LIQUID LOVE AND CONTINUATION OF A NEW LOVE ORDER

AMOR LÍQUIDO E CONTINUAÇÃO DE UMA NOVA ORDEM DE AMOR

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Abstract: The influential Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman released his groundbreaking book, *Liquid Love: On the Fragility of Human Bonds*, two decades ago in 2003. Now, with Zygmunt Bauman no longer with us and as we live in the future he envisioned with a sense of pessimism, it seems appropriate to reevaluate his perspective on the concept of "liquid love." Bauman used the term "liquid" to describe online love, illustrating that it adapts to its context. In our contemporary, highly individualized, and often pessimistic world, many individuals find it challenging to commit to traditional human relationships. Consequently, they seek alternatives that align better with the demands of what Bauman referred to as "liquid life," a concept he coined to characterize life in the early third millennium. Bauman held a critical view of online love because he believed it had the potential to strip emotional relationships of their essential components, particularly the presence and enduring nature of bonds. In essence, love without lasting connections cannot truly be called love. Bauman poetically likened liquid love to the "delete" key on a computer keyboard: it allows you to erase at any moment.

Keywords: Zygmunt Bauman. Liquid Love. Online Relationships. Internet.

Resumo: O influente filósofo polonês Zygmunt Bauman lançou seu livro inovador, Liquid Love: On the Fragility of Human Bonds, há duas décadas, em 2003. Agora, com Zygmunt Bauman não mais entre nós e enquanto vivemos no futuro, ele imaginou com um sentimento de pessimismo, parece apropriado reavaliar sua perspectiva sobre o conceito de "amor líquido". Bauman usou o termo "líquido" para descrever o amor online, ilustrando que ele se adapta ao seu contexto. No nosso mundo contemporâneo, altamente individualizado e muitas vezes pessimista, muitos indivíduos consideram um desafio comprometer-se com relações humanas tradicionais. Consequentemente, procuram alternativas que se alinhem melhor com as exigências daquilo a que Bauman se referiu como "vida líquida", um conceito que ele cunhou para caracterizar a vida no início do terceiro milénio. Bauman tinha uma visão crítica do amor online porque acreditava que ele tinha o potencial de despojar as relações emocionais dos seus componentes essenciais, particularmente a presença e a natureza duradoura dos laços. Em essência, o amor sem conexões duradouras

não pode ser verdadeiramente chamado de amor. Bauman comparou poeticamente o amor líquido à tecla "delete" do teclado de um computador: ela permite apagar a qualquer momento.

Palavras-chave: Zygmunt Bauman. Amor Líquido. Relacionamentos On-line. Internet.

1. Introduction

Liquid love is a metaphorical concept introduced by the great Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman to describe the changing nature of romantic relationships and love in our rapidly evolving, modern society. Bauman's term draws parallels between the fluidity of temporary relationships and the dynamic, ever-changing properties of liquids. In traditional societies, love and relationships were often characterized by stability, commitment, and enduring bonds. Marriages, for example, were often arranged or entered into with the expectation of lifelong companionship and shared responsibilities. However, as societal norms, cultural values, and personal aspirations have shifted over time, the nature of love and relationships has transformed as well.

The falling out of fashion and out of practice of orthodox affinity cannot but rebound on the plight of kinship. Lacking stable bridges for inflowing traffic, kinship networks feel frail and threatened. Their boundaries are blurred and disputed, they dissolve in a terrain with no clear-cut property titles and hereditary tenures - a frontier-land; sometimes a battlefield, other times an object of court battles that are no less bitter. Kinship networks cannot be sure of their chances of survival, let alone calculate their life expectations. That brittleness makes them all the more precious. They are now frail, subtle, delicate; they prompt protective feelings; they make one wish to hug, caress and cajole; they yearn to be treated with loving care (Bauman, 2003: 30-31).

Our perceptions are not solid and always rational (Shahghasemi, 2017) and Bauman argues, as we mentioned, that in our current "liquid modernity," relationships have become more imaginative, fluid, transient, and disposable. People today are faced with a myriad of choices and possibilities, often resulting in a sense of uncertainty and impermanence in their romantic endeavors. In contemporary society, individuals often experience psychological disturbances attributed to not only failure to manage one's love life, but also to a confluence of multifaceted influences. There is an intricate interplay of technological advancements (Shahghasmi et al., 2023), migration (Sarfi et al., in press), social dynamics (Sabzali et al., 2022), economic fluctuations, environmental concerns, political uncertainties, and various psychosocial pressures that collectively contribute to frailties in the lives of individuals.

