

## Rethinking the Knowledge Economy of e-Dating in Romance Stories: Hypertexting G. Homans' Social Exchange Theory

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**Abstract:** Millions of single adults use dating websites like *eHarmony*, *Anastasiadate.com*, *Match.com*, *Chemistry.com* and technologies like the mobile dating app *Tinder* to seek out online partners. Some daters succeed, but most of them fail in the end and become dissatisfied. The online technology presents with many advantages such as easy access to multitudes of potential dates; however, the problematic is that, as a metanarrative of dating power, ICTs do not function in a virtual vacuum but are constructed by the social experience of people in love and sexuality, for example, in African indigenous and modern societies à *la longue durée*. The online dating industry often disembeds this social experience from its services and this constitutes, paradoxically, its major flaw. Consequently, the industry is designed narrowly to rationalize romanticism as a scientific algorithm that follows particular rules and regulations instead of proposing the complex character of knowledge about dating to prospective daters and this constitutes a serious menace to its long term sustainability. These technodigital flaws have to do with the paradox of virtual rationalism, lack of commitment in online daters, who do not meet offline; shallowness and fatigue in the mindset of online singles, scamming, lies telling, identity theft and stalking, *mismatching* from algorithms between singles and so on. Drawing critical insights from the structuralist positionality of George Homans' social exchange theory and from critiques of romance stories, the paper suggests that, in this age of the knowledge economy, e-dating should become a productive service that minimizes the artificiality of economic rationalism embedded in digital contacts, profile browsing, algorithmic matching, the reading of love by apps and tread lightly on all forms of economic determinism. e-Dating should prioritize *tacit* knowledge from critical literature narratives that can enable us to suggest new humanistic functionalities for skype, chatrooms and webcams as technologies that can optimize the integration of offline realities into the online experience. Thus beyond the economics of romance, there are complex hypertextual narratives of fun, friendship, companionship, social support inter-racial insights and values, expectations, resignation, honeymooning, openness/closeness, and 'ups and downs' sensitivities.

**Keywords:** e-dating, economic rationalism, George Homans' social exchange theory, algorithms, post-structuralism, costs and benefits, critical romance stories, hypertextual narratives.

### INTRODUCTION

In Jane Austen's [1] classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, the authoress observes critically that: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife." This critical statement articulates the fact that, in the course of human history, individuals, who searched for a partner in order to achieve love, security and stability, prioritized economic resources. During the past epochs in Africa, as in Jane Austen's epoch, mates were selected and approved by parents. Joseph Ngongwikuo's [2] *Taboo Love* is an illustration of how class issues influenced the dating process. Because the *foyn* of Mukomangoc is endowed with economic resources, the dating relationship between Iyafi and Jam is not permitted to thrive. Later on in the course of history, with the advent of westernization, daters from this indigenous context were confronted with anxieties about their personae [3] and their environments [4] and new practices of romance [5]. In western societies, newspapers offered the possibility of personal advertisements. During the Seventeenth century, the first personal *ad* appeared amidst controversy in a

European society that was still living under puritanistic values and influence. It was actually in the early Eighteenth century that its popularity really increased as a way of arranging for matrimonial relationships. Consequently, when Helen Morrison's first placement of a personal *ad* appeared in the *Manchester Weekly Journal*, it was thought that she was mentally deranged and was sent to a sanctuary for four weeks by the state [6]. However, in the Eighteenth century, social attitudes changed and personal *ads* became a 'normal' way of meeting with potential mates. Personal *ads* were now deployed not only to search for a partner but also to find friendship, pen pals, etc. There were concerns over the morality of these personal ads for various reasons: use of homosexuality coded words, promotion of divorce by unhappily married people, imposturing, scamming, etc.

Today, dating websites have replaced personal *ads* in newspapers and magazines. Thanks to the online technology, a greater number of individuals started to place personal *ads* on websites created by dating agencies. The agencies functioned through algorithms, questionnaires subscription and membership fees,

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smartphones and apps like *Tinder* and *Badoo*. Gradually, the perception of technology as 'shady' shifted into a new awareness of social acceptance and then into another consciousness of the technology as common practice and behaviour. e-Dating offers opportunities of access and convenience to potential daters and singles by enabling them to collect a preliminary *sense* of their *compatibility* with prospective partners prior to deciding whether one desires to encounter them in the physical face-to-face context or not. e-Dating sites gather data that enable singles to eliminate people from the dating group that are likely to be poor relationship 'material' in general. Today, an increasing number of people are turning to screens for almost every decision they wish to make on love and sexuality (or romance, for short); there is an increase in the number of e-daters and romantic encounters because of socio-environmental crises and the Corvid 19. For example, in 1940, 24% of heterosexual romantic dates in the US occurred via family channels, 21% through school, 21% through friends, 13% through Church, 12% at a restaurant or bar, 13% through neighbours, and 10% through co-workers; but by 2009, 50% of couples met via bar, restaurant or friends, while 22% met via the digital technology, and from 2005 to 2012, more than 30% of US married couples met online [7]. Among the five predominant dating apps, namely, *Bumble*, *Match*, *Tinder*, *Plenty of Fish* and *Zoosk* which rank in the fifty highest social apps, *Tinder* has become the principal app thanks to *Tinder Gold*, which is a paid 'add-on' with premium features. *Match.com* and *Zoosk* prioritize preferences of daters such as partners' traits that may be desired or not. Romance is now valued as an economic, matchmaking process with the aid of digital clicks and algorithms that systematize the *happenstances* of human seduction. e-Daters are overly filtered in the cyberspace to get *exactly* what they desire and this ranges from specifications on education level, to issues like height, geographical location and so on. So, digitization of the sexual economy shows that the e-dating site rationalizes the social exchange of mate selection [8]. The principle of mate choice openness is reduced to 'self-closure' in e-dating relationships and this compromises the prospect of any long term sustainability of the rationalist metanarrative. The digital metanarrative assumes that the major objective of an online relationship is intimacy [9, 10]. Digital relationships are assumed to have a *linear* structure from contact to fructification of romance, whereas in the practical environment, a romantic relationship is a complex process in which some steps in the structure may be skipped, others may even take a backward turn in terms of passion or intimacy, while certain others may collapse in due course and revive later on in the process.

In the economy of romance, reciprocity is not always an outcome in e-dating, as a variety of new exchange narratives are generated in, for example, Black/white dating exchanges [11]. Exchange narratives intrude in the relationship in the form of competition, altruism, status consistency and group gain. Mendelsohn [11] observes further that interracial couples in the US and other modern societies have very similar socioeconomic status, education levels, and social class level; yet, the competitive narratives their romantic encounters generate minimize the imperative of reciprocity. Nevertheless, most relationships do not end up with intimacy and happiness online but with a sense of frustration, exhaustion and disappointment [9]. The reason for such dissatisfaction is that e-dating is chiefly focused on the economic side of relationships and is disembedded from the knowledge of romantic feelings to such a point where Facebook now promotes what is referred to as 'contact-less friendships' minimized to LOLs, inane innuendos and pokes. Market rationalism is now compelling *OkCupid* to deploy matching algorithms that enable daters to respond to questions of political affiliation, social status, ethnicity, etc, thereby prioritizing variables like the user's response, a match to yield and so forth. However, while *eHarmony*, *Match.com*, *OkCupid* and apps like *Tinder* and *Badoo* are considered as very accessible and as deployable by everyone, irrespective of their age, gender or sexual preference [12], there are very serious lapses – as elucidated above - that need to be addressed to complement the rationalism and capitalism of the technology with offline humanism. With ready access to a large collection of prospective partners, the tendency is for digital daters to objectify online partners by reducing an assessment-oriented, evaluative mindset. This mindset causes e-daters to objectify prospective partners; but in the same site of *objectification* of partners, it is observed that there is a weakening resolve of e-daters to commit to their partners, precisely as a resulting effect of this objectification [13]. Objectification causes e-daters to make ill-advised, lazy decisions when choosing from among a large pool of prospective partners flooding their inboxes as is the practice with *AnastasiaDate Team* or *Dating.com*, etc. The advantage for e-daters is that they access short-term communication with prospective partners prior to face-to-face contact. When communication periods are too extensive, prior to a face-to-face confrontation, this actually hurts e-daters' romantic perspectives. This is so because daters tend to over-interpret social cues made available in communication [13], and when communication is allowed to proceed for too long in the absence of a face-to-face reality check out, any ensuing face-to-face confrontations may engender repulsive expectation barriers and abuses. This is a possibility because online communication lacks the 'experiential wealth' that one finds in an offline face-to-face meeting. In an offline

