


**Julita Czernecka\***

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8592-8980>

## WAYS OF “SHOWING LOVE” IN AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN’S AND MEN’S INTERACTIONS

**Abstract.** The aim of the article is to present the results of qualitative research into the ways women and men show love in heterosexual relationships and to indicate gender similarities and differences in this area. The analysis is based on references to traditional and modern models of femininity and masculinity. The respondents’ opinions were divided into two main areas – widely defined communication (gestures of tenderness, emotional support, behavior during misunderstandings) and specific activities (helping perform household duties or other activities for the partner, buying gifts, organizing free time, initiating sex). The analysis of the empirical material showed the interpenetration of patriarchal and modern models of femininity and masculinity in how women and men behave lovingly towards their partners. Both men and women draw inspiration from the repertoire of behaviors, as well as from traditional masculinity and femininity, evolving towards a modern model of femininity and masculinity that becomes more androgynous. In this way, they definitely expand the ways they show love, combining the more emotional, feminine ways with the more active, more traditionally “masculine” ones.

**Keywords:** love, intimate relationship, erotic love, couple, heterosexual relationship, romantic relationship.

### 1. Problem statement, research objectives, and methodology

Intimate, loving relationships have been the subject of social science reflection for many decades. At the center of interest are topics concerning the way people proceed “from falling in love to breaking up”, i.e., among other things, the social

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\* PhD, Department of Sociology of Social Structures and Changes, Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz, ul. Rewolucji 1905 r. 41/43, 90-214 Łódź, e-mail: [julita.czernecka@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:julita.czernecka@uni.lodz.pl)

determinants of partner selection (Blackwell, Lichter 2000; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013; Przybył 2017; Kalinowska 2018), the process and dynamics of love relationships (Blood, Wolfie 1960; Kwak 2014; Bauman 2005; Giddens 2006; Szukalski 2013; Schmidt 2015) and the reasons for their breakdown (Illouz 2016; Paprzycka, Mianowska 2019). Strongly rooted in these considerations is the concept of individuation, which makes the individual responsible for his or her life, and thus for the quality of his or her love relationship and whether it will end in success or failure. Life satisfaction becomes a “task to be done”, and it becomes a person’s duty to improve himself and his relationships with others, transcend his own limitations, and overcome all kinds of barriers that prevent self-fulfillment, including in intimate relationships, which have also become relationships of choice (Bauman 1996: 5–40).

The functioning of modern relationships is based largely on the self-awareness of our thoughts and feelings about our partner, behaving accordingly, and sharing them with our partner. It is an intermingling of self-reflection and insights into the relationship and how we function in it (Jamieson 2008: 115–142). This can be seen in Anthony Giddens’ concept of a relationship based on a “pure relationship” and consensual love. A pure relationship is when individuals enter into a relationship for its own sake, that is, for what each can get out of a lasting bond with the other. It lasts only until both sides take enough satisfaction from it to want to maintain it (Giddens 2006). Concurrent love is an active, conditional love, and as such, it is at odds with the romantic vision of “only” and “forever”. It assumes an equality of exchange of feelings between partners. A “pure” relationship is sustained by each party’s recognition that he or she benefits enough from it to want it to continue, and this is possible thanks to the commitment to the relationship. In order to have a shared history, Giddens says, you must “give yourself” to the other person; that is, you must assure them by word and deed that the relationship can last indefinitely. The relationship needs commitment for it to last (Giddens 2006). Thus, if both partners consider the relationship happy and worth “investing” their time and resources in, it becomes problematic for them to constantly construct their own relationship and take steps to maintain it.

Love in Western societies is often identified with emotional expression, which can be studied at the level of social facts. It has different levels of intensity and is largely constructed, defined, and understood through cultural and social contexts. It is a derived emotion. For example, according to the concept of American psychologist Robert Plutchik, love results from the combination of two emotions – joy and trust (Plutchik 1980, as cited in: Pałowska 2013: 14). However, sociology – although it attempts to “disenchant love”, analyzing it as a phenomenon, the discourse produced about it, what determines and changes it – does not create a definition of love itself. The lack of an unequivocal, clear definition makes it difficult to operationalize the concept and subject it to analysis and reflection.

An effort to define this concept was made by Krzysztof Konecki, who writes: “Love [...] is a sustained and extremely intense activity, which [...] can be strictly interactional, imaginatively interactional, or relate mentally and relationally to an object external to the subject with which it wants to unite” (Konecki 2003: 10). Since sociology does not have a definition of love that is useful for this analysis, I will refer to the three-factor concept of love by Robert Sternberg, a psychologist who defines it by referring to three dimensions: intimacy, passion, and commitment (Wojciszke 2010: 10–22). Intimacy is closeness, all positive feelings such as experiencing happiness in the presence of a partner and because of him or her, desiring his or her well-being, understanding each other, sharing experiences, receiving emotional support, and exchanging information of an intimate nature. The emotions that make up intimacy are largely the result of communication between partners and understanding each other’s needs. The second component of love is passion, which is associated with experiencing emotions such as lust, sexual excitement, longing for a loved one, jealousy, and anxiety. These states are accompanied by the desire to be in close physical contact with the other person. The third dimension is commitment to maintaining the relationship, i.e., taking various actions to sustain the relationship and make it satisfying (Sternberg 1986).

