



Online dating during social isolation – Perspectives of singles from Poland and Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This article is a report on quantitative research conducted as part of the project “Singles in Poland and Brazil during social isolation – an international study.” The study, which began in 2020, aimed to understand, from a gender perspective, how singles from Brazil and Poland experienced social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter: COVID). Singles of both genders participated in the study. The study was exploratory, using quantitative strategies, including questionnaires as research tools. In this article, we present an analysis of selected issues concerning online dating during COVID among Poles and Brazilians, taking into account the frequency of dating, the main motivations of respondents and the experience of falling in love through online dating. The purpose of this text is to provide a general overview of online dating among singles, to present the characteristics of the study sample, and to present selected opinions of the men and women participating in the study on their participation in online dating during COVID. We were particularly interested in presenting differences in motivations for engaging in online dating activities and relating this to social and cultural models of femininity and masculinity.

Keywords:

singles, single life, pandemic, COVID-19, social isolation, dating, online dating, relationships, loneliness, single life.

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Introduction

Over the past five decades, there has been a significant rise in the number of individuals living alone. This trend reflects the social and intimacy transformations that are occurring rapidly in Western societies and, increasingly, in societies influenced by Westernization. Factors that have contributed to this phenomenon include the rising number of divorces and separations, an increase in the average age of first marriages, decisions to remain in informal relationships, and the expansion of singlehood. We also observe a rise in single-person households and a more diverse composition of households beyond the nuclear family, including people sharing living spaces with colleagues, friends, single-parent families, and others. These considerations contribute to a deeper reflection on the phenomenon of singlehood, which has become the subject of numerous studies by various researchers (Stein, 1976, 1981; DePaulo, 2016, 2017, 2023; Paprzycka, 2008; Żurek, 2008; Czernecka, 2014; Andrade, 2022).

Notably, when COVID-19 (hereinafter: COVID) emerged in China in December 2019, most countries adopted social isolation measures under the guidance of the World Health Organization to prevent infection and contain the virus. However, social isolation tends to alter people's life dynamics, routines, relationship forms, and self-care practices. While staying at home and maintaining social isolation serves as a protective measure against viral infection, it may also become a stress factor identified during health crises, impacting the experiences of single individuals (Morales, 2020).

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2010, singles accounted for 55.3% of the population in Brazil (including those separated, divorced, and widowed, this percentage rose to 65.1%)

(IBGE, 2010). In its most recent census, the number of single individuals surpassed that of married people: 81 million singles (excluding those divorced, separated, or widowed) compared to 63 million married individuals (IBGE, 2022). Single-person households constituted 15.5% of the total, an increase from 12.2% in 2012. With the growing rates of divorce and diversity in household structures, single individuals are gaining significance in the country.

Similarly, data from the most recent national census conducted in Poland in 2021 indicate that the number of single-person households has risen by just over 2 percentage points compared to the 2011 census. In 2011, single-person households accounted for 20.3%, while in 2021, this figure stands at 22.7%. The most significant change is observed in large cities, where the increase is nearly 4 percentage points, meaning almost one in three households is now occupied by a single person. Additionally, the percentage of divorced people has risen compared to 2011, from 5% to 7.6%, indicating that there are now half as many more divorced individuals than a decade ago. Individuals who have never married currently represent 30% of the population, with little change observed over the past decade (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2011, 2023).

Given the increasing number of single individuals, it was essential to explore and analyze how they experience social isolation, whether they encounter feelings of loneliness, what their lifestyles were like during that period, and the strategies they adopted to combat loneliness. These aspects became the main aim of our research.

Living alone is a multifaceted experience, influenced by various socio-cultural factors—ranging from micro-social to mezzo- and macro-social levels. It is perceived as a social, historical, cultural, and discursive construction, as well as a social practice (Haraway, 1995;

Harding, 1996; Reynolds, 2008). We approach singlehood as both a state or condition and as an experience shaped during the pandemic, based on (a) “marital status,” including the construction of this concept in opposition to marriage and cohabitation, (b) as a particular “lifestyle” based on self-reliance, and (c) as a psychological state relating to “loneliness” and its manifestations (Mansur, 2011; Andrade, 2022).

The purpose of this text is to provide a general overview of the issue of online dating among singles, present the characteristics of the studied sample, and showcase selected opinions of the women and men who participated in the study regarding their engagement in online dating during the pandemic period. We aimed to highlight the differences in motivations for engaging in online dating activities and to relate these differences to social and cultural models of femininity and masculinity, as well as the frequency and duration of online dates and the experience of falling in love through online interactions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Online Dating Among Singles

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted various aspects of social life, including how people establish and maintain romantic relationships. In the face of global social restrictions, such as lockdowns and social distancing, technology became an integral part of daily life, with dating apps gaining importance as a tool for initiating and maintaining human connections. The rise in the popularity of online dating was a response to the increasing feelings of loneliness and social isolation that affected people worldwide (Youngvorst, Pham, 2023; Marshall et al., 2023). The introduction of restrictions on personal contact and the growing use of dating platforms led to new challenges that users had to face. Research

showed that COVID influenced the motivations of dating app users. While pre-pandemic motivations were primarily associated with fun and meeting new people, COVID saw a shift toward motivations related to coping with loneliness and stress. Users began to perceive online dating not only as a form of entertainment but also as a tool to fulfill emotional and social needs (Williams et al., 2021; Portolan, McAlister, 2022; Marshall et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic simultaneously affected the dynamics of online dating. The introduction of new features in dating apps, such as video calls, aimed to facilitate initiating and maintaining relationships under social isolation conditions. Nevertheless, users often experienced frustration due to the inability to transition online relationships to the offline world because of social and health restrictions. As a result, dating apps became both a necessary tool for establishing connections and a source of frustration due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic (Sepúlveda et al., 2021; Diaz, Conrad, 2021; Portolan, McAlister, 2022).