The rapid proliferation of technological innovations has led to a phenomenon known as "technological overload," characterized by an incessant influx of information and constant digital connectivity. As noted by Turkle (2011), this inundation of digital stimuli can result in heightened stress and anxiety, engendering a sense of being overwhelmed. Moreover, while technology enables virtual social interactions, it paradoxically exacerbates social isolation (Primack et al., 2017). The superficiality of online connections can lead to a dearth of genuine interpersonal relationships, thereby fostering feelings of loneliness and depression (Nosrati et al., 2020), despite the fact that dating sites and myriad of other *possibilities* of having a functioning love life seem to be helping us to live better in our liquid modernity.

Modern economies are marked by volatility and uncertainty, often precipitated by globalization and technological advancements (Dooley et al., 2012). The prevalence of precarious employment arrangements and the specter of job automation contribute to economic insecurity, a significant stressor (Green & Heywood, 2015). Concurrently, escalating environmental concerns stemming from climate change and ecological degradation amplify psychological distress (Clayton et al., 2017; Zohouri, Darvishi & Sarfi, 2020). The impending environmental crises and pandemics evoke a sense of helplessness and anxiety about the future (Sarfi, Nosrati & Sabzali, in press), further escalating the sense of loneliness. Moreover, modern economies create a feeling for constant consumption that cannot be satisfied with any amount of money (see for example Shahghasemi, 2021).

Political polarization, social unrest, and geopolitical conflicts have also burgeoned in recent times, engendering a milieu of political uncertainty (Finkel et al., 2020). This uncertainty fosters a climate of apprehension and fear, permeating the psychosocial fabric of societies. Additionally, the increasing fragmentation of communities due to digital echo chambers and identity politics contributes to a sense of alienation and disconnection (Putnam, 2000), thereby exacerbating psychological stresses imposed by the liquid modernity.

The contemporary zeitgeist extols success and achievement, compelling individuals to fulfill societal expectations across multiple domains (Twenge, 2019). The consequent pressure to excel can culminate in stress, burnout, and mental health issues (Hewitt & Flett, 2017). The advent of social media further exacerbates these challenges by fostering a culture of comparison (Kross et al., 2013). Constant exposure to curated depictions of others' lives engenders feelings of inadequacy, envy, and low self-esteem. This has resulted in a mania to love not love, but to demonstrate one's success in *love* to others.

2.   Love Becomes Frail

Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced the concepts of "*amour de soi*" and "*amour-propre*" to elucidate different facets of self-love. *Amour de soi*, translated as "self-love" or "self-preservation," represents the instinctual inclination individuals have toward their own well-being and comfort (Rousseau, 1987). This basic form of self-love is rooted in the natural drive for self-preservation and is characterized by actions aimed at ensuring personal survival and happiness. On the other hand, *amour-propre*, often translated as "self-esteem" or "self-regard," is a more complex and socially derived concept (Rousseau, 1992). It arises from individuals' interactions and comparisons with others in a societal context. Seeking recognition, admiration, and validation from others, amour-propre can lead to the pursuit of status, reputation, and material possessions (davoudi,2018). While *amour de soi* aligns with natural instincts, *amour-propre* is relational and can engender negative emotions and societal ills such as envy, jealousy, and social inequality (Rousseau, 1987). In our *liquid* perspective, it seems that what has become of love is more *amour-propre* and not *amour de soi*. The characteristics of liquid love can be observed in several ways:

3.   Fast Satisfaction

The pursuit of immediate gratification and personal happiness takes precedence over long-term commitments. Individuals may prioritize their own needs and desires over the stability of the relationship. As Bauman aptly describes, the liquid modernity suppresses our deepest appreciation for delaying gratifications:

In lasting commitments, liquid modern reason spies out oppression; in durable engagement, it sees incapacitating dependency. That reason denies rights to bindings and bonds, spatial or temporal. There is neither need nor use for them that the liquid modern rationality of consumers could justify. Bindings and bonds make human relations 'impure'– as they would do to any act of consumption that assumes instant satisfaction and similarly instant obsolescence of the consumed object. Defense attorneys of 'impure relations' would face an uphill struggle trying to convince the jurors and win their consent (Bauman, 2003: 47).