In these reflections, love is analyzed through the context of interpersonal interactions that occur between a man and a woman (I also focus on the dimension of heteronormative relationships) who are in a love-like relationship. In the currents of humanistic sociology, such as symbolic interactionism or Erving Goffman’s (2006) dramaturgical perspective, the study of the individual refers to his functioning in cultural and social dimensions. It assumes his self-reflexivity and self-awareness, in which communication with others takes place through gestures and symbols that produce intersubjective meaning in a mutual dialogue. As Katarzyna Kalinowska writes, sociologists are more concerned with

sentiment, which requires socialization, implies internalization of a cultural pattern; it is an emotional attitude relating to a certain value, and it is a component of objective, supra-individual cultural systems, rather than an emotion, which is a disorganized experience and a biopsychic aspect of individuals. Thus, the emotion of interest to sociologists studying interactions originates in the conscious interpretation of meanings and does not occur outside the context of meaningful action (Kalinowska 2018: 60).

Thus, when subjecting love to reflection in terms of understanding sociology, it is analyzed through empirical facts described by the respondents, such as behaviors and gestures that testify to love towards their partner; love is “produced” in the process of interaction.

Interaction theories indicate that people who live together and function in one space-time have direct access to the other person’s feelings and intentions; in the case of my research – their partners. They may not always need a symbolic system to communicate effectively with their partner. In general, however, the analyses carried out in this article will refer mainly to what is symbolic, subject to

interpretation as “meaningful”, such as spoken words, gestures, and other actions that are performed “for the benefit” of the partner. Interactions are, according to Goffman, directed by culture; individuals are actors playing specific roles within a specific context of norms, values, and symbols that help them play the role. The individual arouses love both in himself and in the partner of the “love performance”, accompanied by certain behavior, facial expressions, and gestures that are assigned to the given role of a “love relationship partner”. All these aspects are primarily of importance in direct face-to-face interaction – the transmission and reading of verbal and non-verbal messages (Goffman 2008: 11).

However, the main axis of analysis will be the concept of cultural gender and reference to models of femininity and masculinity (patriarchal and modern). The theorists of this orientation do not narrow down the importance of the “symbolic order” for the formation of femininity and masculinity to merely capturing socio-cultural gender. It primarily relates to how they emerge in the course of social interactions and involves everyday social practices that create and reproduce socio-cultural gender (Foster 1999: 431–440). In this context, it is shaped in the course of social interactions and becomes an attribute of a given interaction or situation, which is always characterized by “gender” (West, Zimmerman 1991: 121–130).

Despite the socio-cultural transformation that has been taking place for many decades in modern societies, including Western societies, and despite the individualization, we must still deal with strongly rooted patriarchal concepts. They make a dichotomous division of personality traits and social roles into those that are “typically feminine” and “typically masculine”, building social concepts of femininity and masculinity. In the patriarchal model, women are generally credited with being more expressive and warm in their relationships with others (Broverman et al. 1972: 60–65; Lubinski et al. 1983: 435–437), taking community action, being able to make sacrifices, helping others (Bakan 1966), interpersonal orientation, building closeness and understanding with others, and understanding them, giving them support, being gentle, and tender, caring about others’ feelings, and being able to understand others (Tannen 1999). They are also submissive, passive, dependent on others, indecisive and prone to obedience (Brannon 2002, as cited in: Wojciszke 2003; Pankowska 2005).

In turn, the model “traditional” masculine traits are considered to be oriented towards action and activity (Bakan 1966). They also include instrumentality (Parsons, Bales 1955), competence (Broverman et al. 1972), dominance (Lubinski et al. 1983), an attitude of maintaining superiority over others (Tannen 1999), independence, decisiveness, dependability, self-confidence, a sense of leadership, courage, strength, vehemence, and a tendency to dominate (Deaux, Lewis 1984, as cited in: Mandal 2000; Brannon 2002, as cited in: Wojciszke 2003). Pankowska (2005) also noted the ambitious pursuit of goals, self-reliance, rationality, the ability to think logically, restraint and self-control, and efficiency in action. On the other hand, nowadays, we must contend with a modern model of

femininity and masculinity, which rejects gender dualism. As Krzysztof Arcimowicz wrote, “the concept of specialization, that is, the division of social roles by gender, is replaced by the concept of complementarity and androgyny” (Arcimowicz 2003: 56). In modern gender models, the boundaries of femininity and masculinity are fluid and changeable, with many varieties of femininity and masculinity emerging from which individuals can choose the ones that suit them best.

The considerations in this text are part of the current of reflecting on the intimate life of the couple, and love as an emotion is “a certain reality that exists in interactions, communicating man with the world and people with each other” (Kalinowska 2018: 36). The subject of my interest became the ways of showing love to a partner/partner in everyday interactions, with a particular focus on the differences between men and women. I was primarily interested in what the subjects themselves talk about, how they talk about what happens in the relationship, what daily rituals they have as a “couple”, and how they construct and understand “expressions of love”.

Analysis of the material took place *in vivo*; coding was open-ended and individual statements were given labels, which consequently became theoretical codes in the nature of sensitizing concepts. Some of these labels became categories that I subjected to “saturation”, referring to specific empirical references, i.e., gestures, situations, described events, and spoken words/sentences. For me, the most relevant aspects are the differences that emerge between men and women because of the way they talk about interactions with their partner. I am interested in whether women show love in a more emotional way, thus fitting more strongly into patriarchal patterns of femininity. And will men prefer more task-oriented and less emotional expressions of love? Will the ways that both sexes show love be more differentiated, indicative of the tendencies revealed in modern cultural gender models of women and men?