context, valuable information about prospective daters can be gleaned but this is impossible to garner from online communication alone. Today, most daters would desire to confront a prospective partner in their physical affordances in order to arrive at a fair judgment by incorporating their communication to face-to-face intuitions before pursuing a love and sexual relationship.

As far as matching is concerned, there is no persuasive evidence that endorses claims of dating sites according to which mathematical algorithms nurture love outcomes that are superior to outcomes fostered by interactive modes of partner pairing [13]. e-Dating sites construct their mathematical algorithms on the basis of principles like complementarity, similarity, etc, which are not valuable to the welfare of a relationship as was previously thought [13]. e-Matching sites are not in a good position to discern *how* two daters will grow in their love relationship and mature in due course of time. For example, they cannot tell what real life situations e-daters will face, what coping attitudes they can demonstrate and deploy in the future, and cannot tell what interactive dynamics would eventually destabilize or even promote romantic seduction leading to the welfare of an enduring relationship. As such, it is unlikely that any matching algorithm that seeks to match two people based on information available *prior* to their awareness of each other can account for more than a very small proportion of the variance in long-term romantic outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction and stability. Online dating is likely to radically alter the dating landscape in the future. With the deployment of algorithms of *similarity* and *contrast*, dating web services are employing similarity as a chief factor in matching principally demographic categories like education, religion, smoking, political ideology, preference for children, and physical traits such as race, age, eye colour, and height. But the critical question is this: do these characteristics constitute attraction in themselves? Some attitudes and compartments may sharpen online daters' expectations and motivations, to become members of internet forums with varying backgrounds; however, it is not accurate to claim that attitudes and compartments mirror real interpersonal modes of seduction. Many dating/matching sites like *eHarmony* and *Match.com* are not designed to potentialize the recipes for constructing genuine love. They employ photos, multiple categories, and other instruments to enable daters to guess and take decisions about the efficiency and prospects of their interactivity with other daters. The artificiality of photos, categorizations, socializations, etc is different from the real process of signification of interpersonal relationships with a potential mate that spawns *chemistry*, romance, love and sexuality.

Christian Rudder is the CEO of *OkCupid* and, simultaneously, the website's data officer. When Rudder was queried about the performance of his dating site, he maintained that: "We're there to get you that first date. We do use math and we do get people dates. I don't know how those dates go" [14]. *OkCupid* advertises that its "matching algorithm helps you find the right people."). *OkCupid* points out that it is always *A/B testing* its matching methods, and tweaking for maximum outcomes. He added that *OkCupid* measures its success in terms of the extent to which it can stimulate conversations with responding partners: "We don't claim to evaluate you perfectly, but we do claim to find someone who claims to fulfill your claimed requirements, exactly." Nevertheless, a dating algorithm does not and cannot *pair* an individual with a partner. There is no evidence that what daters desire online can be matched to what they prefer offline. Consequently, giving daters what they desire online does not necessarily ameliorate the odds for an offline relationship. The science of randomized A/B experimentation that tests principally two variables means that a variable may work while another variable may not, and this is a classic flaw of science, as a whole. The motivation behind this science is getting daters more dates but *without doing anything else*. The offer in *Tinder's* service consists in proposing its users photos and text. e-Daters swipe right whenever they prefer what they see and swipe left whenever they do not. This is as far as online dating goes: offering a dater the opportunity to meet with another but with no guarantee that the meeting will translate into chemistry and a genuine romantic relationship.

The emphasis in e-dating is then a deterministic one of prioritizing economic resources and essentializing knowledge by weighting matches, benchmarking attraction levels and dater activities or purposing daters to "match" with others, rather than exploring the *tacit* nature of hypertexts in rich knowledge that is embedded in daters' relationships. The spectre of the lost Big Love is a major problematic in the knowledge economy of e-sexuality. As a result, e-dating is now witnessing its own postmodern effects in terms of the lingering feeling in daters' minds that online sites are the 'uncanny valley' of digital mating. In the digital space, the dater is 'not quite' their true selves; the dater is actually a human being with all his flaws and sordid nature. But in the place of that humanity, the dater presents themselves *at their best*, with curated pictures designed to persuade the other. Consequently, the dater may start to feel silly, because he has to 'self-represent' in terms of an odd smile, a measured way of talking to seduce one's mate, etc, and this experience can yield a sickening sense of what s/he is really not. From this moment, the dating relationship becomes transient and temporary as explained by Sam Lansky's essay on *Medium*, with his 'The theory of

visitors,' in which tagged pictures transform into the realm of the ephemeral [15]. This dehumanization of romance in e-dating takes the form of an e-matchmaking session that prioritizes not only the rationalization of choices but also the infiltration of late capital into the Freudian sphere of the irrational, which is the realm of the unconscious, the interpersonal, and therefore, the sphere of the undecidable, the unpredictable and the unknowable in the humanities. e-Dating complies with *signifiers* of e-adverts (profiles of daters, data about their demographics, preferences, past life experience, etc) followed by the imperative to make a rational decision to purchase the 'product', which, in this case, is romance. The reasoning of late capital behind this process is that the more choices are available on a date-making website, the greater the opportunities for daters to make the choice [16]. *Match.com* maintains that its policy is to help a dater to "put [ting] yourself out there" and "open[ing] up options". It emphasizes informed choice ("Choose who you'd like to get in touch with") and stresses the effectivity of rationalism ("Receive your compatible matches straight away"). Romance and the interpersonal which belong to the Freudian realm of the unpredictable and the irrational are now transformed into a rational 'product'. But the increasing invasion of capital with its business 'speak' of the *unconscious* of daters is now a growing preoccupation. For example, the knowledge economy of dating has given rise to elevated subscription costs, employment of false pictures, data with doubtful information, while little thought has been given to other dimensions of matchmaking. This may explain why e-dating is not performing as much as it ought to [17].

Therefore, there is the need to rethink online dating. This paper argues that, while there is potential in online dating, for now, the technology is chiefly 'smoke and mirrors'. The chief problematic is that one cannot practically *measure* compatibility because complementarity and similarity have little to do with the *quality* of emotions found in romance relationships.