Yet, we are social animals. Our log-term and reliable gratifications necessitates us to delay our immediate gratification. Delaying psychological gratification yields multifaceted benefits for human well-being. The practice, often referred to as "delayed gratification," cultivates self-control,

goal attainment, and long-term satisfaction. Studies reveal that this practice enhances self-regulation and impulse management, crucial for informed decisions (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). It fosters goal-directed behavior, fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). By prioritizing long-term gains, delayed gratification contributes to better mental and physical health outcomes (Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). Additionally, the practice promotes resilience by bolstering individuals against adversity (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). It facilitates harmonious social interactions, fostering cooperation and trust within relationships (McClelland, 1987). Ultimately, delayed gratification aligns with eudaimonic well-being, engendering purposeful and sustained life satisfaction (Waterman, 1993).

4.   An Adaptable Love Life

Relationships in the liquid love paradigm are marked by flexibility and adaptability. Partners may come together and drift apart more easily, with commitments and boundaries being renegotiated frequently.

An unprecedented fluidity, fragility and in-built transience (the famed 'flexibility') mark all sorts of social bonds which but a few dozen years ago combined into a durable, reliable framework inside which a web of human interactions could be securely woven. They affect particularly, and perhaps most seminally, employment and professional relations. With skills falling out of demand in less time than it takes to acquire and master them, with educational credentials losing value against their cost of purchase by the year or even turning into 'negative equity' long before their allegedly lifelong 'sell-by' date, with places of work disappearing with little or no warning, and with the course of life sliced into a series of ever shorter one-off projects, life prospects look increasingly like the haphazard convolutions of smart rockets in search of elusive, ephemeral and restless targets, rather than a predesigned and predetermined, predictable trajectory of a ballistic missile (Bauman, 2003: 91).

While lovers may find this new possibility a good option, our deeply rooted sense of yearning for stability that we inherit from our ancestors looks for something else. The paradox of choice can induce decision fatigue and anxiety, as numerous possibilities may overwhelm individuals (Schwartz, 2004). Exposure to idealized relationships on social media can create unrealistic expectations, fostering discontent (Muise et al., 2009). The fluidity of modern love life may result in instability and emotional insecurity (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2012). Commitment challenges can arise due to non-traditional arrangements, leading to uncertainty and emotional

distress (Sheff, 2013). Departing from traditional norms might cause feelings of disconnection from cultural and familial values, impacting overall happiness (Regan et al., 2004). Additionally, superficial digital connections may leave individuals feeling unfulfilled (Turkle, 2011). Balancing personal preferences with meaningful relationships is crucial for navigating modern love life and enhancing well-being.

5. Disposable Love Partners

Just as liquids can be poured and replaced, relationships in the liquid love era can be easily discarded and replaced when they no longer serve an individual's desires or needs.

When guided by wish ('your eyes meet across a crowded room'), partnership follows the pattern of shopping and calls for nothing more than the skills of an average, moderately experienced consumer. Like other consumer goods, partnership is for consumption on-the-spot (it does not require additional training or prolonged preparation) and for one-off use 'without prejudice'. First and foremost, it is eminently disposable (Bauman, 2003: 12).

Online relationships often culminate in detachment due to inherent limitations in virtual interactions. The absence of nonverbal cues diminishes emotional depth and rapport, potentially fostering detachment (Walther, 1996). Anonymity on digital platforms may hinder genuine self-disclosure, eroding trust and authenticity, and hindering emotional connections (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Physical proximity contributes to intimacy; its absence online can hinder emotional bonding (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Miscommunications, arising from lack of cues and immediate feedback, can lead to misunderstandings and detachment (Joinson, 2001). Shared experiences forge connections; online relationships often lack these opportunities, impeding emotional ties (Ramirez et al., 2018). Additionally, depersonalization—treating others as avatars—may hinder emotional investment (Bargh et al., 2002). Complications of mutual understanding in "a world of glocal things" where local and global cultures fusion to create numerous cultural forms (Sabbar & Dalvand, 2018) can add to the complexity of relationships.

6. Short-lived Loves

The rapid pace of modern life and the prevalence of online platforms contribute to the creation of ephemeral connections, where individuals engage in short-lived interactions that lack deep emotional investment.

With skills falling out of demand in less time than it takes to acquire and master them, with educational credentials losing value against their cost of purchase by the year or even turning into 'negative equity' long before their allegedly lifelong 'sell-by' date, with places of work disappearing with little or no warning, and with the course of life sliced into a series of ever shorter one-off projects, life prospects look increasingly like the haphazard convolutions of smart rockets in search of elusive, ephemeral and restless targets, rather than a predesigned and predetermined, predictable trajectory of a ballistic missile (Bauman, 2003: 91).