In the context of the pandemic, an important aspect of online dating became “COVID compatibility,” which refers to partners' compatibility regarding their approach to COVID-related precautionary measures. Studies show that dating app users tried to assess the risk associated with potential partners based on their attitudes toward safety protocols. Consequently, communication about health and risk became a crucial element in building relationships during this period (Williams, Ting, McLachlan, 2021; Pawlikowska-Gorzelańczyk et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the mental health and sexual behaviors of dating app users. Social isolation and the associated increase in stress levels contributed to higher activity on dating platforms, especially among younger users. At

the same time, studies indicate a decrease in risky sexual behaviors, such as having multiple sexual partners, due to concerns about virus transmission (Venegas-Vera, Ting, McLachlan, 2020; Pawlikowska-Gorzelańczyk et al., 2023).

Furthermore, COVID influenced the way the media reported changes in online dating. They focused on transformations in this area, highlighting both new features introduced by platforms and the evolving habits of users. Press coverage emphasized the benefits and challenges of online dating during this period, contributing to a more positive public perception of these platforms than before (Sepúlveda et al., 2021; Diaz, Conrad, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant changes in the way people use dating apps and form relationships (Match, 2021; Tinder, 2021). Shifting user motivations, the need to cope with social restrictions, and the growing importance of COVID compatibility are key themes in studies on online dating during the pandemic. Therefore, the findings of this research may have important implications for the future of dating apps and their development strategies in the context of future health or social crises.

Theoretical Perspective

The research that forms the empirical basis for this analysis concerns the structural and stratificational significance of biological sex and gender. According to the assumptions, gender division is a fundamental element of social structure, influencing the way all societies function. Referring to this division becomes a crucial framework through which we understand and explain the social world (Mauss, 1969, p. 15; Guionnet, Neveu, 2004, p. 9).

In our research framework, we referred to the patriarchal model of femininity and masculinity as analytical categories. Based on the literature on gender polarization, we identified dimensions of personality traits differentiated

into masculine and feminine, such as orientation toward agency and action versus communality (Bakan, 1966), instrumentality versus expressiveness (Parsons, 1955), instrumental and assertive traits versus interpersonal orientation (Williams, Best, 1982), competence versus warmth and expressiveness (Broverman et al., 1972), dominance versus warmth (Lubinski et al., 1983), and maintaining dominance over others versus closeness, support, and communication (Tannen, 1999). Regarding the characterization of feminine and masculine traits, we used empirically defined contents of gender stereotypes by Deaux and Lewis (1984). In the model, the main feminine traits included emotionality, self-sacrifice, gentleness, tenderness, care for others' feelings, understanding and helping abilities, as well as submissiveness, passivity, dependency, and concern for appearance (Brannon, 2002, as cited in Wojciszke, 2003). In contrast, the model masculine traits included independence, activity, decisiveness, self-confidence, leadership, courage, strength, tendency for dominance, ambitious goal orientation, self-reliance, rationality, and effectiveness in action (Deaux, Lewis, 1984, as cited in Mandal, 2004). This model was previously used by one of the authors in another study on a different topic (Malinowska et al., 2016).

Heteronormativity (Wittig, 1992), which remains prevalent in Western culture, continues to manifest through patriarchal, pro-family, and couple-oriented cultural norms and models (Budgeon, 2008; Amador, Kiersky, 2003). These norms and patterns, in turn, influence the experiences and subjectivity of single adults, placing them in a paradoxical situation in contemporary times, where new ways of life, relationships, and identity formation coexist with certain traditions. As the choice to live outside of marriage has become more socially accepted and the stigmas of "bachelors" and "spinsters" have diminished, single adults are still expected to explain why they are not in

an informal or marital relationship. This creates a need for strategies to cope with such opinions and social pressures (Budgeon, 2008; Reynolds, Wetherell, 2003).

In this context, single individuals may also feel excluded, as if something is wrong with them, contributing to negative feelings about their identity and self-worth, potentially leading to disorders, including mental health issues. This is especially true for women, whose identities are constructed in our culture with an emphasis on relationships with others, shaped by "gendered conditions," as discussed by Zanello (2018). For Zanello, there are privileged paths of subjectivation for the lives of women and men. Women's subjectivity is shaped through the tools of love and motherhood, which are linked to the social assignment of caregiving—considered "feminine" traits and viewed as the function and destiny of women. Men, on the other hand, achieve subjectivity through a mechanism of effectiveness (in sexuality and work) associated with social roles as providers.

Gender also intersects with race/ethnicity, sexual orientation/sexuality, age/generation, and other attributes of social identity, placing single individuals in vulnerable positions while simultaneously forming the basis of their identity construction. In the Brazilian context, we highlight how racism contributes to the loneliness of Black women, as well as in many other countries, especially those marked by colonization (Pacheco, 2013). Ageism continues to stigmatize. It affects not only older individuals but also those who have reached a "marriageable age" yet who (still) remain single or divorced/separated.

Homophobia and transphobia continue to oppress many individuals who wish to express their sexuality and gender identity outside the hegemonic (cis-heterosexual, monogamous, etc.) framework. Other forms of discrimination can exacerbate vulnerabilities related to

loneliness, such as the experience of motherhood as a single mother or father, or the state of being childless, especially for women who, for various reasons, are not mothers. However, in this text, due to space limitations, we will focus solely on the analysis considering gender and age categories.

The COVID-19 period offered a unique opportunity to examine how singles perceive their lives and the strategies they develop to cope with the crisis of isolation. A single is defined as a person who is not in either a formal or informal relationship with another individual. By "relationship," we mean an interpersonal bond of an intimate and/or emotional nature (based on love) that connects two people and is characterized by mutual commitment, closeness, and a sense of connection. Such a relationship is marked by durability and intentionality in striving to build a shared future and emotional stability.

During social isolation, singles are individuals who remain outside such relationships, which may impact their emotional well-being and sense of loneliness, especially when opportunities for new social connections are limited. In this text, we will primarily focus on the conditions related to biological and cultural gender and, where relevant, on the age of the respondents.

Methodological Framework

The study was descriptive and exploratory, aiming to identify experiences associated with living alone during the social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research focused on how singles perceived and experienced singlehood during the pandemic and how they practiced it in their daily lives during social isolation. Various aspects of their lives were examined, including personal, professional, recreational, and domestic activities. In this article, we analyze how they expressed, for instance, their sexuality through virtual

relationships. We also investigate mental health—particularly the emotions they experienced during social isolation, self-care practices, their views on loneliness, as well as future plans. The study also aimed to provide a comparative analysis based on age and the determinants of cultural gender while identifying cultural differences between Poland and Brazil.