The paper is anchored on certain research questions: What are the implications of online dating on thinking about romantic relationships and partnership similarity leading to marriage, for example? What recommendations can be proffered to singles desiring to make the most out of their online dating encounters and to policymakers, as a whole, which play a role in the process?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of theoretical writings have helped to shape the critical paradigm of the hypertext [18, 7, 19]. de Siecle [20]. Ackerly and Clipper [21, 22] have proposed a poststructuralist and deconstructive

approach to deal with questions of the hypertext in postcolonial digital humanities (that is, the knowledge economy of ICTs and literature). In poststructuralist theory, the idea of textual *order* is challenged and *structure* is minimized. The French structuralist critic Roland Barthes and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, were two of the most innovative scholars in literary theory and criticism in the 1960s and early 1970s [23, 24]. Derrida [25]. Derrida [26]. Culler [27]. According to Barthes, the author (or the concept of the author) is dead [28, 29]. He also maintained that texts are either *lisible* (readerly) or *scriptible* (writerly) and can be analysed and interpreted as such. 'Readerly' means that an independent relationship exists between a text and a passive reader; in other words, s/he accepts and can easily comprehend the meaning of a text without much intellectual effort, given that a real world with real characters and events is presented. A 'writerly' text establishes a two-pronged or even many-sided relationship between text and reader, that is to say, the text necessitates an active and attentive reader who has to learn about its multiple meaning. Barthes's theory is important for the distinction of traditional text and hypertext. The traditional text has an indirect communicative function: the author communicates with the readers but they cannot communicate with the author. The hypertext introduces a mutual or direct process of communication which means that readers are allowed to make changes and contributions to the text. They are therefore engaged in the *production* of a document and become 'authors' themselves. The idea of deconstruction, which is a concept of poststructuralism, was introduced by Jacques Derrida. He maintained that a text has not just one but numerous different meanings, and should be seen as an endless stream of signifiers, with words only pointing to other words and without any final meaning. The hypertext has similar characteristics. Landow believes that the "hypertext may fulfill certain claims of poststructuralist criticism and that it can provide a rich means of testing them, especially when it comes to Barthes's ideas about the readerly and the writerly text.

Similar to Nielsen, Landow compares the hypertext with the traditional text and comes to the conclusion that it is necessary to give up conceptual systems that are founded upon ideas of *center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity* and replace them with ones of *multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks*. In this respect, four meanings of the term network have to be taken into consideration. First, the printed text takes the form of blocks and nodes which are linked together in a network. Second, the collection of these blocks and nodes by a single author or by multiple ones forms a network. Third, the term network is related to the notion of an electronic system including computers, cables, and connections. The fourth meaning alludes to the usage of the term in critical theory in which all writing



is referred to as a network. He adds that the hypertext is to be read in a non-sequential or non-linear mode. The traditional text, however, can also have a nonlinear structure. For example, footnotes form part of the structure because they interrupt the linear order of texts. Nonlinear writing is the most complex textual instance because traditional concepts such as unity, structure, beginning and end, etc of a text are abandoned. Nonlinear narrative can be found in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Graham Swift's *Waterland*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. These texts can be easily converted into hypertext form by preserving the linear structure and making additions like commentaries, glossaries, or links to other related texts. Such additions change the textuality of the text which is now part of a network of documents and sources. The hypertext just like the traditional literary text, are in intertextual relationship to many other pieces of writing. Barthes maintains that any text is an intertext in the sense that all other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms as well as the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. The text is a galaxy of signifiers and not simply a structure of signifieds because it has no beginning or end; is reversible and can be accessed via many entrances, and none of them has an exclusive authority as the main one.

The hypertext has no centre; it is marked by decentralization. It enables users of it to create their own centre by reading a particular document, a part of a document, by prioritizing a particular way or even marginal parts of it so that they may become central. The hypertext system has two basic structures, with the first one closely dependent upon that of the linear book and the second achieving the dispersed, multiply centered network organization that is evident in electronic links. Links consist of verbal and nonverbal elements, i.e. words and phrases or graphic symbols and images. Hypertext systems include both. For example, the cursor is converted into a hand when it is hovered over a verbal link, or a graphic symbol that constitutes the link to aid the user to navigate in the system. Given that hypertext documents are almost always evaluated by their visual appearance, graphics are not only used for navigational purposes but are also deployed rhetorically to supplement system design. The employment of visual elements in the hypertext responds to Derrida's demand of a new pictographic writing as a way out of *logocentrism* or the paradigmatic focus of Western culture on words and concepts. In this way, the hypertext systems includes graphic signs and symbols that are universalized. The hypertext offers the option of a reader-centred way of dealing with a text because the reader chooses the material they want to use within the context of a large

network. The hypertext system is a library which is consistent with Landow's idea of bidirectional links and efficient navigational devices that any user can contribute material to.

In this paper, the hypertext system is deployed *to show whether the new medium will be more efficient than traditional devices*. The changing theoretical perspectives on the text/web from structuralism to poststructuralism are subsequently accounted for by hypertext theory in order to comprehend the hypertext fiction/web. However, the radical promises and challenges of digital/ texts to readers *can be used to prove that the reading and interpretation of conventional digital/texts are far more participatory*. This will be accomplished by tracing the evolution of poststructuralists' concepts of intertextuality, multivocality, decentering, multilinearity, disorientation, and interactivity to find a way out of constant notions of conventional principles of reading [7]. It will also seek to scrutinize and critique the critical theory perspective on hypertext and argue that it is flawed in at least two ways. The second objective is to portray an alternative theory of the hypertext that addresses itself to the weaknesses of the critical theory understanding and suggest a number of new concepts relevant to the appreciation of the hypertext and its application as a *teaching and learning tool*. The critical theory perspective of the hypertext has its roots in works that focus on the limitations of traditional print. Critical theorists call attention to the fact that traditional print is linear, while human thinking patterns are not. They underline the hierarchical and structured character of traditional print and draw attention to the fact that this imposed structure may serve the needs of the writer but only serves to constrain the reader's imagination in undesirable ways. Related to the idea of an imposed structure is the notion of a principal alignment of organization that establishes an *a priori* "center", regardless of the needs and interests of the reader. Critical theorists argue that the 'fixity' and 'centeredness' of traditional print serve to marginalize readers, who are obliged to simply accept the text as written or stand in silence before it since "there is no way directly to refute a text. Critical theorists argue that these features of text are not essential and, indeed, are unfortunate and "thoroughly unnatural artifacts of the technologies of traditional print (i.e. the book). Critical theorists advocate that we should abandon conceptual systems that are founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and textual networks [30]. Lather [31], Arroyo [32]. What is unnatural in print can thus become natural in the electronic medium because the hypertext literally incarnates poststructuralist conceptions of the open text.

But there is also a serious flaw in critical theory's attempt to re-define hypertext and distinguish it from traditional print. Since the purpose of this paper is more constructive; it proposes a more adequate theoretical foundation for hypertext that relies on the *distinctions between text, metatext, and code*. It is claimed here that these distinctions provide a more adequate basis for distinguishing traditional print from hypertext. They also help ground a number of ideas that follow as corollaries, the concepts of *intentional text and a mediating device*, both of which are also essential features of the new hypertext literacy. The term *text* refers to the "content" of a document as traditionally considered, the words that one might quote or cite. In an HTML document, the *text* consists of the unformatted words and characters that make up the file. *Metatext* refers to a variety of elements that are "about" the text proper. Examples of metatext include links, formatting, and presentation conventions.

Metatext also includes reader aids such as tables of content and indexes. Text and metatext are represented in both traditional print and in hypertext in different ways and, therefore, represent a common ground that the new technologies share with the old. *Code*, on the other hand, is a new idea that has no counterpart in traditional print since this term has been borrowed from computer science rather than linguistics, semiotics, or literary studies. In computer science, the term *code* is used to refer to the programming language statements that make up a computer program. In the present context, *code* refers to the programme that is employed by a mediating device (i.e. a computer) to deliver a document to a reader. Although the term *code* has no counterpart in traditional print, it does have a counterpart in the act of reading traditional print. In the context of a reader using traditional print, *code* corresponds to the *intentionality* of the reader, who directs the reading process by *choosing what to read, how to read, and when to read it*. Although the use of *code* does not (and will never) exclude the *intentionality* of the reader, its presence endows hypertext with an intentionality of its own as a consequence of the code's capacity to monitor, respond to, and control aspects of the reading process.