The analyzed empirical material comes from two qualitative research projects. Within the framework of the first study – “The social definition of love and the role it plays in the persistence of a heterosexual intimate relationship” – eight focus group interviews (FGIs) were conducted separately with women and men, and the following age ranges were determined based on the life cycle (Dobrowolska 1992): 19–25 years old, 26–37 years old, 38–55 years old, and over 55 years old. All study participants had experience of an intimate relationship of at least two years. Most were in long-term, stable partnerships or marriages (the length of the relationship was proportional to the age of the participants and lasted from 2 to 40 years). It is noteworthy, however, that in proportion to age, most of the survey participants were in relationships with “long” tenure. The respondents had similar economic status and were university or high school graduates. The survey was conducted in 2018.

The second source of empirical data was a survey conducted as part of the “How do Poles love?” project, carried out by the Market and Opinion Research

Agency on behalf of Sympatia.pl (the biggest dating website in Poland) in late 2018 and early 2019. The study included FGIs conducted online (BBD – Bulletin Board Discussion online), and the formula of this study allowed all participants to comment on the threads and elicit responses based on individual tasks. This study included 20 heterosexuals aged 18–55 who were married or cohabitating, with different places of residence and different levels of education. As qualitative data analysis was used, it does not give a complete picture of the subject of the study, and the purposive sampling does not allow for generalizations about the conclusions. The collected material only allows for an exploration of the practices of everyday life in sustaining an intimate relationship in sociological terms, and it can inspire in-depth research in this field.

## **2. “The ways men and women show love” in global studies**

Research, including gender analyses, on how partners show love is scant. The vast majority of studies focused on whether men and women think about or experience love differently. The literature suggests that men and women generally experience love in similar ways (Fehr 2006: 230–235), although there are some consistent differences. For example, men and women tend to place different importance on the emotional and sexual aspects of romantic love, causing women to value the emotional aspects more than the sexual ones, while men show the opposite pattern (Schmitt et al. 2009: 830–835). Men tend to fall in love more quickly (Brantley et al. 2002: 614) and have more romantic views of love than women (Sprecher, Metts 1999: 840–845). However, much less is known about the ways in which men and women show and express emotions. One of the first empirical studies in this area was that of David Buss (1988), who asked respondents to say how same-sex and opposite-sex people show love.

Some differences were noticeable in this study. Men were four times more likely to equate sex with showing love, and they were also more likely to consider offering their partners different types of resources. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to forgive their partner’s infidelity.

An inspiring study was conducted by Elizabeth Schoenfeld, Carrie Bredow, and Ted Huston (2012), who investigated the relationship between love and ways of behaving toward a partner. They found that the more women loved their partners, the less antagonistic they were with them. Men’s love was more closely related to the way they organize their leisure time – the more in love they were with their partners, the more time they spent engaging in relationship issues. The more in love they were with their partners, the more often they did household chores together with their partners (there was no such relationship for women). It turned out that sex was also an important way of showing love for men.

Another study, by Daniel Weigel and Deborah Ballard-Reisch (1999), reviewed how often partners behaved positively toward their spouse, whether they communicated openly, assured their partner of their commitment, performed various instrumental tasks, and interacted with family and friends. They showed that wives' love was related to all five aspects, while husbands' love was only directly related to assured commitment to the relationship. In contrast, other studies did not indicate any major differences between the sexes. In these studies, people were asked to indicate the ways that they prefer to show and receive love (Perrin et al. 2011).

Researchers have also assessed relationships between partners in close love relationships by analyzing factors that promote relationship persistence. One of the most significant areas is mutual communication, which refers to the sphere of intimacy, daily verbal and non-verbal communication, and ways of dealing with conflicts (Janicka 2008: 41). Reciprocity in communication refers to giving each other information, discussing relationship issues and daily life, and other important aspects that are important to the people in the couple. Conversations should be frank and open and relate to both the facts discussed and their feelings (Hahlweg 1996, as cited in: Janicka 2008: 41–48).

The second area of importance for couples is intimacy, understood as

a state of feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and gestures, which is produced under favorable conditions between people who trust each other to such an extent that, for the duration of their contact, they remove the usual barriers and safeguards used in social life, and act and express themselves openly without manipulation (Bieńko 2013: 28).

The last important dimension, on the other hand, is argumentative behavior, which refers to communicating or leveling negative verbal messages and nonverbal behavior to each other (Hahlweg 1996, as cited in: Janicka 2008: 41–48). Research shows that it is more beneficial for the longevity of a relationship to avoid, minimize, or even suppress negative, antagonistic behaviors than to simply be nice to a partner (Caughlin, Huston 2006, as cited in: Schoenfeld et al. 2012: 1398).

The idea has become widespread that women have better communication skills, including those for expressing and showing love. According to Francesca Cancian, this feminized perspective leads us to believe that it is then up to men to “make themselves more like” women in this context, so that the relationship between them becomes more close, intimate, and lasting (Cancian 1986: 692).

Women and men are still socially “rewarded” for conforming to socially imposed roles and expectations related to their gender, and gendered socialization often continues to uphold these “typically masculine” traits in boys and “typically feminine” ones in girls. The consequence of this process will be learning to function emotionally in an intimate relationship, again in accordance with this social conditioning. Women will strive to reveal their emotions and provide more support and assistance, while men will reveal more instrumental behavior (Cancian 1986; Eagly 1987; Wood, Inman 1993).

### 3. Similarities and differences in how men and women display affection

For sociological analysis, small events or “small gestures” are often significant (Silverman 2007: 11). When studying relationships in a couple, the interactions of the two people who are in a loving relationship allow us to understand their essence. Verbal and non-verbal communication play a key role in constructing an emotional bond, revealed both at the linguistic level and in the dimension of touch, closeness, and “being together” constitute a social bond, being a “couple”. The following analysis is not strictly an interaction-based analysis, since the study is based not on the observations and behaviors of a couple in their relationship with each other, but only traces these interactions based on the statements of the men and women surveyed. In other words, it is only a “passive” reproduction of the interactions in question.