The selection of Poland and Brazil was based on a previous collaboration between the authors. Comparing the situation of singles in Poland and Brazil during the pandemic was intriguing, as these two countries differ significantly in social, cultural, and economic terms, which may influence individuals' distinct experiences of isolation and loneliness during the pandemic. At the same time, there are also similarities conditioned by shared values. Both countries are influenced by strong individualization while still maintaining deeply rooted collectivist values.

In Poland, since 1989, two value streams have strongly clashed—more individualistic values, encouraging self-sufficiency and independence, and deeply rooted traditional family values, which affect individual life choices and the growing trend of living alone (Czernecka, 2014). In Brazil, there are also strong collectivist tendencies, where individuals primarily depend on the group, and family and social ties are crucial. However, emerging individualistic tendencies can also be observed in Brazil, particularly in large cities (Andrade, 2022).

We were interested in how singles in both countries coped with social isolation and whether significant differences were present. Additionally, Brazil, characterized by a vibrant cultural and social life, relies heavily on direct interpersonal interactions and openness, making the COVID-related restrictions particularly challenging for singles. In this context, restrictions may have led to serious issues related

to loneliness and isolation, although strong family ties and a broad social support network might have helped reduce feelings of isolation among singles. In contrast, singles in Poland, where social norms emphasize individual autonomy more, might have been more vulnerable to loneliness.

Methodology

The research employed both quantitative and qualitative strategies (the latter is not discussed here). The first stage of the study was conducted using an online survey method (CAWI), while the second stage involved individual interviews. This article presents the findings from the first stage, focusing on data related to online dating. The online questionnaire comprised 64 questions, both closed and open-ended.

The sample was purposively selected to include singles—individuals who were not in a relationship at the time of the study. A total of 1,645 adults (aged 18 to 65+) participated in the research, including 778 respondents from Poland and 867 from Brazil. Data collection occurred in 2020, between April and August (from April to May in Poland and from May to August in Brazil). In Poland, the survey was hosted on the Lime Survey platform and linked to the University of Łódź website, while in Brazil, it was administered via Google Forms.

The questionnaires were distributed through the research team's existing network in Brazil and further expanded via social media platforms. In Poland, the survey was also distributed through the dating website Sympatia.pl (which has approximately 3 million users). The website sent the survey to its users, ensuring that it reached an equal number of men and women from each voivodeship and each age group selected for the study. The survey was also made available on the website of the Association for Singles. For statistical analysis, we utilized SPSS (Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences) software to facilitate the descriptive statistical analysis of responses.

The data analysis was carried out according to the principles of descriptive statistics. We used univariate analysis and group comparisons within categories such as gender, age, race, housing independence, parenthood, and between the two countries. A Likert scale was also used for analysis. For the purpose of this article, the analysis primarily focused on distinctions in the areas of gender and age.

Characteristics of the Research Sample

Regarding gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, the majority of participants in Brazil were women (80.7% women and 19.3% men). In Poland, the distribution of participants was more balanced, with 57.4% women and 42.5% men. Among Brazilians, most identified as cisgender (96.4% overall; 97.1% of women and 94% of men), with a dominant heterosexual orientation (70.8%). The remaining 29.2% included individuals who identified as bisexual (15.8%), homosexual (7.5%), lesbian (3.7%), pansexual (1.7%), and other orientations.

Similarly, in Poland, the majority of participants identified as cisgender: 98.0% of women and 96.4% of men. Most Polish participants also identified as heterosexual: 93.5% of women and 95.2% of men. Other reported sexual orientations among women included bisexual (2.9%), other (1.8%), asexual (0.9%), and pansexual (0.9%). Among men, 1.8% identified as bisexual, 1.2% as pansexual, 0.9% as asexual, and 0.6% as other. Among Polish respondents, 98.0% of women identified with their biological sex, while 2.0% identified with a different gender. For men, 96.4% identified with their biological sex, 0.3% as transgender, and 3.3% identified their gender as something other than their biological sex.

For the analysis, the age distribution of participants was divided into four groups based on life cycles (Dobrowolska, 1992) (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, in both countries, the most prominent group was comprised of individuals aged 26–41. However, the composition of the other age groups was vastly different.

Table 1. Age distribution of respondents in Brazil and Poland

Age group	Brazil (%)	Poland (%)
18–25	27.7	5.0
26–41	49.6	54.4
42–59	20.4	39.8
60+	2.3	0.6

Regarding marital status, the majority of participants in both Brazil and Poland reported being single and never married. However, a higher percentage of single individuals was recorded in Brazil, while Poland had a greater proportion of divorced individuals. In Brazil, 72.6% of women reported being single and never married, 14.7% were divorced, 11.6% were separated, and 1.1% were widowed. Among men, 84.4% were single and never married, 7.8% were divorced, 6.0% were separated, and 1.8% were widowed. In Poland, 52.8% of women were single and never married, 34.7% were divorced, 4.5% were separated, 6.0% were widowed, and 2.0% indicated another marital status. Among men, 69.5% were single, 25.4% were divorced, 3.0% were separated, and 1.2% were widowed.

Considering age and marital status, the data indicate that younger individuals in both countries were most often never married, while those over the age of 40 were predominantly divorced. In Brazil, in the 18–25 age group, 98.3% had never been married; in the 26–41 age group, 78.6% had never been married, 11.4% were separated, and 10.0% were

divorced. Among those aged 42–59, 39.5% were single and never married, 34.5% were divorced, 20.9% were separated, and 5.1% were widowed. In the 60+ age group, 50% were divorced, 25% had never been married, 15% were separated, and 10% were widowed.

In Poland, in the 18–25 age group, 94.9% of participants had never been married, while 5.1% reported another marital status. In the 26–41 age group, 79.2% had never been married, 16.7% were divorced, 2.4% were separated, 0.5% were widowed, and 1.2% reported another marital status. In the 42–59 age group, 30.0% were single and never married, 53.9% were divorced, 6.5% were separated, 8.4% were widowed, and 1.3% reported another marital status. In the 60+ age group, 20.0% were divorced, 60.0% were widowed, and 20.0% reported another marital status.