Humans possess a fundamental psychological need for long-term relationships that by nature produce delayed but persistent satisfaction (Shahghasemi et al., 2015). These relationships, spanning from close friendships to romantic partnerships and familial ties, offer emotional fulfillment, a sense of security, and social belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They provide consistent sources of support, intimacy, and companionship, contributing significantly to individual well-being and mental health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Long-term relationships also facilitate personal growth and self-awareness through interactions, feedback, and shared experiences (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Evolutionarily, such relationships have aided the survival and reproduction of the human species by creating stable environments for raising offspring (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Additionally, the presence of enduring relationships fosters a sense of identity and shared memories, further solidifying the importance of these connections in shaping human experiences and societal cohesion (Fiese et al., 2002).

7. Love as Consumer Commodity

Big-tech companies like Google, X and Facebook greatly benefit from our consumerism and hence they try to further it (Zohouri et la., 2021; Sarfi, Nosrati & Sabzali, 2021). Liquid love can be seen as a product of consumer culture, where individuals approach relationships with a "consumerist" mindset, seeking personal satisfaction and happiness as if choosing from a menu of options.

The bewitching prospect just round the corner is the chance (to quote Sigusch again) to 'choose a child from a catalogue of attractive donors in much the same way as they [contemporary consumers] are accustomed to ordering from mail-order houses or through fashion journals'– and to acquire that child of one's own choice at the time of one's own choice. It would be contrary to the nature of a seasoned consumer not to wish to turn that corner (Bauman, 2003: 40).

The modern consumerist culture's emphasis on choice has extended to include love partners, leading to relationships being perceived as disposable commodities. This trend is driven by factors such as the instant gratification culture, which prioritizes immediate fulfillment over long-term commitment (Twenge, 2006). The digital age's abundance of options through online dating platforms contributes to the perception that partners are replaceable like products (Finkel et al., 2012). Reduced societal emphasis on commitment, along with a materialistic mindset, may devalue partners, considering them as means to personal satisfaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). The digital disconnect of online interactions can further distance individuals emotionally, making it easier to detach from relationships without deep consideration (Joinson, 2001). Addressing these influences is crucial to restoring a more authentic and enduring view of love.

8.   Emotional Intensity

While relationships may be transient, they can also be intense. The fleeting nature of connections may lead to heightened emotional experiences, as individuals invest deeply in the moment.

The 'communities of *sameness*', pre- determined but waiting to be revealed and filled with substance, are giving way to 'communities of *occasion*', expected to self- compose around events, idols, panics or fashions: most diverse as focal points, yet sharing the trait of short, and shortening, life expectation. They last no longer than the emotions that keep them in the focus of attention and prompt the pooling of interests – fleeting, but no less intense for that – banding together and adhering 'to the cause'.

All that coming together and drifting apart makes it possible to follow simultaneously the drive for freedom and the craving for belonging– and to cover up, if not fully make up for, the short- changing of both yearnings (Bauman, 2003: 34).

9.   Online Relationships

The digital age has given rise to virtual relationships, where individuals form connections online that may lack physical presence or longevity.

Connections are 'virtual relations.' Unlike old-fashioned relationships (not to mention 'committed' relationships, let alone long-term commitments), they seem to be made to the measure

of a liquid modern life setting where 'romantic possibilities' (and not only 'romantic' ones) are supposed and hoped to come and go with ever greater speed and in never thinning crowds, stampeding each other off the stage and out-shouting each other with promises 'to be more satisfying and fulfilling'. Unlike 'real relationships', 'virtual relationships' are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow-moving, inert messy 'real stuff.' A twenty- eight-year-old man from Bath, interviewed in connection with the rapidly growing popularity of computer dating at the expense of singles bars and lonely-heart columns, pointed to one decisive advantage of electronic relation: 'you can always press "delete"' (Bauman, 2003: xii).

