally present among people aged 18 to 25. This finding is in line with Balbi's study (2017), indicating that 55% of American millennials are in a monogamous relationship. However, seeing that Balbi's study included only 77 participants and our study was qualitative and conducted on a small sample of emerging adults, it is important to test this finding in a larger quantitative study.

Second, numerous authors (Bogle, 2008; Wentland and Reissing, 2011; as cited in Wentland and Reissing, 2014; Claxton and van Dulmen, 2013; Balbi, 2017) identified several types of casual sexual relationships, including friends with benefits, fuck buddies, bootie calls, and one-night stands. Our participants also mentioned these relationships but were not able to agree on their definitions. This fact points to the conclusion that emerging adults are not sure what specific behavioural norms are when they do not follow the traditional dating script. Are they allowed to communicate emotions toward their partner or should they pretend that there are no emotions involved? These doubts are similar to those described by

Illouz (2019). Lovejoy (2015) investigated the individualistic structure of hooking up among college women and found that the norms imply that there is no obligation toward the hookup partner, as well as that one is free to focus on his or her own needs in this kind of relationship. Moreover, heavy drinking is normative for hooking up. Additionally, a third of women who had indulged in a hookup experienced ambiguity regarding their relationship status, and two-thirds of these women experienced ambiguity regarding their friendship with the person they had hooked up with. This ambiguity may result in anxiety, jealousy, frustration, anger, as well as friendship dissolution. Therefore, it is important to understand how adolescents and young adults perceive their romantic relationships, and to create preventive programmes that will help them communicate their expectations effectively.

Altogether, the findings of our study indicate that there are two dating scripts, the traditional and the modern. Those who follow traditional dating scripts usually meet their potential partner in an everyday situation or via a mutual friend or an acquaintance and start going on casual dates. The alternative traditional dating script is that a romantic relationship develops from friendship. On the contrary, modern dating scripts include casual romantic or sexual relationships. Partners usually meet each other in a club, or through social media or a dating app and either start talking or hook up instantly. This can lead to both casual romantic relationships, i.e., an open relationship or friendship with benefits, or result in a casual sexual relationship, such as one-night stands, booty calls or fuck buddies. Again, our conclusions are in line with Balbi's study, suggesting that there might be no cultural differences between the dating scripts of Croatian and American emerging adults. Even though some research indicates that Croatian society is still more collectivistic (Šverko, 2008; Tomljenović and Stilin, 2012), more recent research by Majstorić (2019) has shown that Croats tend to postpone marriage, just as other Western societies do.

It is possible that Croatian society in general is more collectivistic, but that millennials have grown up influenced by individualistic values. This fact is related to another important finding of our study: emerging adults believe that long-term relationships lead to marriage and/or cohabitation. Therefore, if they want to finish their education and build a career, they will try to avoid long-term romantic relationships and postpone marriage. Since they still have sexual needs or the need for intimacy, they try to develop casual relationships that will fulfill their specific needs. Even though it seems that their definitions of these casual relationships differ, Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1986) can still provide a theoretical frame for them. This theory suggests that casual relationships differ in terms of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Previous studies have shown that casual sexual relationships are characterised by moderate (Bisson and Levine, 2009) to high (Rodrigue et al.,

2018) levels of passion, low (Bisson and Levine, 2009) to moderate (Rodrigue et al., 2018) levels of intimacy, and low levels of commitment (Bisson and Levine, 2009). Our findings suggest that partners in casual sexual relationships such as one-night stands, booty calls, and fuck buddies experience high levels of passion and low levels of intimacy and commitment. On the contrary, partners in casual romantic relationships such as friends with benefits and open relationships experience not only high levels of passion, but also moderate levels of intimacy and commitment. Finally, those in traditional romantic relationships tend to report high(er) levels of intimacy and commitment.

Although we asked participants how modern dating scripts and casual sexual relationships affect relationship satisfaction, they talked more about satisfying needs than about relationship satisfaction in general. Our findings are consistent with other studies that identify sexual pleasure as the main reason why young people engage in casual sexual relationships (Lyons et al., 2014; Karlsen and Træen, 2013), and when that is the only motive for entering a relationship, the person will be satisfied with something more casual. Moreover, these relationships can be fun and relaxing, as well as help partners practice their skills and learn what they want from their future long-term relationships.

However, our participants believe that many young people choose modern dating scripts as a compromise, i.e., to be in any kind of relationship with a person in whom they take a romantic interest. In that case, their needs and expectations would not be fulfilled and the casual relationship might harm their self-image. These findings are in line with previous research that showed that hookups have both positive and negative outcomes (Wesche et al., 2021). Some of our participants believe that women are less satisfied with casual relationships and that they are the ones who want to define the relationship, which motivates them to initiate “the talk.” This conclusion is also in line with previous research (Dubè et al., 2016; Lovejoy, 2015; Wesche et al., 2021), but also with the gender roles in society. The traditional norms of society may be at odds with the needs and ways of meeting the needs of young people in our society. This would be particularly pronounced in smaller and more traditional settings, and future research should examine how young people from such backgrounds cope with this challenge.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

The biggest limitation of our research is the sampling. Although we were able to achieve theoretical saturation and describe the dating patterns in detail, all of our participants lived in a specific large urban area. For this reason, the general pattern described by our sample might have been different if at least some participants

lived in rural areas of Croatia. Therefore, it would be valuable to test our conclusions on a more heterogeneous sample in terms of urban/rural backgrounds. Additionally, future studies might benefit from focusing on potential differences in dating scripts resulting from religious beliefs, family values, as well as different opportunities in various parts of the country.

