

Exploring Romantic Relationship Attitudes among University College Students

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to research on love attitudes among Malaysian college students by exploring how they view and handle romantic relationships. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the research investigates love attitude with a focus on gender disparities, the relationship between individual romantic experiences and love attitude styles, the influence of these experiences on love attitudes, and the potential impact of parental marital status on students' love attitude. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory as a theoretical framework, which emphasizes the analysis of costs and benefits in decision-making processes, the study employs convenient sampling to collect data through Google Forms, garnering 115 valid responses. T-tests, Pearson correlation, and Crosstabs analysis are utilized to dissect the data. The findings reveal significant gender variations in love attitude, highlighting distinct patterns in how males and females perceive and approach romantic relationships. The study uncovers a positive correlation between the duration of one's longest relationship and their love attitudes, shedding light on the role of personal experiences in shaping romantic perceptions. However, correlations with parental marital status did not achieve statistical significance, suggesting a need for further exploration. This study contributes to our understanding of romantic dynamics within this demographic and paves the way for future research endeavors in this area.

Keywords— college students, love attitudes, relationship, romantic dynamics

I. INTRODUCTION

In the college years, romantic relationships often take center stage in the emotional lives of individuals. This period marks a significant transition from adolescence to adulthood, during which cognitive development can influence personal attitudes toward romance (Furman et al, 1999; Wlodarski & Dunbar, 2014; Lange slag & Steenburgen 2019). Challenges in academics, career pursuits, and interpersonal relationships abound, shaping expectations and perspectives on romantic relationships. Despite the crucial role of romantic relationships during college, research on love attitudes (Safi and Dilmac, 2019), particularly in the context of Malaysia, remains scarce. Existing studies lack comprehensive coverage of the multifaceted aspects of romantic dynamics, leaving a notable gap in understanding Malaysian individuals' perceptions and navigations of romantic relationships. By addressing these gaps, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the complexities of love attitudes among college students in Malaysia. This study set out with multifaceted objectives. Firstly, it aimed to explore potential variances in Love Attitude Styles (LAS) based on gender. Secondly, it sought to investigate the correlation between individual romantic experiences and LAS. Thirdly, it aimed to examine how an individual's romantic experiences might influence the types of love attitudes adopted. Lastly, the study focused on examining the impact of parental marital status on individuals' love attitude in the context of romantic relationships.

Research Hypothesis

H1: University College male and female have different love attitude styles

H2: Individual romantic experiences directly influence love attitude styles among University College students

H3: University College Students develop unique love attitude styles based on their personal romantic encounters.

H4: University College Students from stable, intact families with positive parental marital status tend to hold more positive attitudes towards relationships.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cheng et al. (2020) found that maternal and paternal responsiveness positively associated with adolescences 'self-concept' which then positively contributed to their attitudes about romantic relationships. Maternal demandingness could link directly to positive adolescent attitudes about romantic relationship and indirectly to negative self-concept. Liu and Gao (2013) found that male students scored higher as to romance devotion and the total marks the scores of those who had previous love experience in considering devotion are higher than those who did not. Students from urban areas are more realistic to love than those from rural areas. Ng et al. (2023) in their studies found that love relationship satisfaction was not associated with suicidal ideation among university college students. There is a link between university college students love styles and suicide ideation. Love relationship satisfaction is positively correlated with love styles as well while Gruning et al.(2023) focused their study on the how individual coping with romantic losses.