## FINDINGS

The French essayist François de la Rochefoucauld once declared that genuine love is like a ghost: people *speak* about it, but very few have really *seen* it for sure. Taking on from that stream of perception, Alain Badiou [33] reinforced his point in a book *Éloge de l'amour*, namely, that it is possible to have love rationally ('Ayez l'amour sans le hasard!') and to be in love without falling in love ('On peut être amoureux sans tomber amoureux!'). Online dating is suffering from an 'ambiguous status'. In Karl Marx's

'Unpublished manuscripts', the author draws our attention to a very striking fact, which is that justice in the material relationships of a given society can be gleaned from the type of relationships regulating women and men in such a society [34]. Although one may not agree with his reductive assessment, one can understand that Marx is equating a very complex affective relationship with one of the evident facts, namely, the degree to which nature for human kind is reducible to human essence or human nature has transformed into human essence according to human beings. So, such a relationship can tell us the degree of attainment of mankind's level of development. When post-Marxist scholar Alain Badiou published his *In praise of love* (following a film produced by Godard with that title), he drew inspiration from this Marxist philosophy to highlight a chief preoccupation with online dating, namely, that online dating systematically avoids the event of love as a necessarily *chance-encounter*. This essential sanctity of love as an event is an idea that online dating needs to retrieve from philosophy. In the context of online dating, Badiou's logic draws from the crudest of utopic notions, His truth-procedure concept, is a 'brain-act' that consists of attaching greater value to chance-encounter as opposed to an online encounter. Online dating is about material alienation in the abstract sense and so the prospect of imagining that some events may take place to overcome challenges associated with chance-encounter is very minimal online. Although online dating epitomizes alienation, this does not, however mean that online dating is absolutely alienating in and for it. Online dating is, nevertheless, in spite of itself, alienating: it is inorganic, and unromantic as any approach to sexual pursuit.

In this section, the dating paradigm of George Homan's social exchange theory will be examined with the aid of critical romance stories in order to determine the degree to which people act in such a rationalistic as well as an economic and analytic manner. Homan's exchange theory of dating as investigated in Liu's [35]. 'Social exchange theory on romantic relationships,' Lawler and Thye's [36] 'Social exchange theory of emotions,' Muldoon, Liguori, and Bendickson's [37] 'Sailing away: the influences on and motivations of George Caspar Homans', and Enayat *et al.*'s [38] 'A Computational Approach to Homan's Social Exchange Theory', proposes that the behaviour of daters in society is the *outcome* of an exchange process. The objective of this exchange is to *optimize benefits and minimize costs*. According to this paradigm, daters weigh the potential benefits and risks of relationships in society and when the risks outweigh the rewards, daters typically terminate or ignore the relationship. Most relationships are comprised of a certain amount of give-and-take processes, but this does not signify that the give-and-take processes are always equal. The social

exchange paradigm suggests that it is the *valuing* of the benefits and costs of each relationship that determine whether or not daters will elect to continue in a social association.

Transactional sexuality or the exchange of money and gifts for sexual favours within dating and marital relationships has been extensively considered as a dominating factor in African societies and creative art. Whether in Nigerian high life and folk music where prince Nico Mbarga's father-protagonist swears that it is over his dead body that he will accept his weeping daughter's choice of 'that poor rat' Joe instead of a rich man, who can provide resources, or in artistic works like Muhomah's [39] 'Romancing the Sugar Daddy in Rosemarie Owino's *Sugar Daddy's Lover*' and Nyamnjoh's [40] *Married but Available* where the male partner has to labour for several years to acquire resources before seducing even the married woman. Asen's [41] 'A Feminist Analysis of the Themes of Bride Price Practice in Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewa* and Sofola's *Wedlock of The Gods*, thematizes this social experience as an evidentiary occurrence. Wealth has also been identified as a contributing factor to the disproportionate prevalence of HIV/AIDS among young women in sub-Saharan Africa [42]. This study applied social exchange theory to premarital relationships in order to explore the linkages between a diversity of young women's resources such as employment and material transfers from male partners and sexual behaviours. Data on premarital relationships (N=551 relationships) were collected from a random sample of pre-marital women aged between 18–24 in Kisumu, Kenya, using a retrospective life history calendar. Consistent with the social exchange hypotheses, results showed that young women's revenue increases the likelihood of safer sexual activities, including delaying sex and using condoms consistently. Material transfers from the male partner displayed the view that resources obtained from within a relationship decrease young women's negotiating *power*. Costs would involve negative issues such as spending money, time, and putting a lot of effort into a relationship. Literature abounds with such instances. For example, if a dater always has to borrow or take money from another as a precondition for continuing a relationship, as evidenced by Odhiambo's [43]. 'Sexual anxieties and rampant masculinities in postcolonial Kenyan literature', then this would be seen as a high cost. In the new cash economy of African countries, spending money is seen as a legitimate way of getting a girlfriend as in Orabueze's [44] *Society, Women and Literature in Africa*, or a boyfriend's favour occasionally as in Koussouhon's [45] 'Portrayal of male characters by a contemporary female writer: A feminist linguistic perspective'. But the question is: does this translate into winning the hearts of the daters? The outcome may be anxiety among male daters as in

identified cases in South Africa from where Dlamini [46] wrote about *The Transformation of Masculinity in Contemporary Black South African Novels*. Social exchange theory suggests that dating outcomes are a dialectical process in which we essentially take the benefits and subtract the costs with a view to determine how much a relationship is *worth*. A negative relationship occurs when costs are greater than benefits and a positive relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs.

William Goode [47] wrote famously in *World Revolution and Family Patterns* that: "all courtship systems are market or exchange systems." Goode's claim only amplified the influence of the 'market metaphor' in scholarship about mate selection. The influence of market, exchange, and utility-optimizing theories of the family increased as the new economics of the family gained more devotees. The "marriage market" is now a phrase employed and based on assumptions as predicted by exchange theory in which men with high status and earnings will marry women of great physical beauty [48, 49] and that the union between two such individuals is supposed to signify an exchange of the man's economic resources for the woman's youthfulness and seductiveness. This is evidenced by psychologists like Hunter [50] Singh [51], but also by literary scholars like Stratton [52] in her *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*.

In another version of exchange theory, men with excellent labour-market skills are predicted to date and marry women with especially strong domestic skills. Katherine Miller has shown how the theory reduces human interaction to such a purely rationalistic and linear process that arises from economic theory. In Africa, love relationships are often represented economically as a question of (material) caring [53]. In this way, the concept of love is never completely divorced from the political economy of the continent. Love does not wrestle with uneven power based on the economy and the cultural. Therefore, love can be perceived as an idealized 'product' applicable to politics; and, some scholars advice that one must abandon the presumption of love as being simply 'innocent' or 'benevolent' and Van Ausdall's [54] 'Loving Her" Without Class: The Politics of Feminist Love in Ann Allen Shockley's Lesbian Novel' and Simpson's [55] 'What fashion of loving was she ever going to consider adequate?' Subverting the 'Love Story' in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*' are dedicated to this thematic. There is what may be termed in love relationships as the "economy of sympathy" that is exchangeable [56]. This is similar to the 'emotional economy' that is intricately linked to the parasitic love that causes Afro-Americans to view love as an 'exchangeable' product in Perilloux and Buss' [57]

'Breaking up romantic relationships: Costs experienced and coping strategies deployed' and in Villeta's [58]. *Daring to Love: Emotional Economics and the Culture of Survival in the Fiction of Toni Morrison*'.