### 4. “Kisses” and “cups of tea” – gestures of love

Touch is one of the first and most important ways to establish, build, and maintain social contact (Leathers 2007: 139–150). “Touch and close proximity signal a desire for closeness and immediacy, although the physical act of touching may require more physical proximity than is appropriate in a public place” (Leathers 2007: 148–149). Spatial proximity also communicates certain meanings to us, especially those of an intimate, extremely close sphere. “Touch has important communicative functions; namely, it can be a supportive function, which is related to the fact that touch is an effective means of emotional communication. [...] It can also communicate ‘belongingness’, i.e., that two people [...] like each other very much” (Konecki 2008: 79–80) and/or love each other.

And for women and men, everyday gestures such as smiling, “swooning”, the “fleeting” touching of a partner, and hugging him or her were extremely important when “realizing” love through these interactions. The semantics of touch are also different types of messages. Women most often mentioned ritual touches, which communicate the meanings of greeting and goodbye (cf. Leathers 2007: 154). They were also convinced that they were much more meaningful to them than to men – they unite the relationship in the daily order of its functioning: “Such small gestures – for greeting, a kiss, or hugging, approaching and touching him, holding his hand. [...] For example, when he’s sitting at the computer, I like to approach and embrace him, give him a kiss. I know he’s busy, that he’s doing something there, but just for a moment, I’ll approach him. I try not to disturb him, but these are the small gestures we have” [FGI/W19-25/2];<sup>1</sup> “It’s this closeness that is there all

<sup>1</sup> FGI – Focus Group Interview, W – Women, M – Man, 18–25, 26–37, 38–55, 55+ age group, 1–9 – number of the respondent.



the time throughout the day. Where you wake up in the morning, you greet each other with a kiss, go out and say goodbye with a kiss again, when everyone goes to work, during the day we call each other, I ask what you are doing, where you are” [FGI/W26-37/6]; “Closeness is when we greet each other with a kiss or a hug. We say, ‘What’s up?’ Pat each other on the back” [FGI/M26-37/2].

One of the expressions of care that the women also spoke of – this time mentioning their partners’ behaviors toward them – were situations in which they felt sick, indisposed, overtired, or were having a “hard time” at work. Examples of such behaviors include covering them with a blanket, making them a cup of tea, giving them medicine, or nursing them after an operation. These are positive touches that communicate support, feelings, and understanding the other person in a particular situation. According to the female respondents, this is also related to men’s “task-oriented” approach, as they actually show certain activities, feel needed and, as one respondent put it, are more sensitive to the needs of their female partners than is the case on a daily basis. Another way of showing love is to make their partner feel special, for example, during social gatherings, taking care of their partner, embracing her, giving her food and drink, and taking care of her physical comfort. According to the women, such behaviors testified that their relationship was important, that they felt “important”, “the only one” – that they were appreciated by their partner.

Men, on the other hand, when talking about themselves, also pointed out that gestures such as hugs and kisses are important to them, and through them, they show love and commitment to their partners. They referred to this as “little things”, “little signs of love”, which are meant to communicate their affection, to reassure their partner of it: “The constant elements are that you go up and give someone a kiss, for me, it’s a simple thing, but it shows attachment” [FGI/M19-25/3]; “I show through small gestures; I’ll hug, I’ll kiss, the fact that you say you love them” [FGI/M19-25/4]; “Hug, give a kiss. These are the kind of things that a lot of people have in them, you know, there after a number of years” [FGI/M38-55/4]; “You cover her with a blanket because she feels weak that she doesn’t have the strength anymore and she’s falling asleep, or you do something for her and say every once in a while, I don’t say eight times an hour, but you say a very sincere ‘I love you’, and that’s the moment [...]. These small, nice gestures are also very important; they make the whole thing. Love” [FGI/M38-55/5].

For the women, however, the themes of showing care through affectionate gestures and communicating their feelings to their partner in this way appeared more often – which is most likely due to the fact that women and men have different socialization processes. Biologically, too, women have nearly ten times more sensitive skin than men, and perhaps for this reason, too, touch is a more important form of communicating love for them than it is for men (Pease, Pease 2012: 129). These opinions were most often shared by women in the two extreme age groups, i.e., the youngest and oldest respondents. Perhaps this is because young women

are only just building a relationship, generally without children yet, and can put their partner at the center of their interests and activities. These are also “young” relationships with only a few years of experience.

On the other hand, in relationships that have lasted for several decades, older women emphasized that they know their partner “inside out” and often communicate “without words”, allowing them to identify these needs faster. Also, due to age and various health factors, the manifestation of care is more obvious to them. Tenderness in gestures and hugs become an expression of love then, as they build intimacy to a greater extent than rapprochements of a sexual nature, which, according to the women surveyed, lose intensity at this age.

As for communicating love through “small gestures”, for the men, those in the youngest age and middle-aged groups were the most likely to speak out. Perhaps this is due to when they were socialized – the older generation was not taught to communicate openly about their emotions. It is easier for the generation of 20-, 30-, or 40-year-olds to talk about it because the awareness of men displaying their feelings, and the social permission to do so, came relatively recently. It was not experienced by those who grew up in the middle of the last century and who have a more strongly socialized traditional model of masculinity, in which showing feelings in this way was not socially promoted.