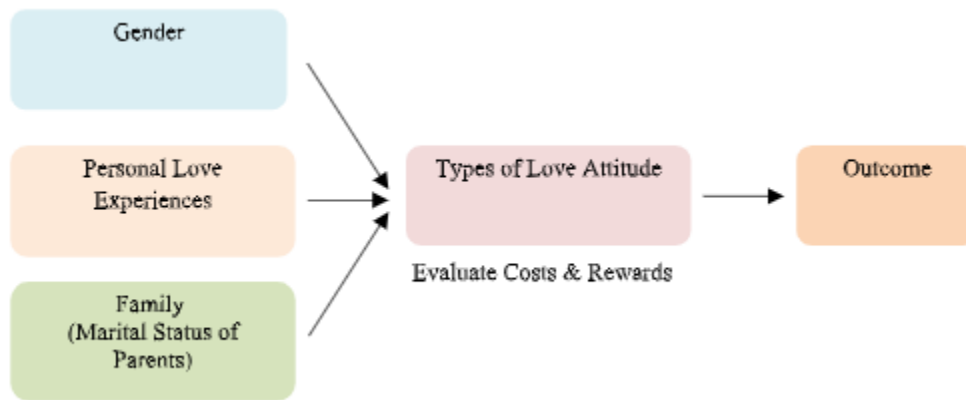
Zhan et al. (2016) explored the impact of the high school-to-college transition on mate selection criteria. Their study delved into how students 'experiences shaped their preferences in romantic relationships, focusing on assessing the importance of physiological needs, morality, personality traits, in clusiveness, complementarity, and emotional connection in mate selection. The findings highlighted a notable transformation among freshmen, particularly those in romantic relationships, who shifted towards prioritizing internal qualities such as inclusiveness and complementarity. Interestingly, freshmen who underwent a breakup displayed a trend towards adopting more stringent standards in partner selection. The research underscored the heightened significance of qualities like implicit charm and loyalty over external appearance, shedding light on the evolvingdynamics of mate selection criteria during the early stages of college life.

According to Zhu and Ye (2020), previous studies have underscored a direct correlation between personal values and attitudes towards romantic relationships, with the college years representing a crucial period for the formation of life values. Despite the evolution of traditional views on love, concerns related to romantic relationships persist among university students. In their examination of the current state of romantic perceptions among college students, the research results indicated generally positive perspectives. Gender differences are evident, with males tending towards possessiveness and females towards dedication. Notably, students from rural backgrounds exhibit a greater inclination towards devotion. Although variations across departments and academic years are not significant, the study highlighted the substantial influence of prior romantic experience son shaping romantic perspectives.

In the study conducted by Binu et al. (2022), the widespread prevalence of romantic relationships in college serves as the backdrop for an exploration into the relationship between passionate love and the big five personality traits. The study recognizes the transformative potential of romantic experiences on individual personality. Delving into the realms of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, the research unveils a nuanced understanding of how these personality traits shape the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of passionate love (Binu et al, 2022). The findings highlight positive correlations between extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience with the cognitive facet of passionate love, influenced by traits such as creativity, altruism, and enthusiasm. Additionally, neuroticism negatively impacts the emotional component, signifying higher levels of anxiety and emotional instability. On the contrary, agreeableness and conscientiousness positively influence the behavioral component, embodying traits of trustworthiness, generosity, and commitment (Binu et al, 2022). While Ahmet et al, (2015) looked at the complexity of relationship between romantic attitudes and mental well-being among college students.

Research done by Li (2022) delved into the perspectives of college students on love and marriage, acknowledging their role as exemplary representatives of the younger generation significantly influenced by economic and social developments. The study aimed to analyze contemporary views on marriage and relationships among college students, exploring behavioral patterns, cognitive aspects, and emotional development within romantic relationships. The findings of their research revealed that a majority of individuals prioritize partner qualities such as refinement, taste, and physical appearance, while simultaneously expressing the belief that marriage is not a necessary requirement. When seeking advice in romantic matters, diverse approaches emerged, with some valuing input from family and teachers, others relying on close friends, and a noteworthy portion choosing to follow their instincts (Li, 2022). Regarding financial aspects in relationships, as pectrum of opinions was observed, ranging from suggestions for parental support to advocacy for self-reliance, with some proposing that individuals who have better financial conditions contribute more. The study highlighted a general disinclination towards long-distance relationships and varied opinions on the concept of marriage, with some viewing it as the goal of romantic relationships and others expressing a firm stance of never intending to marry. According to Li (2022) notable commonality among participants was the proactive approach to love.

While Wu (2023) in his investigation focused on evaluating the impact of family environment, particularly examining the influence of parental parenting styles on individual psychological development, with a particular emphasis on the role of the mothers parenting style. The research scrutinized prevalent romantic relationship stress among college students and explored its correlation with maternal parenting styles. Additionally, the study investigated potential variations in romantic stress based on factors such as gender, being the only child or having siblings, regional differences, and relationship status. The findings revealed that the majority of university students experienced relatively low levels of romantic relationship stress. Despite gender not exhibiting significant differences, noticeable variations in romantic stress among students were observed concerning factors like being the only child, living location, and relationship status. Importantly, all three dimensions of maternal parenting style (rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection) were significantly positively correlated with romantic stress, signifying that higher scores in these dimensions were associated with increased levels of romantic stress (Wu, 2023).