The analysis of the survey results reveals certain correlations between marital status, gender, and age. Respondents from younger age categories, particularly men, were more frequently single and never married, reflecting a shift in marriage patterns. In Brazil, the average age of first marriage was 28 for women and 31 for men, according to marriage records from 2020 (IBGE, 2020). Furthermore, increasing divorce and separation rates have contributed to longer periods of singlehood. In Poland, these statistics are similar (GUS, 2020).

Online Dating During the Pandemic as a Coping Strategy for Loneliness

The study examined how the women and men who participated in the research engaged in online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given social isolation and the risk of virus transmission, it was expected that there would be fewer opportunities for casual meetings. Indeed, around 70% of participants in both Brazil and Poland reported not being involved in any relationships during this

period. However, some singles engaged in casual encounters. In Brazil, many reported engaging in “ficar” (casual dating), while in Poland, “friends with benefits” (sexual relationships with friends) and affairs were more common. In both countries, online dating was less prevalent than anticipated. The analysis suggests that casual relationships were most often reported by younger respondents (18–25 years), while those in the oldest age category (60+) were mostly not involved in any relationships. The findings indicate that 58% of the Brazilian participants engaged in online dating during the pandemic, compared to 43% of Polish participants.

Among the Brazilian respondents who dated online during the first wave of the pandemic, most did so once a month (28.8%) or 2–3 times a month (30.3%). A smaller percentage dated once a week (21.3%) or several times a week (20.5%). Women were less likely than men to go on dates, which could be explained by their greater caution and selectivity in forming relationships. Men, consistent with the traditional masculinity model that promotes agency and proactivity (Bakan, 1966), were more inclined to date frequently, aligning with their social role as initiators of contact (Lubinski et al., 1983).

Among the respondents from Poland, the most common responses regarding the frequency of online dating were once a month (59.9%) or 2–3 times a month (24.1%). Less frequent were responses indicating more frequent dating, such as once a week (9.6%) or several times a week (6.3%). Polish women also reported engaging in online dating less often than men, which may be attributed to a more conservative approach to relationship-building and caution toward online interactions (Brannon, 2002; Deaux, Lewis, 1984).

Regarding age, in Brazil, individuals over 42 years old most frequently reported dating at least once a week (20.5%), while these rates

were lower in other age groups: 7.1% (18–25 years) and 13.6% (26–41 years). Older individuals may have been seeking emotional stability and support, which could explain their higher frequency of dating (Fox, Warber, 2013). In Poland, age did not significantly differentiate responses concerning the frequency of online dating.

In terms of the duration of dates, the Brazilian respondents most often indicated that their online dates lasted less than an hour (38.4%) or 1–2 hours (35.7%). Shorter dates were more frequently chosen by men, possibly reflecting an instrumental approach to relationships, where shorter meetings allow for quick goal attainment without engaging in lengthy conversations (Parsons, 1955). Women, on the other hand, tended to choose longer dates, which may result from their inclination to build deeper emotional connections and express emotions in relationships (Broverman et al., 1972).

In Poland, respondents who engaged in online dating most frequently chose durations of 1–2 hours (41%) or 2–3 hours (22.6%). The option “less than an hour” ranked third (20.2%), while “more than 3 hours” was the least common choice (16.3%). Polish respondents, regardless of gender and age, more often preferred longer meetings, which suggests a more balanced and emotionally engaging approach to online dating. Longer dates may indicate a greater emotional investment and a desire to build lasting connections, aligning with a more traditional and communal approach (Tannen, 1999).

The analysis of online dating behaviors in Brazil and Poland reveals significant differences between the two countries. Brazilians were more likely to indicate that they date online because they enjoy flirting (38.6%) or wanted to have a good time, while Poles more often stated that they used dating apps to fall in love (59.9%) or be in a relationship (49.9%).

In Brazil, men were more likely than women to say they date online to be in a relationship or fall in love. In Poland, the differences between genders were less pronounced, although women more frequently indicated that they date to share their problems. The analysis also shows that younger people in both countries were more likely to date online to be in a relationship, while older individuals were more likely to seek closeness and emotional support. Sexual orientation also plays a role: non-heterosexual individuals were more likely to report flirting as the main reason for online dating. Additionally, individuals with secondary education were more likely to use dating apps to be in a relationship or fall in love, whereas those with higher education engaged in online dating less frequently. These results align with previous studies that suggest that motivations for using dating apps may vary depending on cultural, social, and demographic contexts (Smith, Duggan, 2013).

Table 2. How do you date online, and why?

		Brazil	Poland
I want to be in a relationship	I completely disagree	23.7 %	7.5%
	I partially disagree	14.4%	3.6%
	Hard to say	1.2%	14.8%
	I partially agree	35.7%	23.2%
	I completely agree	25.0%	50.9%
I like to flirt	I completely disagree	11.4%	12.0%
	I partially disagree	9.3%	7.8%
	Hard to say	0.7%	19.3%
	I partially agree	33.3%	34.9%
	I completely agree	45.3%	26.0%
I want to fall in love	I completely disagree	18.6%	6.9%
	I partially disagree	11.1%	3.6%
	Hard to say	1.4%	10.2%
	I partially agree	30.1%	19.3%
	I completely agree	38.8%	60.0%
It's a nice way to spend leisure time	I completely disagree	15.0%	7.5%
	I partially disagree	10.9%	3.9%
	Hard to say	0.2%	16.9%
	I partially agree	33.1%	30.7%
	I completely agree	40.8%	41.0%
I want to share my problems	I completely disagree	41.7%	28.2%
	I partially disagree	20.2%	13.0%
	Hard to say	0.9%	23.8%
	I partially agree	24.2%	21.4%
	I completely agree	13.0%	13.6%
Good to have someone to be close to during this difficult time	I completely disagree	18.2%	7.5%
	I partially disagree	10.6%	4.8%
	Hard to say	1.0%	12.7%
	I partially agree	30.1%	25.9%
	I completely agree	40.1%	49.1%

When analyzing data related to the statement “I date online because I want to be in a relationship,” a clear gender difference can be observed in Brazil—only 20.1% of Brazilian women fully agreed that they use online dating to pursue a relationship, which is

significantly lower than in Poland. This suggests that Brazilian women are less inclined to view online dating as a means to find a serious relationship. A significantly higher percentage, 28.7%, partially agreed with this motivation, indicating a more ambivalent attitude towards

online dating among Brazilian women. This outcome may be explained by deeply rooted gender and social norms that promote restraint and caution in expressing sexuality among women, aligning more closely with traditional models of femininity (Deaux, Lewis, 1984; Heilborn, 2006).