## DISCUSSIONS

In this section, this dating paradigm will be subjected to a rethinking with the aid of critique in romance stories in order to determine the degree to which people *re-act* in ways that are interstitial, hypertextual and *challenge* the rationalistic, economic and analytic hypothesis of exchange theory. It will raise issues regarding the prior section, and then it will establish that cost-benefit analysis by daters plays a lesser role in the social exchange process because there are multiples of other factors that play out in the interdisciplinary perceptions of daters and may even overshadow their analyses of different contexts. Literary scholarship has demonstrated that the influence of new forms of exchange theory has degraded the hypothesis as women enter the labour force in greater numbers and as the traditional nuclear family of working husbands and dutiful house-wives lost some of its centrality in family life [59]. McClintock [60] adds in 'Beauty and status: The illusion of exchange in partner selection?' that the benefits in a dating relationship are not just 'economic' but also the things that a dater gets out of it such as fun, friendship, companionship, social support and so forth. From this light, a dated person may be a bit of a financial 'sponge', but they may bring a lot of fun and excitement to a relationship. For example, a relationship may benefit in terms of inter-racial insights and values as Rountree [61] has detailed out in *Just us girls: The contemporary African American young adult novel*. When determining the value of a relationship, one may decide that the benefits outweigh the potential costs. In another challenge to the hypothesis of exchange theory, white people of relatively low socio-economic status have been portrayed to marry black women of higher revenue, instead of the classical pattern of rich white male and poor black female as in Casares and Barranco's [62] 'Popular literary depictions of black African weddings in Early Modern Spain,' or to have an eye of admiration for them, and this is a reversal in the exchange hypothesis of the racial caste position for economic resources and status in Lewis Jr, Yancey and Bletzer [63]. This challenge to the hypothesis of exchange theory, status-caste exchange, has been especially popular in the recent literature on racial intermarriage. Despite the claims of the theoretical paradigm, it can be shown from literary evidence that status-caste exchange is not as strong as it appears to be. The tendency of simple educational homogamy (the tendency for mates to have similar educational backgrounds) is the prevailing educational marriage pattern, regardless of the race of either spouse as

developed by Bratter and King [64] in 'But will it last?': Marital instability among interracial and same-race couples.'

Consequently, outcomes of the dating process can be qualified as 'ups and downs' as Arriaga [65] testifies in 'the ups and downs of dating: Fluctuations in satisfaction in newly formed romantic relationships.' For example, daters do have *expectations*. As daters weigh benefits against costs, they do so by creating a comparison level that is often influenced by *past experiences*. If a dater had always had poor friendships, their comparison levels at the start of a relationship may be lower than a dater who has always had caring and supportive dates. For example, whenever a previous romantic partner showered a dater with displays of affection, her comparison level for her next relationship may be quite high when it comes to affection. When the next romantic partner tends to be less emotional and more reserved, the dater may not measure up to her expectations. As Dlamini, Nonhlanhla, author of *The Transformation of Masculinity in Contemporary Black South African Novels* has pointed out, female daters in South Africa express their expectations in terms of *power* relationship with male daters, whereas in Afro-American relationships, expectations are expressed in narratives in terms of physical attractiveness and intimacy in Stephens and Few's [66] work entitled 'The effects of images of African American women in 'hip hop' on early adolescents' attitudes toward physical attractiveness and interpersonal relationships.' Expectations may take the form of absence of a caring and supportive partner as evidenced in the analysis of Diekman, Gardner and McDonald [67] entitled as 'Love means never having to be careful: The relationship between reading romance novels and safe sex behaviour.'

The dater may be required to assess alternatives of the social exchange process such as considering that in spite of all the costs of a relationship, it is still better than anything else that is available. Consequently, a dater may return and re-evaluate a relationship in the light of what may now be a much lower comparison level. Storer [68] has thematised this in his writing entitled: 'A year of bad choices: The postfeminist "re-storying" of teen dating violence in young adult literature.' Beyond the social exchange process, there is the honeymoon phase, which is the length of time that a friendship or romance takes and how it also plays a role in the relationship. During the early weeks or months of a relationship, often referred to as the "honeymoon phase," daters have the propensity to ignore the social exchange balance. As a result, issues that would normally be seen as high cost may be ignored dismissed or minimized, while potential benefits may often be hyperbolized. But when the honeymoon period finally ends, there may often be a



gradual assessment of the exchange balance. From then on, downsides may become more apparent and benefits may be perceived in more realistic ways. This recalibration of the exchange balance can lead to the upgrading or termination of the relationship if the balance is tipped too distant from or too far toward the negative side. It may also lead to resignation as reported in Stark [69], Bradshaw [70], Caesar [71] and Moolla's [72]. 'The polygynous household in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*: a haven in a heartless world'. The exchange paradigm favours openness as it was developed in the 1970s when ideas of openness and freedom were preferred, but there may be instances when, in the eyes of the dater, openness is not the best option in a dating relationship. As Pucherova [6] has pointed out in "Re-imagining the other: the politics of friendship in three twenty-first century South African novels", there are multiples and indeed limitless ways of 'opening up' to a loving partner by 'closing up'. In fact in Chimamanda Adichie's migration text *Americanah*, the concept of openness and fluidity comes with love in terms of 'closeness' because encounters are unpredictable and unknowable in environments that are strange, risky and changing as confirmed by Leetsch [73] in 'Love, Limb-Loosener: Encounters in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*'. This critical reading assumes that the crucial goal of a relationship is intimacy. The exchange paradigm places relationships in a linear structure of materiality leading to love, whereas many relationships typically skip steps or may even go backwards by starting off with violence and then proceeding to intimacy and real love as evidenced by Orpinas *et al.*'s [74] in 'Trajectories of physical dating violence from middle to high school: Association with relationship quality and acceptability of aggression.'

A number of studies such as Mitchell and Quisenberry's [75]. 'Social exchange theory, exchange resources, and Interpersonal relationships: A modest resolution of theoretical difficulties', and Cropanzano and Mitchell's [76]. 'Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review, discuss how one of the major themes within the social exchange theory is the lack of information within research on the various exchange rules. Reciprocity is the major exchange rule in the paradigm; this emphasizes that friendships are frequently relationships marked by what has been termed as 'symmetrical reciprocity' in Giordano, Manning and Longmore's [77]. 'Adolescent romantic relationships: An emerging portrait of their nature and developmental significance'. Orpinas *et al.* [74]. However, Cropanzano and Mitchell write that the theory would be better comprehended if more research programmes discussed a variety of exchange rules such as altruism. Within the exchange process, research may take into account the roles played by the following attitudes beyond economism or endowment with

material resources in traditional societies: reciprocity, social responsibility, group gain, status, consistency and competition or rivalry. Rosenfeld [78] also noted significant limitations to social exchange theory and its application in the selection of mates/partners. Specifically, Rosenfeld looked at the limitations of interracial couples and the application of social exchange theory. His analysis suggests that in modern society, there is less of a *gap* between interracial partners' educational level, socioeconomic status, and social class level, which, in turn, makes the previously understood application of social exchange arguable because the question of 'exchange' is challenged on the grounds of 'nothingness' to exchange.