Online relationships cannot fully replace offline relationships due to inherent limitations in virtual interactions and the unique qualities of face-to-face connections. Nonverbal cues like body language and tone of voice, crucial for conveying emotions, are lacking online (Walther, 1996). The absence of physical presence and sensory experiences in digital interactions hampers intimacy and emotional bonding (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Curated self-presentation online may compromise authenticity and self-disclosure, impacting the depth of connection (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Offline interactions offer a distinct level of emotional depth, fostered by shared experiences and the ability to perceive emotions more deeply (Ramirez et al., 2018). Offline relationships engage multiple senses, providing a richer multisensory experience compared to the primarily visual and textual cues of online interactions (Vorderer et al., 2016). Furthermore, offline relationships are embedded in a broader social context, involving mutual friends, family, and shared activities, which online relationships often lack (Baym, 2010).

10.   Intertextuality

Zygmunt Bauman passed away in 2017 and by then his thesis had already found repercussions in many academic studies. In fact, the positive impulse he received from the academic circles had an important role in shaping his ideas about other so-called *liquid* issues like migration, life, work, child-rearing etc. In this section, we will review some of the most important studies that adopted and elaborated his thesis.

In their study titled "Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships, and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy," Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber (2017) study the evolving landscape of romantic relationships in the age of digital technology. They draw inspiration from Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love." The authors examine the influence of digital dating and hook-

up applications, commonly known as 'apps,' on the experiences of users. They aim to assess the extent to which these technologies contribute to a digital transformation of intimacy. One of their primary focuses is on how dating apps have altered the dynamics of modern courtship, often turning it into a commodified game. Throughout the article, Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber explore the various affordances provided by dating apps and inquire whether users believe that technology has impacted their sexual practices, as well as their perspectives on long-term relationships, monogamy, and other romantic ideals. Their findings suggest that dating apps serve as intermediaries through which individuals engage in strategic performances in their pursuit of love, sex, and intimacy. The article argues against overly pessimistic views of dating apps and contemporary romantic practices, contending that they may offer some positive aspects related to what the authors term 'networked intimacy.'

In the article "Liquid Love: Zygmunt Bauman's Thesis on Sex Revisited," authored by Best (2019), the author engages in a critical examination of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid love. One of the central tenets of Bauman's thesis, as noted by Best, is the privatization of sexuality, with the state largely retreating from its regulatory role in this realm. However, the article challenges Bauman's assertion that liquid modernity completely severs ties with the regulatory aspects of personal life. Best contends that "Liquid Love" represents an application of Bauman's liquefaction thesis that reveals a commonality between solid and liquid modernity concerning the regulation of personal life, particularly in the domain of sexuality. In contrast to Bauman's thesis, the article argues that in contemporary society, more sexual activities have become criminalized, and previously marginalized groups, often seen as the sexual "Other," are encouraged to assimilate their relationships into traditional, predominantly heterosexual arrangements like marriage. Additionally, the article highlights the increasing regulation of populations in their most intimate behaviors. Best's critical reassessment of Bauman's "Liquid Love" offers a nuanced perspective on the evolving dynamics of intimacy, sexuality, and regulation in the context of liquid modernity. It invites readers to reconsider the extent to which contemporary society has truly moved away from the regulatory aspects of personal life and challenges Bauman's narrative of unrestrained individualism in the realm of human relationships.

In her analysis of Zygmunt Bauman's writings on identity, desire, and love, Janet Sayers offers a psychoanalytic perspective that sheds light on the complexities of what Bauman termed liquid love. Sayers suggests that Bauman's portrayal of liquid modernity can be understood as a manifestation of what she refers to as 'manic consumerism,' a state of constant and often frenetic desire. From this viewpoint, identity becomes akin to a 'shopping list of manic desire,' reflecting

the relentless pursuit of ever-changing desires and experiences in a rapidly changing world. Sayers focuses on Bauman's exploration of the decline of stable marriages and the emergence of what he termed 'top-pocket relationships'—those that can be easily utilized and just as swiftly discarded. She also examines Bauman's analysis of 'SDCs' or semi-detached couples, individuals who lead compartmentalized lives with separate residences and distinct spheres. While acknowledging the merits of Bauman's sociological critique, Sayers contends that his analysis may suffer from an overemphasis on the prevalence of manic individualism in contemporary society. Drawing from the works of psychoanalytic theorists such as Donald Winnicott, Wilfred Bion, and Julia Kristeva, Sayers suggests alternative perspectives on identity formation and its relationship to modern culture. Sayers' psychoanalytic reading invites a deeper exploration of the emotional and psychological dimensions of liquid modernity, offering a nuanced perspective on the ways in which desire, identity, and relationships are shaped and negotiated in a world characterized by constant change and flux.