On the other hand, Brazilian men were more likely to cite the desire to be in a relationship as a reason for online dating—29.6% of them fully agreed with this statement. This is a significant difference compared to Brazilian women and may reflect a more traditional approach among men in Brazil to seeking partners through the internet. Men might see themselves as initiators of relationships, which is consistent with social and cultural expectations that promote a proactive attitude and fits into a more traditional perspective (Bakan, 1966; Lubinski et al., 1983; Heilborn, 2006). It could also be that due to the experience of social isolation, men, who generally have smaller social networks in the form of familial and friendly relationships, felt loneliness more intensely (Czernecka, 2014).

In Brazil, both women and men in the younger age groups (18–25 years) showed less engagement in online dating with the intention of being in a relationship. This is due to the exploratory phase that is typical for this age group, where young people prefer casual relationships and exploration before committing to a long-term relationship. As individuals in the 26–41 age group reach a life stage associated with the need for stability, they are more likely to treat online dating as a means of finding a serious relationship. These results reflect differences in motivations and expectations regarding relationships based on age, which is consistent with psychosocial development theory, where, at later life stages, individuals seek stability and aim to build lasting relationships (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013).

In Poland, as many as 50.9% of women fully agreed that they date online because they

want to be in a relationship, indicating a significantly higher inclination among women to seek serious relationships through the internet. This may be due to a more egalitarian approach to gender roles in Poland, where women have greater freedom to actively pursue romantic relationships, which is less stigmatized than in Brazil. Additionally, the growing social acceptance of women initiating relationships, alongside ongoing social and cultural changes, may encourage greater involvement of Polish women in seeking serious relationships online.

The situation for Polish men is somewhat different. While 42% of men agreed that they date online with the intention of forming a relationship, this percentage is lower compared to women. Interestingly, more men than women in Poland completely disagreed with this statement—8.1% of male respondents rejected the motive of seeking a relationship as a reason for online dating. This could suggest that, for some men, online dating might be seen as an opportunity for other benefits or more casual interactions, which is consistent with a trend observed in many societies where men are more likely to use dating apps as a space for exploration and short-term relationships (Conrad, 2021).

In summary, in Poland, there were no significant differences between genders, although women constituted the dominant group of individuals seeking serious relationships through online dating. In contrast, in Brazil, it was men who more often cited such a motivation. Brazilian women appear to be more skeptical about viewing online dating as a pathway to finding a lasting relationship, contrasting with the attitudes of Polish women. These differences may stem from varying cultural and social norms that shape expectations around romantic relationships and the influence of traditional gender roles, where men are seen as initiators and demonstrate a proactive stance (Lubinski et al., 1983; Deaux, Lewis,

1984, as cited in Mandal, 2004). In Poland, these differences are less pronounced, which may suggest that Polish men and women have a more egalitarian approach to romantic relationships, with gender roles playing a less significant role (Malinowska, 2003).

Regarding the response “I like to flirt,” the differences are more pronounced in Brazil—38.6% of men fully agreed that they enjoy flirting, while 27.3% partially agreed. On the other hand, 28.4% of Brazilian women fully agreed that they like flirting, with another 28.4% partially agreeing. This clearly indicates that men in Brazil are more likely than women to treat flirting as the main reason for using dating apps. This difference may stem from traditional gender norms in Brazilian society that encourage men to be proactive and actively express their interest, reinforcing their inclination to flirt in the context of online dating (Heilborn, 2006). Additionally, Brazilian women may be more reserved due to concerns about safety and privacy in digital spaces, which limits their openness to engage in such interactions (Virtual Dating and the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2023).

Among Brazilians aged 18–25, 38.5% fully agreed that they enjoy flirting, while 27.3% partially agreed. Younger individuals in this age group may be more inclined to view flirting as a form of social exploration, consistent with psychosocial development theories that highlight the need for exploration and experience-building during this life stage (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013). In the 26–41 age group, flirting as the main motivation was chosen by 40.4% of respondents, with 30.2% partially agreeing. This age group is the most active in online social interactions, which may be linked to greater life stability and the intention to actively seek contacts to expand social and friendship networks.

In Poland, the motivation for online flirting does not significantly differ between women

and men, indicating a more egalitarian approach by both genders when using dating apps for this purpose. Among Polish women, 25.9% fully agreed that they like flirting, while 34.9% partially agreed with the statement. These results suggest that women in Poland have greater freedom to express their intentions in social and romantic relationships, possibly stemming from a growing sense of equality in initiating dates. This may indicate a shift away from the stereotype based on the traditional model of femininity (Virtual Dating and the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2023; Czernecka, 2014). Similarly, 25.9% of Polish men fully agreed that they like flirting, with 28.4% partially agreeing. In Poland, where men and women have similar attitudes towards online relationships, the gender differences regarding flirting are minimal. This could be attributed to a more equitable approach to interpersonal relationships, where both men and women feel equally entitled to initiate social interactions (Czernecka, 2014; Heilborn, Cabral, 2013).

In the 18–25 age group in Poland, 28.6% fully agreed that they enjoy flirting, while 35.7% partially agreed. Younger individuals may be less inclined to engage intensively with dating apps than their Brazilian counterparts, possibly due to cultural differences and different behavioral patterns in younger age groups (Looking for Lockdown Love Online, 2023). In the 26–41 age group, 24.1% fully agreed with the statement, while 40.3% partially agreed. These responses suggest a more moderate approach to flirting, which could be due to a greater focus on other priorities, such as career and the pursuit of life stability.

In the 42+ age group, 28.3% fully agreed that they enjoy flirting, while 40.2% partially agreed, indicating that flirting is accepted even at older ages, although it is not the dominant motivation for online dating in Poland. Individuals in this age group may view flirting

as a way to maintain social activity, but their priority shifts towards more stable and long-term relationships.

It appears that online flirting is significantly more popular in Brazil, especially among men and individuals aged 26–41. Brazilian women are somewhat more inclined than Polish women to engage in online flirting, which may be attributed to different social norms that promote activity and sociability in relationships in general. Young Brazilians are much more open to flirting than their Polish peers, which can be explained by the greater cultural acceptance of social exploration among the youth in Brazil (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013).