## 5. “Exploring the body map” – gestures of passion

Another aspect mentioned by the respondents was the erotic sphere. The dimension of sexual but also sensual intimacy – generally stereotypically more often attributed to men – was important to both sexes, although in slightly different contexts. Regardless of the length of the relationship, men were more likely to raise the issue of creating a loving atmosphere by adoring their female partners, “hitting on” them, flirting with them, and inviting them on dates. This courting of wives and “girlfriends” (i.e., permanent partners) was extremely important in producing love and sustaining it: “In my opinion, this idea of picking each other up, this idea of relieving tension, preserving it only not in the short term, only for the first months or years. This is an unambiguous element for me personally, present in everyday life. I would say that adoring them, picking them up [...] works great. Starting from the first date anew, a surprise on the town. It takes energy and motivation” [FGI/M26-37/6].

They also touched on the topic of differences in interactions as they relate to how erotic interest is communicated to long-term partners compared to those described as “adventures”, “short romances”, and “infatuations”. With infatuations, sex is more mechanical, based on “primal instincts”. It is “one-dimensional”, based on short-term excitement, infatuation, and satisfying one’s own needs. In the case of long-term partners, sex has a different “quality”, based on love and attachment.

It requires satisfying the beloved’s needs first, followed by one’s own. Men spoke in an extremely sensual way about interactions with their beloved woman, and sex became multidimensional, lined with emotions and intimacy, and it involved “being together”. “Exploring the map” of each others’ bodies has nothing to do with bachelor adventures: “A short period of time, but it can be a fascinating journey, I think, into the world of the senses and such getting to know yourself much more deeply, not just your partner. That’s the excitement, which of course [...] mellows a bit over time, but it’s still there” [FGI/M55+/2].

Women, on the other hand, were more likely not to talk explicitly about the importance of intimate contact per se. Instead, they placed more importance on the communication process itself with their partner. It was important that they could tell “everything” to their partner about their sexual fantasies or needs. And the exchange of information was extremely valuable in their opinion, the fact that this is a sphere that can and should be discussed as with other topics. In their opinion, a way of showing love is also receiving compliments and assurances of love from their partners: “Talking about some of their sexual fantasies, for example, not necessarily immediately about *50 Shades of Grey*” [FGI/W19-25/3]; “During sex, talking to each other about feelings with the other person [...] that I love you, you’re wonderful, some words like that” [FGI/W19-25/1]; “[I want to hear] ‘you look nice’, and as if he thinks I look nice, he says ‘you look nice’” [FGI/W19-25/5]. Women’s reflections also included observations that men and women show each other that they are attracted to each other in a different way: “I go up to him and put my hand on his face and hug him, and he comes over and pats me on the butt. He tells me lots of compliments; he’s quite effusive” [FGI/W38-55/2]. This “pat on the butt” is the kind of “entertainment” touch that communicates attachment, “courtship”, and confirmation that the partner is attractive to the man in a playful way.

The erotic sphere and the initiation of sexual behavior may be related more to the way men show love than is the case with women. Perhaps men are more likely to believe that sex is crucial to building intimacy. Sexual intimacy is a very intimate area of a couple’s functioning and probably, for many men, one of the few times they are willing to openly reveal their feelings to their partner – showing their “true self”, stripped of many “social masks”. And perhaps, for this reason, men are more likely than women to equate sex with showing affectionate love to a partner.

## **6. “I’ll do it for you, darling” – gestures of helping**

Both women and men pointed to various activities undertaken on behalf of their partner as “proof” of love. Perhaps the household tasks themselves are not strictly gestures of “producing love”. However, they are extremely relevant in the context discussed here, especially given the differences in this area between men and women. It turns out that activities such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, ironing,

washing floors or windows, or other physical actions done for the benefit of the other person are often seen as demonstrating commitment to the relationship and the attentiveness of the partner. And especially for men, they are seen as “evidence” and “gestures” of love.

Most often, in the context of “relieving” their partner of her duties or making it easier for her to do them, men spoke in this way: “My partner has a difficult time at work; she works a lot of overtime. Then I try to clean at home, make breakfast in the morning, go to the store to buy groceries. They are such small things that we don’t have to talk about it, we don’t have to mention it, but I know that she sees it somewhere and appreciates that I do certain things. I do it for the sake of our life together, for the sake of what we have in common” [FGI/M26-37/7]; “I go out in the morning to get rolls and leave them on the doorknob” [FGI/M38-55/6]. This sphere of household chores was probably emphasized in the men’s statements as a way of showing love to their partners more often than in the women’s because this area is still more often attributed to women. Perhaps men consider it relevant and important because it also breaks the perception of traditional masculinity. After all, the statements included comments precisely about “taking care of”, “doing something for female partners”, and “helping them”. Perhaps in this way, by performing certain tasks and offering practical help, they express concern towards their female partner.

Additionally, when talking about ways in which their partners express love, the women often referred to how men help them, simply by doing some things “for them”, to please them, and let them know that they are loved and supported by them: “It’s all about the little, small things. You come and have your shopping ready; you don’t have to do it anymore” [FGI/W19-25/3]; “Washed dishes. Well, I will get back later today and have fresh pasta cooked at home for soup” [FGI/W19-25/1]. The women also spoke of being relieved of tasks that are traditionally perceived as “typically” male, such as washing the car, filling it up with petrol, or changing the tires, as well as carrying heavy groceries or other items, for example: “Namely, when we moved in together, we were not yet married at the time, and he carried the mattress from Ikea to the third floor. I then felt that this was the man for me, it was then such a wow moment. We could have paid someone. It wasn’t that I didn’t have someone to bring the mattress to me. It was just that he did it for us. And then it really was such a confirmation for me, and also for him, of how important this relationship is” [FGI/W26-37/5].