### ***Concluding Remarks: The Case for an e-Dating of the Eros and Hypertextuality***

This paper was motivated on the grounds that e-dating websites tend to rationalize the choices of male partners, but algorithmic calculations deform the very complex character of interpersonal relationships by prioritizing economic resources and rationalism and excluding exploration, deviance, subtlety, the unpredictable, the irrational, etc. The questionnaires employed to calculate compatibility (e.g. 'Are you happy with your life? Select A. Yes, B. No, C. Most of the time') shift from the way real humanistic conversations are conducted in offline life, from social interaction, to the ways 'products' are quantified and objectified. e-Dating is thus being traversed by narrow narratives of rationalism leading to deception and the erosion of trustworthiness in respect to personal profiles [79]. This is a major problematic that is creating tension among e-daters. It was also founded on the premise that gender markers of messaging behaviour and preference in e-dating websites are too reductive and betray the need for opening up to practical moments of romantic realism. For example, females are signified as preferring 'revenue' (e.g. gold-diggers) much more than 'physical traits', and males are represented as seeking chiefly after 'physical bodies' and seductiveness while offering information that strengthens the perception of their status. Now, while this dichotomization is generally true, this disembods e-dating from practical reality; it leaves the digital site open to positivistic *gap filling* and *anxiety susceptibility*. What is taking place now in the digital world is more of e-communication than e-dating and e-matching. Even with the improvements in the technology that have significantly extended daters' resources and liberty to communicate, the potential to construct romantic relationships and generate love through e-dating/matching, is still restricted. e-Dating remains 'locked' in a type of 'contact' in which a dater fills in 'gaps' after receiving information about a potential partner with positive qualities possessed, while there is anxiety to represent the dating self in as positive and as seductive a light as possible by embellishing the desirable features of the

self. Consequently, e-dating spawns a spectrum of multiple reactions such as fatigue, exhilaration, and fury and compares itself to a 'duty' to fill the imagined gap rather than to 'flirting' (in the positive and risky but realistic sense) because it does not reassure and it exhausts. The imperative to *interpersonalize* the dating space rather than to simply rationalize or materialize it is critical. Although e-dating is a very popular system, there is evidence that e-daters struggle with *how* to assess and represent traits which are germane to seduction and attraction [80]. A successful e-dating strategy that can inform web system design would entail daters keeping online assessment intentionally minimal and creating space to confront each other in-person as quickly as possible [44]. Current digitally designed systems asphyxiate possibilities of assessment of seduction traits online, particularly when it comes to personality. If we can learn about one practice about romantic attraction in traditional Africa, for example, it is the culture of physical confrontation that was extended from contact between lovers to the 'knock door' contact and then to contact between families as the relationship developed. In creative art, daters such as Jam and Iyafi in Joseph Ngongwikuo's *Taboo love* meet in secret places prior to family encounters. Evidence shows that the 'desirability gap' can be efficiently filled with short than with long messages [81].

The challenge is huge: the digital technology should evolve from the 'erotic capitalism' [82] of linking subscribers to generate online *personas* into dating sites and apps that prioritize openness to ways of creating chemistry and sensitivity from a multiplicity of cultural contexts [83], promote interpersonal seduction, attraction and love and foster emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual welfare, personal needs, companionship, physical seduction and attitudes of affection. These *ideological* trajectories are the *playing* grounds where daters engage in significant interfaces such as nonverbal and verbal interactions, face-to-face communications, and relationships that construct and re-construct processes with potential to lead to chemistry, sexual pleasure, faithfulness and shared activities or negative attitudes like defensiveness, disdain, stonewalling, controlling and censure, conflict, violence and rupture. In this way, the category-based mode of communication that involves the exchange of messages after prior screening and assessment of daters, should be replaced by the interaction-focused mode of seduction that facilitates interstitiality by prioritizing the hypertextuality of the right place, time, persons, mindset, etc, emptied or filled with all forms of prejudices about the self of daters. Seduction is constructed when there is eye gazing, reciprocity in the dis/closure of intimate dimensions of the self to another self, reciprocated reward, likeness and physical allurements. These variables are valueless until daters

with these patterns, attributes and tendencies enforce them on their *targets* of seduction. The right *mindset* is key here because a dater may be offered a good opportunity to meet with their ideal partner but may lose the opportunity to construct the appropriate relationship for reasons that have to do with psychoanalysis. A dysfunctional mindset, characterized by anxiety, fear, previous experiences of failure, invalidation, etc, may be deploying superficial categories to characterize the self and envisage the efficiency of their relationships. In this case, the dater may ignore messages of love coming from real individuals seduced by them. The employment of digital categories in dating is similar to the deployment of maps which are actually substitutions of geographical place and not the humanism of location by itself. The employment of categories to envisage an interrelationship may cause one not to consider the genuine forms of communication, and this may lead to a dater missing the opportunity of genuine love from the right people and, the additional consequence of seducing the 'wrong' individuals. There is, therefore, the need to check out this kind of distorted cognition by laying emphasis on significant and regular *interactions* that enable people to enquire whether they are commendable to other individuals' prospect of appreciation and love.

As a romantic metanarrative, *online dating* has always been in a flux; it is a process of self-presentation and matching that revolves around selection but not around offline *interactivity*. In swiping, people concentrate on quantity of mates seen rather than on their *quality*. So, e-daters suffer from the question of paradox of choice, namely, the idea that having multiple choices may seem good, but it is actually a bad one. e-Daters 'freeze up' in the face of multiple options because they cannot decide who to date seriously on *Tinder*. Even when they make the decision, there is the tendency to be unsatisfied with their choices, because they start to think about *all the other girlfriends/boyfriends* they could have dated instead. This creates a paralysis in dating as a result of the illusion of plentifulness, of an ocean of easily-accessible singles. In the end, the feeling is that the dating app delivers something else other than a mate relationship; it conveys a certain sensation of possibility, of a chance that they *could but never succeed to have*. The dating app functions as a *totem* that is carried around to deflect the despair of singleness. The sense of infinite online possibility impacts negatively in the real-world context of the social: the old circles of bars are no longer frequented as before. The apps disincentivize daters from attempting offline romantic opportunities because apps just feel easier and they are low-stake. In the event where things do not work out, the dater would feel that s/he was only a stranger and one did not embarrass

oneself in an awkward relationship of requesting an outing in person that did not work. Online dating sites and apps do not instruct daters on *how* to date, they offer a means of communication but *without clear norms, or knowledge of exactly what one is searching for*. There is always a feeling that daters cannot tell people what they want (e.g. women: long-term relationship, men: casual sex, friendship, cooperation, etc) because they think they will be penalized, discriminated against or criticized: men may be scared away and women may judge their immorality. This causes daters not to be authentic with their profiles. They ‘chill’ out preferring to see how things turn out first without really *desiring* a particular direction for things to go. Daters ‘chicken’ out without a ‘dating language’ nor a desire to ‘confess’ their deeper wishes, confusion or frustration. Thus, instead of staying in the metanarrative paradigm of mate-choice, daters have the propensity to ‘freeze’ out by internalizing embarrassment and residual shame about, for example, stereotypes from racial, ethnic, class, disability, generational, class or other considerations. This then leads to exhaustion and even to harassment. The reason for this post-modernizing effect is that the metanarrative environment of mate-choice is not enriched with ‘grammatical’ rules of dating or standard scripts of courtship itineraries together with their power and knowledge dynamics. The apps only stress the technology of options, connections and inter-connections; the rest is the postmodern realm of the *unknowable*, the *unpredictable* and the *undecidable*. In a greater sense, it is not the fault of the digital technology itself; it is the fault of absence of postmodern facilitation of the dating apps, no doubt owing to the era of fear of wasting time, the sense of scarcity of time and so forth. From this light, the technology offers efficiency of method (power), but not *effectivity* of content (knowledge).