In the motivation “I want to fall in love,” clear differences are observed between women and men in both Brazil and Poland, as well as by age. In Brazil, the percentage of individuals who declare that they want to fall in love as the main reason for online dating is noticeably lower than in Poland, especially among women. Among Brazilian women, 30.0% fully agreed that they date online to fall in love, while 28.7% partially agreed. This suggests that Brazilian women are less likely to treat online dating as a means to find a lasting, romantic relationship. This may be due to a more open approach to relationships in Brazil, which favors exploration and more casual forms of connection without immediate commitment (Heilborn, 2006; Santos, Nogueira, 2019).

For Brazilian men, 42.5% fully agreed that they wanted to fall in love, while 21.7% partially agreed. This indicates that Brazilian men are more likely than women to view online dating as a way to find a lasting relationship, which is connected to a more traditional approach to relationships, where men play an active role in initiating and building long-term connections. The traditional masculinity model involves proactivity and the initiation of “romantic” or sexual interactions, regardless of whether the aim is short-term casual sex or

seeking a long-term partner (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013; Fox, Warber, 2013).

In Brazil, younger individuals are less likely to identify this motivation as the reason for online dating. In the 18–25 age group, only 24.3% fully agreed with this statement, while 33.1% partially agreed. This aligns with studies suggesting that younger generations prefer less committed forms of relationships, using dating apps primarily as a tool for establishing more casual social connections (Fox, Warber, 2013; Madsen, Collins, 2011). As age increases, the percentage of people who consider falling in love as a reason for online dating rises. In the 26–41 age group, 36.7% fully agreed that they date online to fall in love, while 25.9% partially agreed. In the 42+ age group, as many as 42.1% fully agreed with this statement, and 21.8% partially agreed, indicating that older individuals in Brazil are more likely to view dating as a way to find a serious relationship.

In Poland, significantly more women agreed with the response “I want to fall in love” than in Brazil. Among Polish women, 59.9% fully agreed with this statement, while 23.2% partially agreed. In Poland, where long-term relationships are valued, women treat online dating much more seriously, hoping to form stable and romantic relationships, which may stem from having a more traditional approach to relationships and dating (Elphinston, Noller, 2011; Fox, Warber, 2013). Polish men also show a commitment to this motive—42.0% fully agreed that they date online to fall in love, while 26.8% partially agreed. This demonstrates that men in Poland also view online dating as a serious method for finding a romantic partner, which may be linked to Poles’ expectations regarding life stability and values (CBOS, 160/2020).

In Poland, the percentage of people who want to fall in love is higher across all age groups. In the 18–25 age group, 41.7% fully agreed that they date online to fall in love,

while 37.2% partially agreed. Younger people in Poland show a stronger commitment to seeking stable relationships than their Brazilian counterparts, which may be connected to a somewhat more traditional approach to relationships, where the pursuit of long-term stability is important even at a young age. In contrast, young Brazilians are more likely to engage in casual dating and sex without commitment (Andrade, 2022).

In the 26–41 age group, 46.8% fully agreed that they want to fall in love, while 30.7% partially agreed, aligning with the life stage where the pursuit of stability and starting a family plays a crucial role. In the 42+ age group, as many as 50.3% fully agreed with this statement, and 27.9% partially agreed. This shows that in Poland, regardless of age, falling in love is one of the main motivations for online dating, which may be attributed to strong cultural norms promoting long-term relationships and pro-family values (CBOS, 46/2019; CBOS, 160/2020).

In the context of the motivation “I want to share my problems,” differences in responses are noticeable in both countries, depending on the respondent’s gender and age. In Brazil, 11.0% of respondents fully agreed that they date online to share their problems, while 20.5% partially agreed. The differences between men and women are relatively small. Among men, 13.6% fully agreed with this statement, and 21.4% partially agreed, while among women, these percentages are similar—11.0% fully agreed, and 20.5% partially agreed. Brazilian women and men demonstrate similar motivations in this regard, possibly due to cultural norms that favor a more open approach to sharing emotions and seeking emotional support online, with no significant gender differences (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013; Fox, Warber, 2013).

In Brazil, younger individuals are less likely to cite sharing problems as a reason for online

dating. In the 18–25 age group, only 10.2% fully agreed with this statement, while 15.3% partially agreed. This is because younger generations more often treat dating apps as platforms for casual interactions rather than spaces for emotional support (Fox, Warber, 2013; Madsen, Collins, 2011). In the 26–41 age group, 11.5% fully agreed, while 22.7% partially agreed. In the 42+ age group, 14.5% fully agreed, and 21.7% partially agreed. This indicates that older individuals in Brazil are more likely to view sharing problems as a motivation for online dating, which may be associated with their greater need for support and emotional stability (Santos, Nogueira, 2019).

In Poland, a higher percentage of individuals agreed that they date online to share their problems compared to Brazil; 12.0% of Poles fully agreed, while 20.9% partially agreed. Similar to Brazil, the gender differences are not significant. Among women, 10.7% fully agreed, and 21.9% partially agreed, while among men, 14.8% fully agreed and 18.6% partially agreed. This suggests that, in both Brazil and Poland, sharing problems is not the primary motivation for online dating. However, Poland shows a higher percentage of people who consider it an important aspect of online relationships, which may be due to the more close nature of relationships preferred by Poles (Elphinston, Noller, 2011; Hertlein, Stevenson, 2010).

In Poland, older individuals are more likely to view sharing problems as an important reason for online dating. In the 18–25 age group, only 10.2% fully agreed with this statement, while 15.3% partially agreed. In the 26–41 age group, 11.5% fully agreed, and 22.7% partially agreed. In the 42+ age group, as many as 14.5% fully agreed, and 21.7% partially agreed. Older people in Poland may use dating platforms more frequently as a space to share their emotions and problems, connected to their greater need for stability and emotional support (Elphinston, Noller, 2011; Fox, Warber, 2013).