In the study titled "Media, Love, and Marriage: The Relationship Between Social/Mass Media, Liquid Love, and Attitude Toward Marriage" conducted by Abbasi Shovazi and Delavar (2019), the authors investigate the intricate interplay between media, the concept of "liquid love," and individuals' attitudes toward marriage, particularly among students at Shiraz University. The study involved 386 students who were selected through a stratified, probability sampling method. Participants completed a researcher-made questionnaire that had undergone rigorous testing to establish reliability and validity, including Cronbach's alpha and face validity assessments. The findings of the research suggest several significant relationships. First, the study reveals a significant connection between the use of virtual social networks, domestic and foreign media, and the concept of liquid love. This indicates that the virtual world, shaped by social media and media content, has an influence on the way individuals perceive and experience love, particularly in its more transient and fluid form. Additionally, the study highlights a significant relationship between these variables—virtual social networks usage, domestic mass media usage, foreign mass media usage—and individuals' attitudes toward marriage. This implies that the media landscape and the evolving nature of love in the digital age can impact how individuals view the institution of marriage. By producing a structural equation model, the research identifies that virtual social networks usage, domestic mass media usage, and foreign mass media usage exert the most significant influence on the concept of liquid love. Moreover, domestic mass media usage, foreign mass media usage, and liquid love are found to have a significant impact on individuals' attitudes toward marriage.

In their work titled "Educational Encounters and Liquid Love," Davids and Waghid (2020) engage with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love" and its implications for human bonds and relationships in contemporary society. Davids and Waghid maintain that Bauman's "Liquid Love" serves as a poignant reminder that modern human relationships are characterized by fragility and insecurity, largely due to the pervasive trend of rampant individualization. He underscores the idea that the sense of togetherness among people is constantly threatened and undermined because the openness to others has become increasingly challenging. Bauman's analysis extends to the troubling aspects of our times, where he points to the specter of xenophobia, tribal suspicions, and animosities as examples of the uncertainty and insecurity experienced by various communities. Furthermore, Davids and Waghid say, Bauman highlights the alarming rise of immigrant-phobia, where immigrants are unfairly scapegoated as strangers and newcomers who are held responsible for a wide range of social issues and malaise. This phenomenon reflects a growing sense of alienation and fear of the "other." In response to these challenges, the authors of the paper propose a rethinking of the concept of love. They suggest that a reevaluation of love can potentially guide individuals and communities to act differently, particularly in the context of educational encounters. The cultivation of love, in this reimagined sense, may offer a path to greater understanding, empathy, and solidarity in a world marked by uncertainty and insecurity.

In the study titled "Social Isolation or Liquid Love: Changing Friendship Patterns Amongst Middletown Women," authored by Flaherty, Goodsell, and Brown (2012), the authors address the ongoing debate regarding changes in social isolation and friendship patterns in contemporary society, particularly among women. The study begins by referencing the work of McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashear (2006), who reported findings from the General Social Survey suggesting an increase in social isolation over the past twenty-five years. These findings had sparked considerable discussion and concern about the state of social bonds in modern society. However, Claude Fischer (2009) challenged these findings, arguing that Americans' social networks had not substantially changed over the past few decades. He also questioned the lack of theoretical explanations for the significant changes documented by McPherson et al. Flaherty, Goodsell, and Brown address this debate by utilizing twenty years of longitudinal data from the Middletown III and Middletown IV studies. Specifically, they investigate where "Middletown" women met their best friends over time. Their analysis reveals a decline in close social bonds among these women, providing empirical evidence that challenges the notion of stable social networks. To offer a theoretical perspective on these findings, the authors draw from Bauman's concept of "liquid love" and use it to reconceptualize the reported evidence of social isolation.