Conceptual Framework

This research adopted the social exchange theory as the theoretical framework according to Nickerson (2023), social exchange theory explains how individuals make decisions based on expected returns and costs. Social exchange theory emphasizes that individuals follow the minimax principle in social interaction, seeking to maximize benefits and minimize negative costs. This theory posits that social interactions are based on the principles of reciprocity and the expectation of mutual benefit (Varey, 2015). As shown in Fig.1 in the above, in the context of romantic relationships, individuals may engage in a cost-benefit analysis, evaluating the rewards and costs associated with different love attitudes based on their gender, personal experiences, and family background. Individuals evaluate different attitudes towards love by comparing different factors to determine which choice will give the greatest satisfaction and return.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a quantitative approach to investigate university college students' attitudes towards romantic relationships. As the research object of this study are university college students who have experienced romantic relationships, a convenience sampling method has been employed to ensure the timely collection of a sufficient number of participants who are in love before. The selection of this sampling method was driven by considerations of practical feasibility and the convenience of data collection. To enhance the universality and diversity of the data, the researcher utilized both online and offline methods for data collection by employing Google Forms as the survey tool. Initially, the survey was distributed to 119 college students. After excluding 4 invalid responses, a total of 115 valid responses were obtained for subsequent analysis. To measure romantic attitudes, the LAS developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) and (Hendrick & Hendrick) in 1986 as cited in Safi and Dilmac (2019) was utilized as the primary measurement tool. The LAS consists of six subscales (7 items each), each measuring a different style of love. To obtain more accurate and comprehensive data, the study modified the original 5-point scale to a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (moderately disagree), 3 (slightly disagree), 4 (slightly agree), 5 (moderately agree), to 6 (strongly agree).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	115	96.6
	Excluded ^a	4	3.4
	Total	119	100.0
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items	
.811		46	

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

The study data were collected and organized using Microsoft Excel, and statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 26.0. The reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha (α), a measure of internal consistency ranging from 0 to 1. A Cronbach's alpha value between 0.7 and 0.9 generally indicates good internal consistency and high reliability for a scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; Barbera et al, 2021). In this study, the calculated Cronbach's alpha value was 0.811, as presented in Table 1, indicating the results of this research is reliable.

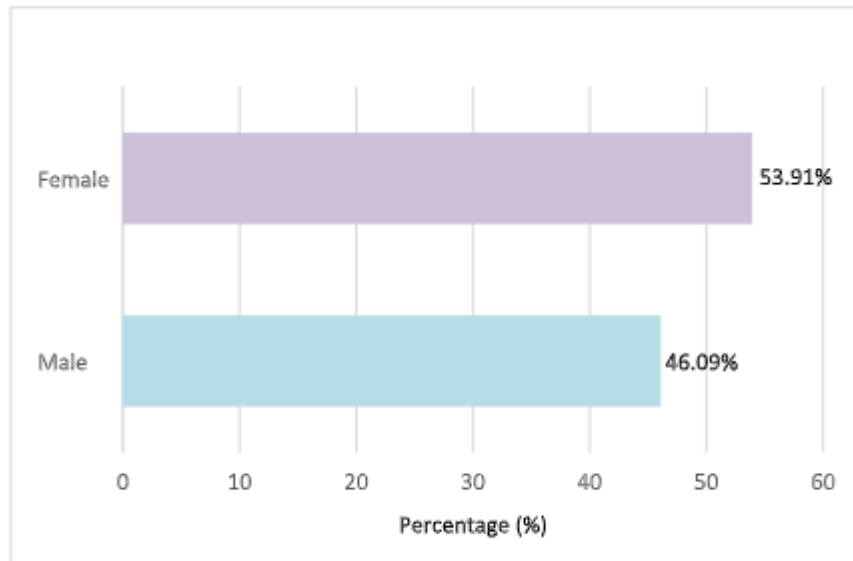
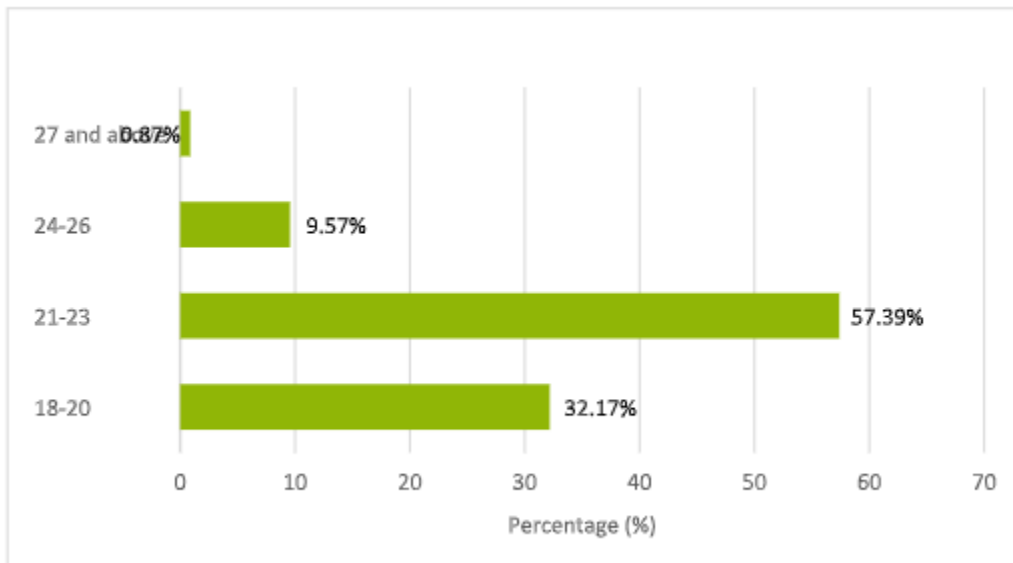