The analysis of the responses to the statement “It’s good to have someone close during difficult times” reveals significant gender and age differences in both countries. In Brazil, 33.5% of respondents fully agreed that online dating allows for closeness during difficult times, while 25.2% partially agreed. A higher percentage of men than women fully agreed with this statement—41.2% of men compared to 31.2% of women. This may be attributed to the stereotypical notion that men, who often have less extensive support networks than women, seek emotional support through romantic relationships. This trend is observable across cultural contexts (Czernecka, 2014; Andrade, 2022). Brazilian women show a more ambivalent approach, with 26.5% partially agreeing. This difference may stem from traditional gender norms in Brazil, where men are encouraged to actively seek relationships, even for emotional support, while women may be more cautious due to cultural expectations placing greater responsibility on them for emotional commitments (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013; Fox, Warber, 2013).

In Brazil, the respondents’ age significantly influences their responses to this question. Individuals in the 26–41 age group most frequently fully agreed that it was beneficial to have someone close during the pandemic (42.2%), while those in the 42+ group were more likely to partially agree (27.7%). Younger individuals aged 18–25 also report high agreement levels—36.4% fully agreed, and 22.7% partially agreed. This aligns with studies indicating that middle-aged individuals are more likely to seek stability and emotional support during difficult times, possibly due to increased professional and family responsibilities, while younger individuals may prefer more flexible forms of support (Santos, Nogueira, 2019; Bryant, Sheldon, 2017).

In Poland, a higher percentage of respondents fully agreed that online dating

serves as a way to achieve closeness—49.1% fully agreed with this statement, while 25.9% partially agreed. The gender differences are smaller than in Brazil; women more frequently than men agreed with this statement—50.3% of women in Poland fully agreed that it is important to have someone close, compared to 47.7% of men. Partial agreement is also more common among women (29.0%) than men (22.1%). This may indicate that Polish women, similar to Brazilian women, place high importance on emotional relationships. However, the cultural norms in Poland may provide greater support for expressing such needs among women (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013; Hertlein, Stevenson, 2010).

A similar trend is observed in Poland, where older individuals are more likely to state that they use online dating to have someone close. In the 42+ age group, 47.2% fully agreed with this statement, while 28.3% partially agreed. In the 26–41 age group, 48.7% of respondents fully agreed with the statement, whereas among younger individuals (18–25 years), 28.6% fully agreed and 35.7% partially agreed. Older individuals in both countries may be more likely to use dating apps to seek closeness and emotional support, aligning with their needs for stability and security in later life stages (Sawada et al., 2018; Bryant, Sheldon, 2017).

The study results regarding falling in love online in Brazil and Poland differ by gender and age. In Brazil, the most common response was “no” (34.8%), although 33.5% of respondents reported that they had fallen in love online, showing an almost equal distribution between these options; 23.2% had no experience in this area, while 8.5% were uncertain about their feelings. Women more often reported a lack of experience (23.2%) and uncertainty about their feelings, which may result from a more complex approach to emotions in the context of online relationships, influenced

by cultural norms and responsibilities in the sphere of intimacy (Heilborn, Cabral, 2013). In contrast, men more frequently reported falling in love (41.2%), which may be explained by them having a more proactive approach to online dating, consistent with social norms that encourage male initiative in romantic contexts (Heilborn, 2006).

Age also influenced the responses of Brazilian respondents. Younger individuals aged 18–25 were more likely to report having fallen in love online (36.4%), indicating a greater openness to using technology to build emotional relationships. In the 26–41 age group, this percentage increased to 42.2%, which may relate to the need for emotional stability at this life stage. Meanwhile, older individuals (over 42 years old) more frequently partially agreed (27.7%), possibly due to greater concerns about safety and trust in online interactions (Fox, Warber, 2013; Santos, Nogueira, 2019).

In Poland, the majority of respondents (54.2%) reported that they had not fallen in love through online dating, while 18.5% stated they had done so, despite never having met their partner in person. Meanwhile, 17.5% were uncertain about their feelings, and 9.8% indicated they had no experience with falling in love online. Women were more likely than men to report not having fallen in love (57.1%), which may be attributed to a more traditional and cautious approach to building online relationships, reflecting a greater skepticism towards such interactions (Elphinston, Noller, 2011). Additionally, women generally require more time to undergo the process of falling in love (Pease, Pease, 2014, 2020). On the other hand, the men were slightly more likely to report having fallen in love online (19.6%), which may suggest that Polish men are more open to this type of relationship, although still in a more moderate manner than Brazilian men.

Table 3. If you date online, have you fallen in love with someone you haven't met in person?

	Brazil	Poland	Total
Not	34.8%	54.2%	42.8%
Yes	33.5%	18.5%	27.2%
I'm not sure about my feelings	8.5%	17.5%	12.3%
I have no experience in this area	23.2%	9.8%	17.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The analysis of the results related to falling in love online reveals significant differences associated with gender and age in the two countries. Women in Brazil were more likely than men to report a lack of experience (23.2%) and greater uncertainty about their feelings (8.5%). This may stem from social norms that impose a greater sense of responsibility and caution on women when building emotional relationships, as well as dating strategies that emphasize restraint and fitting into a more traditional model of femininity (Pease, Pease, 2020; Broverman et al., 1972). Conversely, men more frequently reported falling in love (41.2%), which aligns with traditional cultural norms promoting their activity and initiative in establishing relationships, including in the context of online dating. This proactive approach and assumption of initiative in this domain are also consistent with the traditional masculinity model (Deaux, Lewis, 1984; Heilborn, Cabral, 2013; Santos, Nogueira, 2019).

Age was also a significant factor that influenced the results among the Brazilian respondents. Younger individuals aged 18–25 were more likely to report falling in love online (36.4%), which may be attributed to their greater openness to technology and desire to explore new forms of relationships. In the 26–41 age group, this rose to 42.2%, suggesting that people in this age range seek

emotional stability and are more inclined to build relationships, even in the absence of physical contact. Meanwhile, older individuals, aged over 42, exhibited greater caution, with 27.7% only partially agreeing with the statement that they had fallen in love online. This may indicate greater concerns related to trust in the context of online interactions (Fox, Warber, 2013).