The hypertextual in e-dating speaks to the fact that an e-dater may not be attracted to a mate at first sight, but can be seduced to them over time, as s/he gets to *understand* them better. Consequently, assessing a mate’s suitability in the span of one digital date or a single swipe, definitely eliminates this possibility of *tacit* knowledge. Even with an initial seduction, *time* is a critical factor necessary to construct chemistry, intimacy and seriousness. From this perspective, there is a conflict between *efficiency* of dating and *effectivity* of dating. The digital language of efficiency sounds good; however, the critical question is efficiency for *what purpose?* Digital apps *are* an efficient technology that enables a dater to move through their options. But the more a resource is deployed efficiently, the more it will be used up. The multiples of e-dates attended to artificially add up to a general feeling that the dater has done pretty much a lot of work, whereas she is still left out with virtually nothing. This is the sense in which e-

dating has been referred to as an apocalypse (Ibid): that is, as another manner in which modernization of life overworks people into feeling a sense of awkwardness. A person’s physical appearance, professional success and appeal may be less critical for a success in a romantic relationship than other factors like preferences, confidence, and tastes. Most people start off a romantic relationship not on the basis of first impressions but on the strength of gradual contact, a chemistry spark and an acquaintance that converts a friendship into an intimate and serious relationship. A first date is a love connection without much investment. *Tinder*, for example, simply reduces the dating experience to evaluation of people’s pictures. However, this right/left swipe *app* merely promotes the superficiality of faces; beyond this, is the need for organization of physical meetings in person (Beck 2016). This is happening with a foreboding of an ‘apocalypse’ (cf. Hinge, relaunched its dating app, in a site named as “*thedatingapocalypse.com*”). The digital challenge is also how to generate a formula of doing romance more efficiently with less stress online.

The major problem, though, is that in today’s digital universe of the knowledge economy, romance has been objectified as an economic ‘product’ in a digital industry of data collection, rational choice-making and consumerism driven by the need for expediency, etc, to the exclusion of *knowledge* of romance as ‘essence-free’ feelings of the ‘irrational’, marked by spontaneity, emotions, impulsivity, erraticism and surprise (cf. Slavoj Zizek). *eHarmony* views marriage breakdown in terms of personality differences and the language of market rationalism [80]. But human beings are not efficient at knowing what precisely they desire. Scientists in *Match.com* discovered that the mates people said they desired often do not match up with what people are really attracted to. People often filter a lot of information whereas they would have been better off selecting dates in person [10]. Online dating should be seen as a technology that facilitates people meeting, but, in as much as it would have been desirable, it is not a *lieu* for actually dating, at least from the perspective of the contemporary state of the technology. Online dating is not really a ‘dating service,’ but a service for *introducing* potential mates to each other. It is important, therefore, that online mates go out and meet their partners physically after they have been introduced. Algorithms may predict pretty good first dates; however, such results do not inform us with sufficient detail about the success potential of partners *à la longue durée*. There is no mathematical algorithm that can foretell whether two mates will make a relationship material in the next ten years or so [13]. Nevertheless, as a result of the capitalism of digital love, online dating is now faced with very serious challenges. First, as a stone-walled form of encounter in which the screen separates both potential partners, the

technology systematically defers the humanism of face-to-face interaction. Second, as a category-based type of confrontation, it exacerbates the affective pains of daters because it is extricated from the interaction-based process of love generation. In online category-based processing of love, daters deploy *concepts* in their mindsets to guess acceptance and rejection possibilities by other daters. Online love processing is thus artificial because acceptance or rejection of love by daters is about acceptance or rejection of the *perceived* or *imagined* traits of daters' categories rather than about acceptance or rejection of *real* dating, physical persons. For example, *eHarmony* employs personality traits as foundation for date matching, but, in real life, people do not fall in love with *categories of traits* but with physical individuals. Online dating sites enforce access services of communication and matching that do not always ameliorate results. In fact, the services may sometimes minimize such outcomes. As concerns access, encountering prospective partners through e-dating profiles reduces three-dimensional individuals to two-dimensional ones and this kind of display of information fails to capture important experiential values from social interaction which are necessary to assess compatibility with prospective daters.

Consequently, online dating fails to *signify* a genuine diversity of human experiences and characteristics, because only *real* interpersonal processes can create the feeling of love. Love is constructed and sustained through a process of significant communications in which perceptions are certified and invalidating evaluations of inaccurate interpersonal experience is disconfirmed. Online dating does not offer the dater the opportunity to make such checks and balances. In addition, love is a greatly individualized experience in the sense that one loves another individual as a result of the fact that they are the Ms. Right or the Mr. Right with their own singular characteristics in the eyes of the dater. The algorithmic science has set itself with the huge task of retrieving information from two individuals who are absolutely unaware of the existence of each other and determining whether they are emotionally, physically, socially culturally and spiritually compatible. This task can be referred to as 'intransitive' because there is no evidence that online dating can achieve something else other than augment the pool of potential daters and increase the odds of getting a match. The digital industry is causing daters to believe that online dating is an alternative to and is better than offline dating or real life dating. Daters for the most part do not even know what they really want in the first place. The fact that daters report interest in particular partners does not automatically signify that they constitute their ideal or perfect algorithmic match. Compatibility cannot be established from a data of traits about an individual through the algorithm of a matchmaker or profiling. This fact is

testified by the evidence that dating sites hardly offer their algorithms to clinical review so as to determine whether the algorithms had any merit. As proprietary algorithms, it is hard for one to evaluate very specifically how they work. *eHarmony* and *Chemistry.com* deploy personality tests to assist daters to explore prospect of finding their mate. The introduction of personalized matchmaking into these dating services with eH+ suggests that their algorithms may not be as perfect as they claim.

This pedagogy of the Eros offers the dating process multiple possibilities [84, 85]. *Eros* takes the turn to regenerate the desire to converse, which is now absent in contemporary e-dating. Romantic love is a mode of communication, which among ancient Greeks, is encapsulated under the Eros myth with its own potentials for expansive reproduction and among Africans is envisioned under the maintenance of the community spirit system. In Greek mythology, *Eros* is the offspring of two gods, namely, Poros, a rich and inventive god, and Penia, a famished and poor god. Penia meets with Poros and brings forth *Eros*. In this myth, love is an offspring from both *wealth* and *lack*, which are united in *Eros* as the desire to gratify discontented economic needs. *Eros* is neither benevolent nor clever, but his principal objective is to recognize a materialistic need that longs for satisfaction. When one is endowed with the power of love and one seeks to satisfy its needs, this suggests that one possesses the material energy that Greeks believed has to be refined and fostered. In the readings of Plato, *Eros* is a figure looking for goodness and wisdom and, at the same time, *Eros* is a tool for identifying necessities and generating the energy to satisfy them. Identified in these needs is what one yearns for as worthy of one's desire: the subject of desire has a particular beauty in the eyes of the one desiring. In the search for this object of desire, one releases creative power: the originating power that arbitrates between *Being* and *not Being*. Thanks to this creative process, human beings succeed to immortalize themselves through the agency of the biological offspring and through the creativity of communication. Human beings recreate themselves in children thanks to the power of teaching, which is a technology of conveying life's cultural meaning. But Greek mythology also upholds the ideology that love is a self-generating energy and this suggests that, as a drive, *Eros* embodies this mode of romantic communication with its reproductive potentials. Therefore, erotic love should be a drive that does not only quest for material, economic or biological love, but also aims for a love of chemistry, education, learning, culture and wisdom. Online dating should therefore prioritize not only dating as technology but also the *e-learning about eroticism* and contextual discursivity. Therefore, *Eros* and the love ideology in Africa should transform the impossibilities of