Figure 2 : Gender of the respondents

4.1 Demographics of the Respondents

This study focused on University College students those who have prior relationship experience, and data were gathered through a questionnaire utilizing a blend of online and offline methods. The data collection process has been initiated with a pilot test, followed by actual data collection which was then completed within a month. Four responses among the 119 collected were deemed invalid due to omissions of some questions, yielding a total of 115 valid responses as shown in Fig. 2 above.



The age distribution of respondents is depicted in Fig. 3 above. The majority were university college students aged between 21 and 23, constituting the largest segment with 57.39%. In contrast, respondents aged 27 or above were the least represented, comprising only 0.87%.

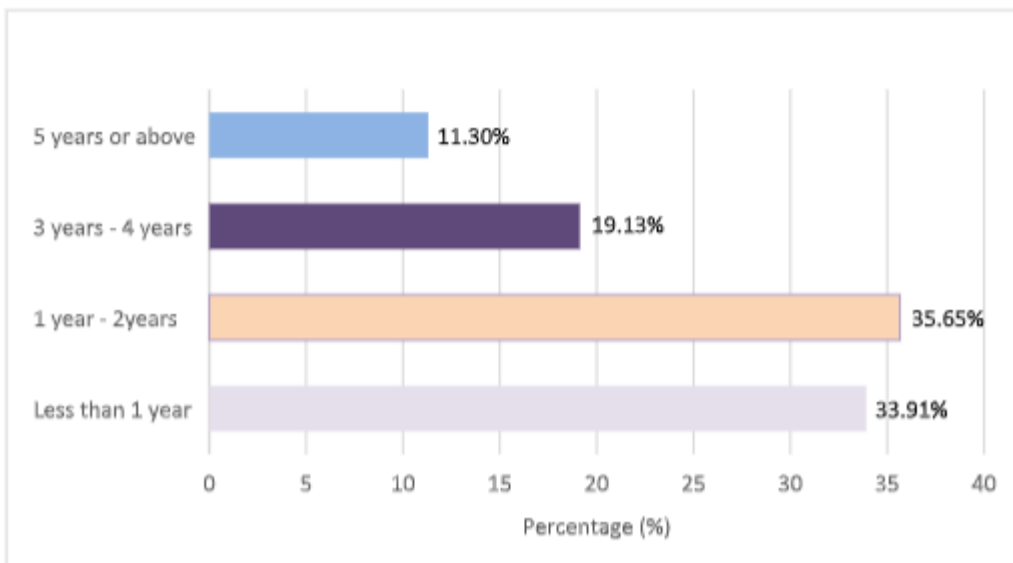
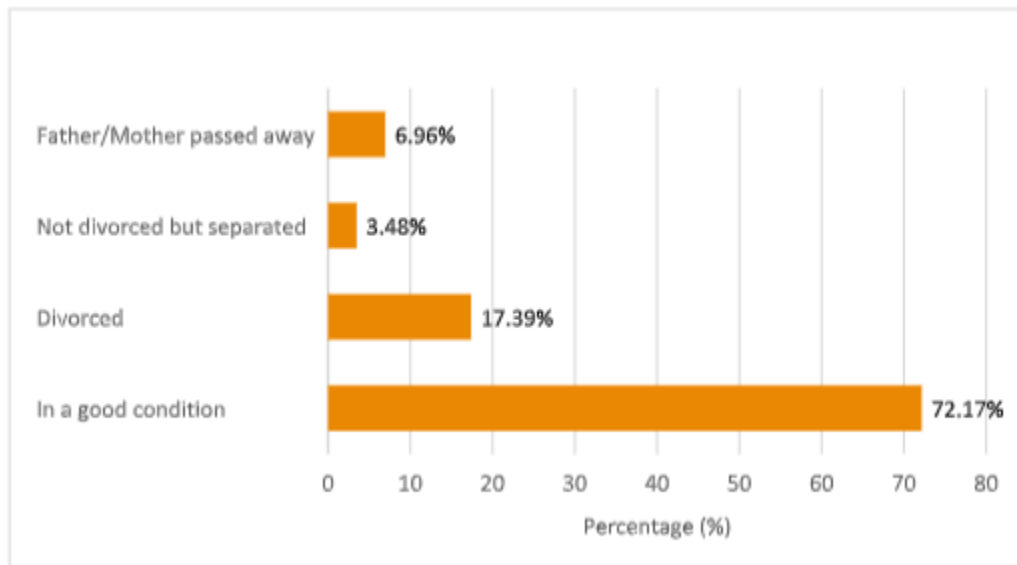
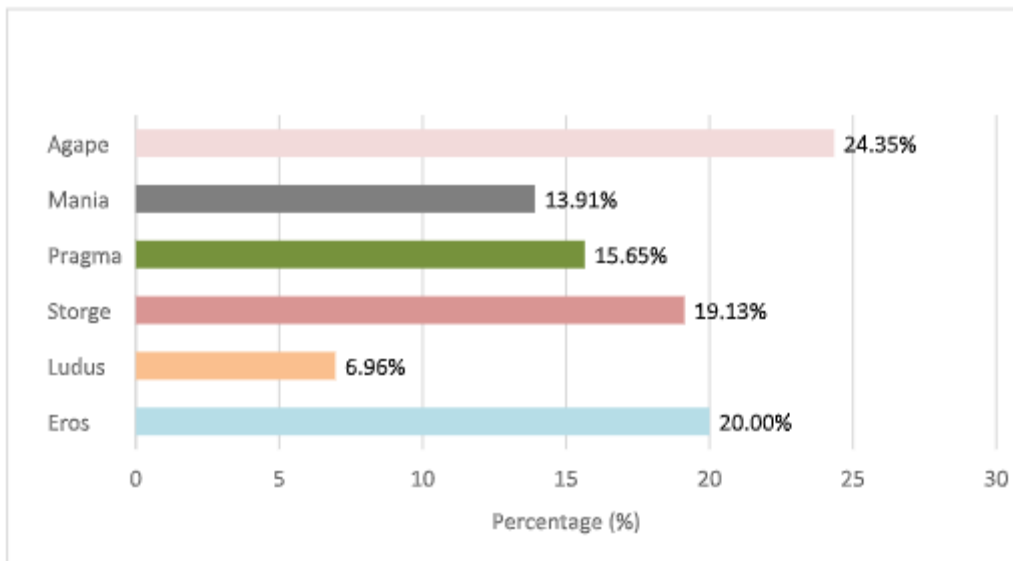


Fig. 4 reveals that a significant proportion of respondents, comprising 35.65%, have encountered relationships lasting between 1 to 2 years. In contrast, a minority of respondents, representing 11.30%, responded having sustained relationships for a minimum of 5 years.



The parents marital status in this study was classified into four dimensions: In a good condition, Divorced, Not divorced but separated, and Father or Mother passed away. Following statistical analysis, Fig.5 displays the distribution of participants' parents & marital status. The highest proportion, constituting 72.17% of the overall percentage, was reported under the category of 'In a good condition'. Conversely, the dimension with the lowest percentage was 'Not divorced but separated' accounting for only 3.48%.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis



In this study, love attitudes were classified into six types: Eros (romantic love), Ludus (playful love), Storge (friendship love), Pragma (realistic love), Mania (possessive, dependent love), and Agape (devoted love).The collected data were categorized based on types of love attitudes, and scores within each type were aggregated. The respondents predominant love attitude type was determined by identifying the type with the highest summed score among all categories. As depicted in Fig. 6, 24.35% of University College students exhibited a relationship attitude characterized as 'devotional love' while only 6.96% fell into the category of playful love'.