In Poland, the results differed from those in Brazil. The majority of respondents (54.2%) reported that they had not fallen in love online, indicating a more cautious approach by Poles toward building online relationships. Only 18.5% of individuals confirmed that they had fallen in love despite not having met in person, and 17.5% expressed uncertainty about their feelings. Polish women were more likely than men to report not having fallen in love (57.1% vs. 50.7%), which may be due to the same cautious approach to building relationships and engaging in online interactions as seen among Brazilian women (Elphinston, Noller, 2011). Polish men were more open to the idea of falling in love online (19.6%). However, the difference was smaller than in Brazil, suggesting a more egalitarian approach to online relationships between genders in Poland.

Regarding age, Polish respondents displayed a more even distribution of responses compared to Brazilians. Both younger individuals (18–25 years) and those in the 26–41 age group showed similar levels of falling in love online (around 17–19%). In the older group (42+ years), the percentage dropped to 14.5%, indicating a lower inclination to form online relationships at a later age, although this was not significantly different compared to the younger groups (Fox, Warber, 2013).

Comparing the two countries, it is evident that Poles were more likely to report not having fallen in love online or, conversely, being uncertain about their feelings, which may reflect a more pragmatic approach to online

relationships in Poland. On the other hand, Brazilians, despite a higher percentage lacking experience in online dating, were more likely to report falling in love, possibly due to their more open and warm approach to emotional relationships (Heilborn, 2006; Santos, Nogueira, 2019).

Conclusion and Summary

The analysis of online dating behaviors in Poland and Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals significant differences and similarities in motivations and preferences regarding conversation topics during dates. It is important to acknowledge that the results obtained, due to the type of sampling employed, do not allow for generalizations across the entire population. Nonetheless, these findings highlight the main issues and most common experiences of singles during the pandemic in both countries, thereby providing valuable insights in this context. Furthermore, the results and conclusions served as the basis for developing interviews with singles conducted in the second phase of the research, and their relevance in terms of validity and reliability of the tool used was found to be high. The differences uncovered in the quantitative analysis certainly merit further exploration and additional interpretations, which we hope to achieve by continuing the qualitative analysis derived from individual, unstructured interviews.

In Brazilian society, there is a strong emphasis on social interactions and emotional expression, which is reflected in their approach to online dating. Brazilians often perceive relationships and emotions as key elements of their social identity, promoting openness to falling in love, even during online dating (Heilborn, 2006). Cultural norms regarding openness in interpersonal relationships lead to online relationships being more accepted and taken seriously, which may explain the

higher rate of individuals falling in love online. Both Brazil and Poland are societies where individualistic tendencies clash with collectivist, traditional values, where social bonds and emotional closeness are crucial for individuals, particularly during the challenging experience of social isolation. In this context, online relationships become part of a larger network of social contacts, supporting individuals in building emotional stability. Online dating in Brazil more frequently leads to emotional engagement. In contrast, individuals in Poland may adopt a more skeptical approach to online relationships, influenced by a greater emphasis on privacy, autonomy, and a lack of pressure for close, emotional relationships (Czernecka, 2014).

Additionally, COVID impacted the mental health and behaviors of users of dating apps. Social isolation and increased stress levels undoubtedly contributed to heightened activity on dating platforms. A reduction in risky sexual behaviors, such as having multiple sexual partners, resulted from concerns about infection from COVID-19, indicating a more conscious approach to health and safety during the pandemic (Venegas-Vera et al., 2020; Ting, McLachlan, 2022; Pawlikowska-Gorzelańczyk et al., 2023).

In summarizing the analysis of online dating in Brazil and Poland, clear differences can be observed in the manifestations of femininity and masculinity. In Brazil, men are more likely to initiate online dates and prefer shorter forms of interaction, which aligns with the traditional model of masculinity that promotes agency, activity, and dominance (Bakan, 1966; Lubinski et al., 1983). Brazilian men view online dating as a means to quickly and directly achieve interpersonal goals, consistent with their instrumental approach to relationships, which also reflects a more stereotypical perspective on masculinity (Parsons, 1955). At the same time, their emotional availability and

openness appear to be greater than that of Polish men, indicating a process of androgynization. While women in Brazil also actively participate in online dating, they exhibit greater caution and selectivity. Both Polish and Brazilian women prefer longer dates that facilitate the development of deeper relationships and emotional bonds, which is characteristic of their interpersonal orientation and traditional model of femininity (Williams, Best, 1982). In Poland, both women and men generally approach online dating in a more egalitarian manner, with less differentiation in their responses. Polish men, while demonstrating initiative, often prefer longer meetings, suggesting a balance between agency and the pursuit of lasting bonds (Deaux, Lewis, 1984). The results indicate that social norms in Brazil, which support emotional expressiveness and activity when forming relationships, foster greater engagement in online dating, especially among men. In contrast, in Poland, a possibly stronger attachment to traditional values suggests both greater caution regarding online contacts and less pressure to live as a couple, alongside a higher acceptance of single life. 📧

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Randki online podczas izolacji społecznej – perspektywy singli z Polski i Brazylii podczas pandemii

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi raport z badań ilościowych przeprowadzonych w ramach projektu „Single w Polsce i Brazylii podczas izolacji społecznej – badanie międzynarodowe”. Badanie, które rozpoczęto w 2020 roku, miało na celu zrozumienie, z perspektywy płci, jak osoby samotne z Brazylii i Polski doświadczyły izolacji społecznej spowodowanej pandemią COVID-19. Udział w badaniu wzięli single obu płci. Badanie miało charakter eksploracyjny, z zastosowaniem strategii ilościowych, w tym kwestionariuszy jako narzędzi badawczych. W niniejszym artykule przedstawiamy analizę wybranych zagadnień dotyczących randek on-line podczas pandemii wśród Polaków i Brazylijczyków, uwzględniając częstotliwość randek, główne motywacje respondentów oraz doświadczenie zakochania się dzięki randkom on-line. Celem niniejszego tekstu jest ogólne przybliżenie problematyki randek online wśród singli, przedstawienie charakterystyki badanej próby, zaprezentowanie wybranych opinii kobiet i mężczyzn biorących udział w badaniu na temat ich udziału w randkach online w okresie trwania pandemii. Zależało nam szczególnie na przedstawieniu różnic motywacji do podejmowania aktywności na rzecz randek online i odniesieniu tego do społecznych i kulturowych modeli kobiecości i męskości.

Słowa kluczowe: single, życie singli, pandemia, covid-19, społeczna izolacja, randki, randki online, związki, samotność, życie w pojedynkę.