However, while the women did appreciate this dimension of help, they generally do not identify it as an “expression of love”. Thus, washing a car will be seen by a man as a sign of love, but the woman will only see it as useful. Anyway, in the self-reflections of the men themselves, a similar observation also appears: “A man is enough, in my opinion, and material expressions of this love – sex or dinner. An example of this is how a woman asked her husband if he could do something nice

for her one day. Well, he washed her car. For a guy, for me, that would be extra; I would be happy. But a woman doesn't expect that” [FGI/M55+/3].

In their statements, the women treated this area of work at home quite differently. For some, it was something to be taken for granted, due to the more traditional division of household chores. For others, it was something that partners should appreciate. But they should not pretend that it is a gesture that “produces” or “sustains” love. Here is one such statement:

I clean up after him, do the laundry, he comes home at 8 p.m. sits down and eats and puts his plate away saying, ‘thank you’. I don't rebel against this because, as we said earlier about some shared values, we have a more traditional relationship, even though I go out to work. I get home much earlier than he does. That's why I take care of most things around the house. It suits us both. We have no problem with it. I know that he appreciates it, that I do many of these things simply for him [FGI/W37-55/3].

Interestingly, it was the men who were more likely to perceive help from their female partners in the area of domestic affairs: “I come to her, and she tells me, I cooked this for you, and I say, well, cool” [FGI/M19-25/6]; “I really appreciate small gestures. Once in a while, my girlfriend will bake me something. I appreciate it very much. So, on her own initiative, that is. If I ask, she will bake too, but [when] I don't have to ask, I am positively surprised” [FGI/M19-25/6]. These surveys involved people with secondary and higher education, generally from urban areas, so, they are more likely to claim an egalitarian distribution of household duties. It can be assumed that the survey participants were aware that women “may” but no longer “have to” be more active than men in this area.

## **7. “Flowers, chocolates and candlelight dinners” – gift-giving gestures**

A way to show love – in the opinion of respondents – is also to give gifts to a loved one, without a reason, as a token of affection or love, behind which is the desire to arouse positive emotions in the partner, to make him/her happy. Men were more often attributed to this traditional way of expressing their feelings to their partner (regardless of the gender of the respondents), e.g., buying flowers, chocolates or other gifts: “Yes, flowers, of course, but I'm more attracted by the fact that I know it will make someone happy; it's more calculating than an impulse of the heart” [FGI/M55+/4]; “When I'm walking down the street, and I see a flower shop, I'll just go in and buy flowers. It will be nice for her, I'll feel cool” [FGI/M19-25/6]; “For me, it was romantic that my emotional troglodyte, when he bought me a gift, he hid it under my pillow. I slipped my hand in and found it. This was a manifestation of romance, so unusual and surprising” [FGI/W38-55/5].

However, in the men's statements, there was also information that their partners also buy gifts for them, e.g., candy, favorite foods, or games: “It's Children's Day.

I'm sitting at home, my girlfriend comes, a Happy Meal on the table, thank you, no questions asked, it's lovely" [FGI/M26-37/2]; "I buy my husband sweets. He loves sweets so much. It's automatic to me after so many years – I'm in the store and I'll think, yes, well he'd probably be happy if I brought something home with me" [FGI/W26-37/2]. The cultural conditioning associated with the fact that it is more often men who "should" give gifts to their female partners and solicit their favor (not only during the courtship phase) predisposes them to express their love by investing time and resources in the relationship to prove to their loved one that they are capable of providing material security for them, and this is perhaps revealed in such symbolic gestures more often in men than in women (cf. Buss 1988). However, it can be inferred from observations of everyday life that women also increasingly offer their partners gifts, including unexpected ones, without any reason, as "tokens of love". The only difference is that social expectations of men in this regard are still stronger.

The gestures of "gifting" your loved one with impressions, candlelight dinners arranged by yourself, a nice evening at home or outside, going out together to the cinema, theater or concert, or any other way of spending time together as a "surprise" for your partner/partner also became an interesting area of analysis. First of all, it is organizing for the other person a romantic "candlelight dinner" preparing at home or arranged in a restaurant: "These are literally some small things. We put the kids to bed and suddenly my wife says to me, come downstairs, and there are candles or salad, now we have time for ourselves, let's talk. And this is also cool such a nice surprise, because I did not expect this" [FGI/M38-55/6]. In the opinions of both men and women, it was noticeable that it does not matter which partner organizes leisure time, and that it happens alternately: "I try to make such a surprise, to plan, here I buy tickets, children to grandma, here I will leave work earlier, and then listen we go to the cinema today and I have a surprise for you. I do that, but my husband also does that, it's cool [...], not planning, just such surprising each other" [FGI/K26-37/6]. It seems to confirm the thesis that the love that men show was more closely related to the way they organize their leisure time. Men who declared that they loved their wives spent more of their leisure time engaging in activities focused on "us" as a couple and those that involved women (cf. Schoenfeld et al. 2012).

## **8. "I love you" – communicating love**

Building attachment and emotional bonding are also produced during verbal communication. The participants paid a lot of attention to this area, which seems obvious because, in relationships where there is a feeling of love, this sphere of communication is also one of the key ones. Here there were aspects of simply saying "I love you", "you are important to me", but also the issue of empathy and the ability to communicate "without words", and the ability to listen to a partner, and to comfort them and lift their spirits.