Future studies should also include not only emerging adults but also young adults older than 25 because they may follow modern dating scripts due to pre-occupation with their careers. Young people involved in modern forms of dating should also be in the focus. This would allow researchers to investigate their motives for choosing casual forms of relationships rather than traditional dating. Some of the possible predictors of a modern dating script are personality traits such as sensation-seeking and previous experiences. Researchers should also investigate to what extent specific needs are satisfied in these casual relationships.

Finally, it seems that social media became an important part of dating, so we argue that researchers in the field should explore how social media affects different forms of dating. For example, does texting indeed help potential partners to find more information about each other before they start dating? Do they use filters suggested by filter theories? Does the availability of potential partners on dating apps jeopardise the stability of relationships? If we genuinely want to understand 21st-century romantic relationships, many questions are waiting to be answered.

It also must be taken into consideration that this research was conducted before the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has probably affected the ways in which young people meet their potential partners and develop their romantic relationships. Every year Match.com, an online dating service, surveys thousands of singles of all ages across the United States and their results of 2021 suggest that singles nowadays are mostly looking for emotional support and meaningful relationships. More precisely, 83% of singles prioritise their partner's emotional maturity over physical attractiveness. More interestingly, only 11% of singles are interested in casual dating (Match, 2021). The pandemic may have brought a change in the needs of young people and the need for closeness and contact might be stronger than in the pre-pandemic period.

We believe that the findings of this study can be useful to experts in the field of social sciences in creating prevention programmes aimed at adolescents and emerging adults. More precisely, these findings can serve as a starting point for programmes focused on strengthening romantic competence. Such programmes should aim at empowering young people to recognise their own needs and emotions, as well as ways to achieve emotional closeness in relationships. Moreover, they should aim to help them improve their communication skills and learn how to be assertive. These skills are crucial in expressing one's needs and setting bound-

aries. Expressing needs and setting boundaries would lead to less ambiguity, and to less negative emotions related to romantic relationships.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of the present study was to identify modern dating scripts, as well as the forms of casual sexual relationships, and to investigate whether they meet the same needs as traditional forms of dating among emerging adults in Croatia. Our qualitative data suggested several important findings.

First, modern dating seems to be as common as traditional one among emerging adults, at least those living in urban areas. While traditional dating scripts include going on casual dates, modern ones cover various forms of casual sexual and romantic relationships: an open relationship, friendship with benefits, fuck buddy, a booty call, and a one-night stand. Another important finding was that, even though we managed to define these modern romantic relationships based on the descriptions provided by our participants, emerging adults do not seem to define them in the same way, which can result in ambiguity and lead to frustration. Finally, modern dating scripts can have both positive and negative consequences, depending on what needs a person tries to fulfill. Our results are in line with Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1986), as well as with other studies on casual sexual relationships that were mostly conducted in the United States and Canada.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The data were collected as part of the MA thesis research at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Following the institutional rules of the Department, the ethical approval was granted by the thesis supervisor (the second author of the paper) and the research was conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards of the profession. Since

the study did not include deception nor was implemented on minors, no additional approval from the institutional ethics committee was required.

DATA ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

Selected analytic materials (Focus group discussion guide and Coding matrix using examples from the transcript excerpts) are available in the original in Croatian from the online Supplement on the URL: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/index.php/rzs/libraryFiles/downloadPublic/280>.

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Postoji li još *dating* u Hrvatskoj? Suvremeni oblici *datinga* među mladima u dobi od 18 do 25 godina

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SAŽETAK

Dvoje ljudi tradicionalno započinje romantičnu vezu izlazeći na “spojeve” te najprije razvijaju emocionalnu, a potom i fizičku bliskost. No, čini se da se taj obrazac počeo mijenjati pod utjecajem različitih društvenih promjena, uključujući pojavu društvenih mreža. Glavni je cilj ovoga kvalitativnog istraživanja utvrditi suvremene obrasce *datinga* i neobaveznih seksualnih odnosa kod mladih Hrvata u dobi od 18 do 25 godina, odnosno u razdoblju odraslosti u nastajanju, kao i identificirati potrebe koje ispunjavaju različiti oblici romantičnih odnosa. Proveli smo četiri fokus grupe s mladima – nezaposlenima, zaposlenima i studentima. Rezultati upućuju na to da mladi te dobi podjednako često biraju tradicionalni obrazac odlaženja na “spojeve”, kao i upuštanja u suvremene, neobavezne oblike odnosa poput otvorene veze, prijateljstva s povlasticama, seksa bez obaveza, poziva na seks i veze za jednu noć. Dugotrajne veze doživljavaju pak kao korak prije braka ili zajedničkog života pa ih neki pokušavaju izbjegavati sve dok im se karijera i druge životne okolnosti ne stabiliziraju. U tom smislu, neobavezni odnosi mogu, barem privremeno, biti zadovoljavajući. Ipak, ti odnosi mogu biti zbunjujući, jer se čini da ih različiti ljudi definiraju na različite načine i, sukladno tomu, imaju različita očekivanja od partnera. Ovo istraživanje proširuje naše razumijevanje romantičnih veza u odrasloj dobi, a kao jedna od prvih hrvatskih studija na tu temu daje važan doprinos u području istraživanja partnerskih odnosa. Može poslužiti ne samo kao referenca za buduća istraživanja, nego i kao osnova za razvoj preventivnih programa koji će jačati romantične kompetencije te razvijati komunikacijske vještine kod mladih u razdoblju odraslosti u nastajanju.

Ključne riječi: romantične veze, *dating*, neobavezni seksualni odnosi, odraslost u nastajanju