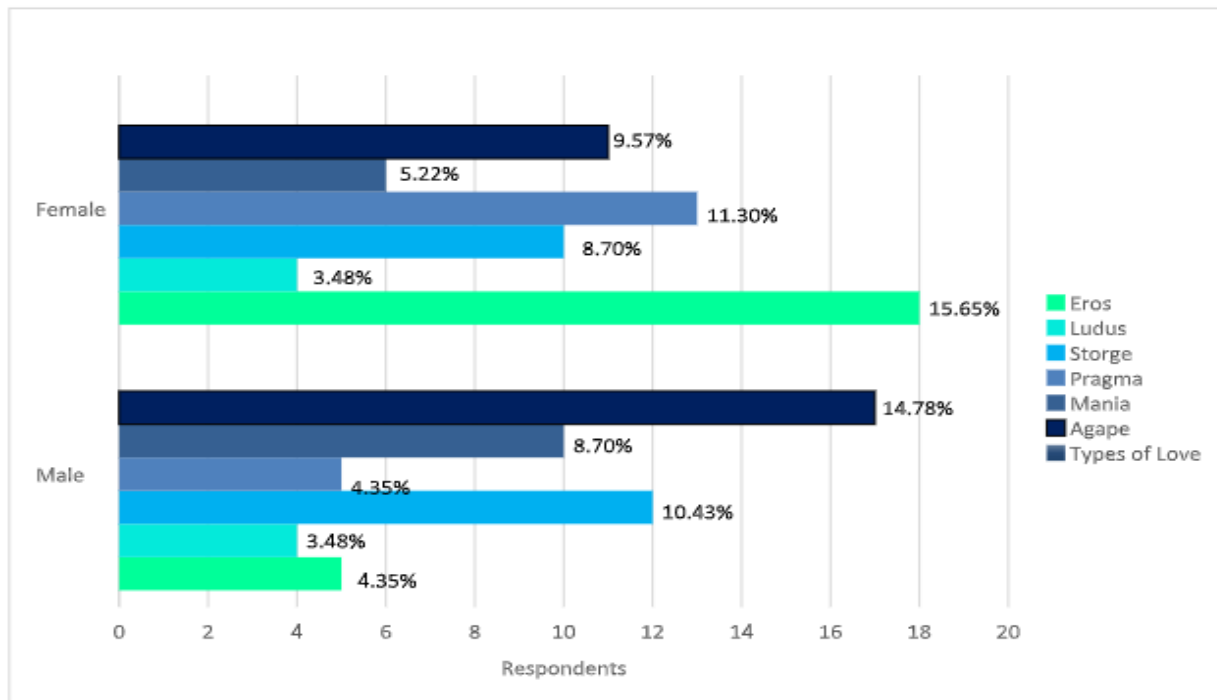


Fig. 7 illustrates the distribution of males and females concerning their attitudes toward love. Males demonstrate a higher inclination toward devotional love, constituting 14.78% of the total. Conversely, females exhibit a greater inclination toward romantic love, representing 15.65% of the total. Notably, playful love is the least prevalent among both males and females, accounting for only 3.48% among university college students.

4.3 Inferential Analysis

Table 2: Group Statistics of T-Test Results for Hypothesis 1

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Types of Love Attitudes	Male	53	2.83	1.695	.233
	Female	62	3.71	1.841	.234

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test Results for Hypothesis 1

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Types of Love Attitudes	Equal variances assumed	.414	.521	-2.648	113	.009	-.879	.332	-1.538	-.221
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.665	112.353	.009	-.879	.330	-1.533	-.226

H1: University College male and female have different love altitude styles.

Utilizing independent samples t-tests, differences in the data have been examined, and the results are present in Table 2 and Table 3. The analysis reveals a significant difference in the mean scores of types of love attitudes between males ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.695$) and females ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.841$), $t(113) = -2.648$, $p = 0.009$. Thus, this hypothesis is supported by the results of the independent samples t-tests as shown in Table 2 and Table 3 in the above.