Certainly, there were differences in describing the verbal interaction between men and women. Interestingly, the men spoke more often about this area of verbal communication and the resulting differences and misunderstandings. They pointed out that they are more open to it than they are to showing love directly, declaring it, and saying the words “I love you” out loud or talking about their feelings: “My partner is very effusive when it comes to expressing her feelings. She talks about them a lot, likes to talk about them and express them verbally” [BBD/M1].<sup>2</sup>

We both like to talk about love; of course, my wife does it more often. Sometimes it overwhelms me, but I tell her, and she understands [...]. Sometimes she says she loves too often, or when we don't see each other for a short time, a few days, she says she misses you. This is very nice and makes me happy, but it doesn't make me miss her really. It happens that she doesn't notice the lack of mood for such conversations. She just wants to talk about romantic things here and now, and this is not necessarily the right time [BBD/M2].

A man will not always say ‘I love you’. It's much easier to express how you feel about the woman you love in a different way. A man who is in love will always stand by his woman and defend her from any unpleasantness if necessary. He will support her in any situation, and will always take into account what she has to say. So, a man is more likely to show love with actions, and a woman is more likely to show love with words, but with actions too [BBD/M5].

These statements show that men cultivate closeness and intimacy in their relationships more through participating in joint activities than in the way they communicate verbally with their partner (cf. Fehr 2006).

However, they themselves valued receiving such emotional support from their female partners: “It's support when there's a problem there. Sit down, let's talk, I'll try to help you. It's also nice that she wants to help me. I don't have to fight it myself. There's probably a lot of it, but I'll be honest, I don't pay attention. Now I'm just starting to think about how important it is” [FGI/M38-55/6]. On the other hand, they admitted that their female partners have a need to “talk it out”, to be listened to, and it comes with difficulty to them: “When a spouse has a problem, she comes, and she will say her thing for half an hour or so [...]. I mean, you know what, listening and hearing are different subjects, but sometimes just listening. And don't say a fucking thing, just listen. For guys it's quite difficult, I think. [...] That is, to talk, listen, and let yourself be talked out” [FGI/M38-55/3]. In the men's statements, it was possible to see a duality, a contradiction of statements. On the one hand, they said that: “Often a woman does not expect a solution, but to be listened to. Don't feel like it? You need to break up” [FGI/M38-55/4]. On the other hand, there were statements such as: “Men prefer to give some concrete help, it is more difficult for us to listen to stories and problems for many hours” [FGI/M38-55/2]. It's apparent that many of them feel uncomfortable in this way of showing love, i.e., through listening and talking. Perhaps society's feminized view of love overlooks, underestimates, or misses the more masculine orientation

<sup>2</sup> BBD/M1 – Bulletin Board Discussion online; M – Man, W – Women, 1 – number of respondent.

to the more active expressions of love that men prefer (cf. Noller 1996). Perhaps this, as well as the way female partners behave and want to satisfy their needs in this area, is causing men, willingly or not, to develop the competence to show love in the direction that is more stereotypically perceived as “feminine”.

It is also confirmed by the women’s comments. When talking about their partners, they appreciated their efforts in this area of communication – being empathic, empathizing with their situation, seeing some situations “through her eyes”: “It’s a concern for me that he allows me when I’m mega upset to calm down, when I’ve hit rock bottom he always motivates me, and it’s his concern for me that is the most important, actually” [FGI/W19-25/5]; “In general, as I say that I’m having a hard time writing my master’s thesis, and he says it will be fine. I know for sure it will be fine one day, but once he says it will be fine, it’s a little better” [FGI/W19-25/3]; “Talking constructively to me, backing it up with an example, or putting myself in the situation I’m in now: look I used to have that too and I got out of it. So that’s a good motivator, actually. It’s also caring for the other person” [FGI/W19-25/5].

The women and men interpreted the various aspects related to verbal communication very similarly. What was important to them, above all, was a thorough knowledge of the other person, his beliefs, values, and the way he thinks about himself and others, which sometimes made it possible to communicate without words: “It is understanding without words, that you already guess what the other person might be thinking. There is no need to ask everything. Maybe also if the other person reacts emotionally, to understand that the fact that complains about us, it doesn’t mean that something we did just is a reaction to something else, not that something happened that she complained” [FGI/M26-37/4].

Similarity, regardless of gender, was also about trying to be sincere or “real” in this communication with a partner. It was important to remain attentive to the way they spoke about difficult, unpleasant things to a loved one, even the most difficult ones. The importance of showing patience, tolerance, or accepting your partner’s faults and making concessions and daily compromises was then emphasized. How to respond to crises, quarrels, arguments, and how to reconcile, reconciling after quarrels, also proved to be crucial: “We, too, don’t have such a perfect marriage that there are no arguments between us. But if I grumble a little with my husband because I don’t like something in general, not there in the little things, we can’t argue, we can’t be angry for a long time, two, three hours, one will sit here, the other here, and then we come together. And there are no silent days with us. I can’t be quiet and pass each other by” [FGI/K55+/3]. The more that partners love each other, the less likely they are to cause quarrels or tensions in the relationship, and the less often they behave in a confrontational manner, avoid criticizing their partner or imposing their opinion. What the respondents talked about, i.e., tolerating their partner’s faults, being empathic and patient with them, can be considered “gestures” of love and a way of maintaining it in close intimate relationships.