communication as experienced in technology today, into new possibilities of comprehending, re-establishing contact and thinking, acting and processing information in alignment with the comprehended [86]. Love is also a symbolic medium, with a code that aims to facilitate comprehension by surmounting a problem. The romantic medium is not simply a feeling but a code, through which people can articulate, create, replicate, assign or deny feelings to others but also accept its consequences [86]. This romantic code is very personal because the user has to distinguish herself/himself from others by making themselves the subject, i.e. speaking about herself and making his attitude to the subject matter the axle of communication in factual discussions. Romantic communication attempts to overcome the problem by personalization of feelings, attitudes and an inbuilt drive. Love can strengthen communication by integrating the language of glances, talking to each other without saying anything to each other. It can be maintained without specification of a particular direction or necessity of meaningful information. Because of the absence of physical proximity, romantic communication is interpreted as a lingering phase of 'flirting'. Flirting has to do with the initial contact daters make with a new partner. It is a light-hearted, casual and erotic courtship without real commitment and it is a risky form of romantic communication. Online dating is the initial forum for flirting or holding a romantic dialogue. But the digital act of flirting can also become a driving pull for more communication. The e-flirting act articulates the *autopoiesis* of romantic dialogue, in the sense that its system has the potential for self-production. The Luhmanian autopoietic flirting attempts to go beyond the norm of intimacy considered as appropriate to a rationalist relationship into a humanistic sense of irony, playfulness, *double entendres*, etc. E-flirting signals a romantic interest through verbal exchange and interchange, ambiguity and double meaning. A web form of flirt may include facial expression and kinesic language, additional hints and readings between the lines, humour, compliments and double meanings, nonsense talk, cuddling nicknames and so forth. Luhmann [86] suggests that the capital of trust is acquired with the use of humour, confidence in self-presentation and personalization of communication through integration of personal experience, physical comportment, and other forms of mutually shared behavior [86]. Double meanings would include smiles, emoticons on msn, such as winking, role-plays, etc.

Communication is a *chain* of information, message and comprehension; not a technological moment. The romantic code can embed, for example, information and a smiley attached to create interest in more communication, construct a *double entendre* capable of creating ambiguity, arousing interest in the receiver. Investing in double meanings can sustain the

code system by double-guaranteeing the reproduction of communication. The employment of negation, ambiguity in the semantic structure can then replace undifferentiation and potentialize particular communication modes and outcomes. The new digital flirter has to be a dialogical seducer because online flirting is an "entrapping" process in *autopoiesis* where a mate lures another mate into reproducing a form of communication through humour and compliments, creation of mystery, personification of ambiguity and so on. The female dater considers herself as being lured by the convincing form of communication and ambivalent self-presentation of the male dater. First, she is enticed into writing about herself, then into meeting face-to-face. But pedagogical communication is a process of enticing dialogue as a dialogical model of teaching without instruction or strict direction. It involves critical appraisal and reflection, speaking and dialoguing, construction of a problem and academic discussion. In this pedagogy of communication, reading involves confirmation and challenge of knowledge [87]. Seduction involves a language of *assimilation* which is greater than the effort required to accommodate. The objective is to create a new (hyper) text where daters lose themselves in seduction by enabling new meaning horizons to join together and emerge; seduction is constructed as the dater is seduced and allows herself to be seduced [88]. After seduction (via humour, self-disclosure, authenticity), there is the process of maturing of thought, followed by serious evaluation of love [89], new *associations*, educating of responses from others, new reflections and ideas that are open to interpretation, *double entendres* etc. This romantic code can create trust in the online dating forum; trust-creating [86], must align with the increasingly complex and is losing its confidence and naturalness, thereby giving occasion for trust to be strengthened [86]. Trust is both personal and systemic in a complex society where communication itself is a "risky opening offer" [90]. In the normative context, the other dater has to reply to this offered risky trust and then (dis)affirm or confirm it. When trust is demonstrated, people feel compelled to comply with what is being asked. In net-based pedagogy, institutional trust is generated through academic credentials and understanding. In the same light, online daters can construct institutional trust in oneself by deploying a digital dating site. In this way, a dating website reassures daters that they can engage in self-disclosure (e.g. pictures, profile, formulations like irony and humour, etc, which promote one's trust capital [90]. Romantic online dialogue should be able to reproduce itself by appealing to daters who demonstrate personal trust, although it presents instances of dishonesty and trust breaches.

The physical confrontation is also an instant with a risky objective. Online daters envision chiefly communication via textual production. But it is also

feasible to deploy a webcam, to pay off for the absence of physical presence, even as they will still be separated by technology and distance. Personal trust aligns with physical proximity and, from that light, can only be cultivated in the course of time. Physical reach means interactivity on a symbolic exposure level because it may either lead to bliss or possibly to harm. Online dating does not come with such physical hazards, but face-to-face contacts carry physical turns that may be dangerous. Real trust can only occur when it is mutual: this means that it is developed in an interaction where both mates can freely act differently from how the other may desire or expect. So, trust may implicate a full consciousness that all may not go well as expected. Trust is a social value if it can afford possibilities of mistrust; trust minimizes complexity [91].

The romantic online code is therefore a personal form of communication designed to promote personal trust through institutional trust, in the digital arena where dis/closures are made. Nevertheless, the code is exposed to a multiplicity of possible narratives: time when mates may agree to meet after an initial contact, objective of encounter (find a partner, casual sex, etc), exploratory mode on issues (e.g. how much will I reveal, how honest can I be, outcomes of self-disclosure, possible consequences of trust) and conversational considerations that can energize the dialogical system of Eros together with their transposability. Eros should be the basis of the future digital pedagogy being proposed by this paper. As evidenced by the Eros mythology, the desire in a digital pedagogy of the Eros is to deploy the website as a teacher to immortalize the communication of love as a cultural reproduction [92], a dialogical strategy with its own rhetorical registers [93] that reflects the Athenian Golden Age myth of learning as a cultural act handed down from teacher to pupil in Spartan warrior society. Like in traditional African societies 'love' implies a notion of ultimate *fusion*, not only of two *persons*, but also of families. With modernism, love became an Eros created without the optimal: it was only a digital methodology through which a dater identified with another dater. Consequently, the practice of love should go beyond identification to incorporate knowledge and world experience in both daters. Public education is not only about principles, it is also about practical adaptability, about how to use knowledge; it is a reflexive concept differentiating between what one is and what one could become, or what a dater is and what his/her dater is. Reflexive assessment in digital education signifies that society still has values, but these should be seen in relation to reflexivity where the learner observes herself and this induces reflection. Dating then is a digital process of re-creation from an idealized image that follows a trajectory of self-presentation, invitation, flirtation, dialogue and mutual exploration.

The context of digital romantic communication is one that must transition from the online medium to the offline medium and therefore has to involve a re-thinking of the continuum. The online dating continuum moves from the employment of technology in its written/oral forms to classical modes of face-to-face romantic communication marked by lovers using incomplete sentences, kinesic gestures, paralinguistic tonalities and intonations, etc. Thus, there is an urgent need for a digital pedagogy that extends the horizon in knowledge of the world, the exegesis of other cultures, relationships beyond geography, social texts about cognition and emotion, the production and consumption of romantic texts and the employment of Eros is principal driver of this quest. Respondents confirm that the romantic game ameliorates their competence in the communication code. There is a need to learn how to become conscious of people's thoughts, behaviour and emotions in different contexts, together with the skills necessary to manage disclosure, self-presentation, trust-building and the cultivation of emotional relationships. Bell Hooks hypothesizes in the area of education that: "... professors must find again the place of Eros within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire" [94]. In Greek and African mythology, Eros possesses its own self-creating and reproductive drive to satisfy desires.

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