Table 4: Pearson Correlations Results for Hypothesis 2

		The longest relationship ever	Types of Love
The longest relationship ever	Pearson Correlation	1	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.285
	N	115	115
Types of Love	Pearson Correlation	.101	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.285	
	N	115	115

H2: Individual romantic experiences directly influence love altitude styles among university collegestudents

Pearson correlation analysis has been conducted to examine the relationship between the variables, and the results are present in Table 4 above. The analysis reveals that there is a positive correlation ($r = 0.101$) between the longest relationship ever experienced by university collegestudents and types of love attitudes among them. University college students who are with longer relationship experiences tend to exhibit a greater inclination toward devoted love, possessive love, and pragmatic love in their romantic relationships. Conversely, those with less romantic experience lean more towards romantic love, playful love, and friendship love. However, this correlation did not reach statistical significance as the $p = .285$, $p > .05$. Hence, the hypothesis claims that individual romantic experiences directly influence love altitude styles among university college students has been tested not statistically significance.

The initial table was found to have mistakenly transferred!

Table 5: Pearson Correlations Results for Hypothesis 3

		Marital status of parents	The longest relationship ever
Marital status of parents	Pearson Correlation	1	-.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.272
	N	115	115
The longest relationship ever	Pearson Correlation	-.103	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.272	
	N	115	115

H3: University college students develop unique love altitude styles based on their personal romantic encounters

The relationship between parental marital status and the longest relationship ever experienced by individuals has been explored. As shows in Table 5 above, a negative correlation has been observed between the two variables ($r = -0.103$). It has been found that university college students with parents in good marital conditions tend to have longer relationship experiences, while those with single or separated parents tend to have shorter relationships. However, this correlation did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Hence, the hypothesis is proven not statistically supported.

Table 6: Crosstabs Results for Hypothesis 4

		Types of Love						Total
		Eros	Ludus	Storge	Pragma	Mania	Agape	
Marital status of parents	In a good condition	15	2	18	14	13	21	83
	Divorced	6	4	2	3	1	4	20
	Not divorced but separated	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
	Father/Mother passed away	1	1	1	1	2	2	8
Total		23	8	22	18	16	28	115

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests Results for Hypothesis 4

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.960 ^a	15	.385
Likelihood Ratio	15.838	15	.393
Linear-by-Linear Association	.445	1	.505
N of Valid Cases	115		
a. 18 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .28.			

H4: University college students from stable, intact families with positive parental marital status tend to hold more positive attitudes towards relationships.

Table 6 above presents the crosstabs analysis showing the association between parental marital status and types of love attitude among university college students. The results indicate that, for those with parents in good marital status, the highest score love type is devoted love, while playful love is reported as the lowest. Subsequently, a chi-square test of independence has been performed to further investigate the relationship between parental marital status and types of love, as demonstrated in Table 7 above. The analysis reveals that there is no statistically significant association ($p > 0.05$) between the two variables, $\chi^2 (15, N = 115) = 15.96$. Thus, this hypothesis is proven not statistically significant as shown in Table 6 and Table 7. These findings indicate that, within the context of the sample, parental marital status may not be a significant factor influencing attitudes towards relationships among university college students.

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study employed the Social Exchange Theory to investigate the romantic attitudes of university college students. The overall results regarding university college students' love attitudes partially align with previous research, particularly in the study conducted by Zhu and Ye (2020), where the highest number of university college students exhibited the attitude of 'devoted love' while the lowest number showed tendencies towards romantic love. However, this study reveals a distinctive finding, indicating that the least prevalent love attitude type among participants is 'playful love'. This trend may be attributed to the cultural context, possibly influenced by the reserved nature of local university college students or the societal adherence to monogamous relationships (Titan, 2020). Significant differences were observed in love attitude styles between male and female university college students, with males leaning towards devoted love, while females showed a preference for romantic love. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between the longest romantic relationship experienced by university college students and their love attitude styles. Conversely, a negative correlation was identified between parental marital status and the individuals' longest relationship experiences. However, both correlations did not reach statistical significance in this study. The lack of significance in the observed correlations may be attributed to sample size limitations as the relatively small sample might not provide enough statistical power to detect subtle relationships between variables. Future research with larger and more diverse samples may provide further insights into the nuanced relationships between variables in the realm of university college students' romantic attitudes.

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