## 9. Final reflections

Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts, he tends to act out what is sometimes called a line – that is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself (Goffman 2008). “Productions” of love are the various categories of interactions that occur during and due to the co-presence of partners. The basic “behavioral material”, as Goffman (2008) wrote, is bodily gestures, facial expressions, and statements that people bring to a situation. The analysis of the above statements shows that the ways people show love in interactions between men and women are becoming more egalitarian, and that the desire to build a “special” relationship with a partner, full of love and assurances of commitment, applies to both men and women. The participants in the study are aware of their feelings for their partner, often subjecting their daily functioning in the relationship, their relationship with their loved ones, to self-reflection. Wanting to make their relationship happy, maintain mutual feelings, and show commitment, they try to show love in many ways, both verbally and non-verbally, with words and gestures.

The areas of gestures that emerged while analyzing the participants’ statements were far more numerous than those of verbal communication. As we were dealing with an analysis of the statements of people who are in relationships that they consider successful and happy, the statements often referred to reciprocity and to the fact that love requires “work”, confirmation, showing their feelings, and commitment, so that the relationship lasts.

It turns out that the ways in which “love” interacts reflect the significant intermingling of the patriarchal and modern models of femininity and masculinity. For women, the thesis is confirmed that they more strongly identify love with emotional expression and talking about feelings. They seem to think that it comes more easily to them – which is also confirmed by the men in the study. Showing love with a whole spectrum of gestures, but also directly spoken messages that assure the partner of one’s attentiveness – probably better fits the traditional model of femininity. Interestingly, according to most of the male respondents, love for a partner is also evidenced by a dinner that is served and cooked by the partner, or the preparation of a romantic dinner, which also indicates the identification of “expressions of love” in a more traditional way (although the women themselves mentioned this incidentally). However, women also prefer a number of “external” activities (attributed to masculinity in the patriarchal model), which they themselves are the initiators of, such as organizing joint visits to the cinema, concerts, or organizing joint trips. In the women’s statements it can be felt that this is “natural” for them and does not require any special effort.

It becomes interesting to observe how these models of masculinity – patriarchal and modern – are reflected in the men’s opinions. On the one hand, those that fit into traditional masculine behavior are noticeable, revealing themselves in active forms of showing affection, such as washing and filling up the car, carrying heavy things, or organizing time spent together. In a way, it’s also a perception of “doing women’s chores” at home, rather than perceiving it as cooperating for the benefit of a jointly run household. Although the sphere of housework has traditionally belonged to women, merely including themselves in this area of work, doing most of the chores “for” their partners, testifies to a new perception of ways of showing love. Since other studies speak of interacting for the home together with the partner (cf. Schoenfeld et al. 2012), we were dealing with the representation of these activities by men themselves.

Emotions and ways of expressing them are another area where these models intersect. On the one hand, men admit that they often have trouble listening to their partners when they need to share their problems (the men would like to “solve the problem” right away). But on the other hand, they also appreciate the fact that they themselves receive emotional support from their wives and girlfriends when they need it. They admit that they are not able to give it as women do, but some of them make “every effort”, even “by force”, and “in spite of themselves” to enter this emotional area and meet the needs and expectations of their loved one. It is also noticeable that in the sexual sphere in a close relationship, men are primarily oriented to meet the needs of their female partners, rather than their own needs, as in the patriarchal model.

The analyzed material certainly only allows us to capture some tendencies of more “feminine”, feminized ways of showing love in relationships, regardless of the respondent’s gender. It also makes it possible to see the opposite tendency, when women are – in the traditional sense – more in “masculine energy” because active forms of showing affection to their partners. It seems that some researchers’ interpretations of wives’ ability to love “eclipsing” their husband’s ability (for example, Cancian 1986: 695–670) cannot be fully confirmed. Both sexes now draw inspiration from the behavioral repertoire of both the traditional model and the modern one, expanding the range of interaction possibilities of both sexes in how they show love. This may be indicative of greater egalitarianism, androgyny, or perhaps simply being guided by “the heart”, because when you love someone, you want to show it “your way”, regardless of your understanding of “feminine” and “masculine” ways of “producing” and “sustaining” love.

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## **SPOSOBY „OKAZYWANIA MIŁOŚCI” W RELACJI INTYMNEJ – PODOBIENSTWA I RÓŻNICE MIĘDZY INTERAKCJAMI Kobiet i Mężczyzn**

**Abstrakt.** Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań jakościowych dotyczących sposobów okazywania miłości w heteroseksualnych związkach przez kobiety i mężczyzn oraz wskazanie podobieństw i różnic, jakie występują między płciami. Analiza odnosi się do tradycyjnego i nowoczesnego modelu kobiecości i męskości. Wypowiedzi respondentów zostały podzielone na dwa główne obszary – szeroko definiowaną komunikację (gesty czułości, wsparcie emocjonalne, zachowania podczas nieporozumień) oraz podejmowanie określonych działań (pomaganie w wykonywaniu obowiązków domowych lub innych aktywności na rzecz partnera, kupowanie prezentów, organizowanie czasu wolnego, inicjowanie seksu). Analiza materiału empirycznego pokazała przenikanie się modeli patriarchalnych i nowoczesnych kobiecości i męskości w sposobach zachowań miłosnych kobiet i mężczyzn wobec swoich partnerów. I mężczyźni, i kobiety czerpią inspiracje z repertuaru zachowań zarówno z tradycyjnej męskości, jak i z tradycyjnej kobiecości, ewoluując w kierunku nowoczesnego modelu kobiecości i męskości, które stają się bardziej androgeniczne. Tym samym zdecydowanie poszerzają zakres sposobów okazywania miłości, łącząc te bardziej emocjonalne, sfeminizowane z tymi aktywnymi, tradycyjnie „męskimi”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** miłość, związek intymny, miłość erotyczna, para, związek heteroseksualny, związek romantyczny.