In the book "Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds," as discussed by Keskin-Kozat (2004), Zygmunt Bauman extends and deepens the themes he explored in his earlier work, "Liquid Modernity," which was published in 2000. Keskin-Kozat says that in contrast to the earlier phases of modernity, which often imposed strict controls on individual freedoms in the pursuit of social order, liquid modernity, as Bauman describes it, provides its inhabitants with unprecedented opportunities for action. This shift is attributed to the rise of consumerism and globalization, which grant individuals direct control over their interactions and relationships with others. Bauman refers to the individuals navigating this fluid landscape as "denizens." However, despite the promise of unlimited opportunities and individualized control, Bauman notes a significant limitation. In the absence of universal guarantees for the sustainability of interpersonal communication and relationships, individuals in liquid modernity are inclined to terminate their commitments at the slightest hint of potential loss or dissatisfaction. This leads to a state of constant uncertainty and insecurity. For Keskin-Kozat, the unpredictable and ever-changing nature of liquid modernity generates feelings of vulnerability and anxiety among its inhabitants. These emotions, in turn, contribute to the fragility, brittleness, and ad hoc nature of social bonds. Bauman's work highlights the tension between the desire for individual freedom and the yearning for stable and meaningful connections in a world characterized by fluidity and unpredictability. Keskin-Kozat's discussion of "Liquid Love" in the context of contemporary sociology underscores the enduring relevance of Bauman's ideas and their impact on our understanding of human relationships and social dynamics in the modern era.

In the article "Liquid Love in Relationships: Towards the Viable Utopia of Happiness within Love. A Standpoint from Zygmunt Bauman and Pope Francis," authored by Velásquez Camelo (2020), the primary objective is to examine the dynamics of relationships through the lens of *liquid love* and explore ways to address the challenges posed by this concept. The author conducts a documentary analysis to achieve this purpose. The central premise of the article is to review how relationships are affected by the idea of "liquid love," a concept introduced by the French philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. The article argues that liquid love is one of the factors contributing to what the author terms a "throwaway culture." This culture is characterized by a tendency to discard not only material items but also relationships when they face difficulties or instability. The parallels drawn with Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato si', which addresses the connection between unwanted items and unwanted people, further emphasize the disposability of relationships in contemporary society. However, the article also introduces the concept of "viable utopia" as a potential solution. The viable utopia of love suggests that, amidst crisis and challenges

in relationships, there is an opportunity for growth and fulfillment through love in a couple. It encourages a shift away from disposable and transient relationships towards a more profound and enduring form of love.

The purpose of the study presented in "Networked Connections and Experience of Liquid Love: A Qualitative Study on Female Students of Guilan University," conducted by Kanani and Mohammadzadeh (2016), is to investigate the network connections of female students and their attitudes towards these relationships. The research is framed within the context of Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid love. The primary research question addressed in this study pertains to the characteristics and consequences of online relationships and friendships among students. The researchers employed qualitative methods, specifically Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), as their research approach. FGDs involve group discussions that allow participants to express their views and experiences on a particular topic, making them well-suited for exploring the complexities of interpersonal connections in the digital age. The study's findings highlight two key characteristics of network connections among students: simplicity and anonymity. Simplicity suggests that these online relationships are straightforward and easy to establish, while anonymity implies a level of privacy and distance that online interactions can provide. The study also identifies freedom as a positive outcome of these connections, indicating that students appreciate the autonomy and flexibility online relationships offer. However, the research also acknowledges the awareness among students of the potential negative consequences of network connections. Despite this awareness, the study reveals that the participants generally maintain positive attitudes towards internet relations and friendships. This suggests that while students recognize the challenges and risks associated with online relationships, they still perceive value in these connections and are inclined to view them positively.

11.   Discussion and Conclusion

Bauman's concept of liquid love has sparked debates within the field of sociology. Critics argue that while societal changes have indeed influenced relationships, there are still many examples of enduring, committed partnerships. Additionally, some scholars believe that the concept may oversimplify the complexities of modern relationships and overlook the diversity of experiences within different cultural and social contexts.

Yet, we believe that almost 20 years after publication of *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*, there is much less doubt that liquid love is not what most of the people find pleasant. Due to many problems we enumerated above, and as a result of intensification of what we call *love technologies*, people now can better see the problems with the *brave new world* of liquid love and look for something serious. Bauman himself was positive about the future and called for a so-called authentic love:

Inside a love communion it is only natural to view friction and disagreement as a temporary irritant that will soon go away; but also to view them as a call to a remedial action that will prompt them to go. A perfect blend of selves seems a realistic prospect there, given enough patience and dedication– the qualities that love is confident of supplying in profusion. Even if the spiritual sameness of lovers is still some way ahead, it surely is not an idle dream or a fanciful illusion. It certainly can be reached– and it can be reached with resources already at the lovers', in their capacity as lovers, disposal (Bauman, 2003: 32-33).

In a world in which information technologies audaciously intrude our privacies, cookies steal our most intimate data, and artificial intelligence render our lives without permission, finding a retreat in what the nature has given to us as the most powerful drive a human being has experienced is very important.

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