
A Study on the Current State and Influencing Factors of Contemporary College Students' Views on Marriage and Love

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Abstract: Attitudes toward marriage and love play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' choices and behaviors in relationships, exerting profound influence on societal dating situations, family structures, and youth development. Contemporary university students' perspectives on marriage and love are characterized by modernized concepts, traditionalized behaviors, and strategic approaches. These views exhibit significant features such as inclusive relationship models, diverse attitudes toward marriage and love, and dynamic relationship choices. These attitudes result from the combined effects of personal development and family environments.

Keywords: College students; Views on marriage and love; Marriage and love phenomena; Digitalization

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1. Introduction

As social transformation and digital technology continue to integrate, contemporary university students' views on marriage and love are undergoing profound reshaping, which affects both their emotional well-being and personal development, as well as future family structures and societal cultural ecosystems. This paper systematically analyzes the current state and characteristics of these views to uncover the underlying causes of their evolution.

2. The current state of contemporary college students' views on marriage and love

Contemporary university students' views on marriage and love are characterized by modernized concepts, traditionalized behaviors, and strategic relationship practices.

2.1. Modernization of marriage and love concepts

The essence of modernization lies in the succession of tradition and modernity, the process by which human society transitions from traditional to modern ^[1]. Key characteristics of this transformation include the rise of individualism

and the centralization of the family unit ^[2]. The modernization of contemporary university students' views on marriage and love reflects a shift from traditional concerns with family background and economic strength toward a more value-oriented approach to partner selection. This shift does not reject traditional marriage ideals but emphasizes aligning multidimensional capital, highlighting personal values and compatibility while retaining the rational core of traditional principles with contemporary meaning. Overall, it represents a clear manifestation of the modernization of university students' views on marriage and love.

2.2. The traditionalization of marriage and love behaviors

Behavioral traditionalism refers to the tendency to creatively transform and selectively apply traditional elements to adapt to the modern social environment ^[3]. Although college students hold modernized perspectives in their conceptual thinking, their actions still exhibit traditional tendencies in practice. For example, while students generally embrace modern individualism—advocating for emotional autonomy, relational equality, and self-actualization, they often maintain a critical, reflective stance toward traditional marriage institutions. Confronted with practical challenges such as marriage or homeownership risks, they rely on traditional family systems, revealing an underlying dependence that forms a dynamic internal negotiation between modern conceptualization and traditional behavior.

2.3. Strategic approaches to relational practice

The strategic approach to relationship practices refers to contemporary college students no longer strictly adhering to a single social script when establishing ^[4], maintaining, and developing intimate relationships. They adopt a rational and cautious approach to relationships, manifested at three levels: during initiation, emotional investment is carefully managed via social platforms; during maintenance, flexible interactions sustain connections while respecting boundaries; and during development, traditional romantic timelines are reconfigured through non-traditional models such as trial cohabitation and career-aligned partnerships. This approach reflects young people's rational control over intimacy and careful planning of emotional life in a risk-laden society, serving as a key indicator of strategic relationship practices.

3. Characteristics of contemporary college students' views on marriage and love

Contemporary college students' views on marriage and love are marked by inclusive approaches, diverse attitudes, and dynamic choices.

3.1. Inclusive approaches to marriage and love

The inclusivity of marriage and love patterns refers to contemporary college students breaking free from traditional, singular scripts for love and marriage, demonstrating a diverse and inclusive cognitive approach to multifaceted relationship forms and patterns. This inclusivity is reflected in two ways: first, mate selection moves beyond traditional material criteria to include multidimensional factors such as emotional compatibility and spiritual alignment; second, non-traditional relationship outcomes are increasingly accepted, with marriage no longer seen as inevitable and greater respect shown toward singledom, delayed marriage, and childbearing. Finally, there is increased tolerance for diverse relationship structures, including trial cohabitation and “career-aligned partnerships.” The core of intimate relationships is now seen as emotional compatibility and mutual fulfillment, rather than rigid formalities ^[5].

3.2. Diverse attitudes toward marriage and love

The diversification of attitudes toward marriage and love primarily encompasses three dimensions: cognitive diversification, emotional diversification, and behavioral intention diversification ^[6]. Among college students, diversification is most evident in behavioral intentions, with some prioritizing immediate fulfillment, treating romance as emotional exploration, and contributing to a “hookup culture” of rapid, fleeting, and casual relationships ^[7]. On the other

hand, some students maintain a commitment to nurturing relationships, emphasizing shared values and complementary personalities to build long-term, stable partnerships ^[8]. Additionally, some students advocate rigorous selection, prioritizing highly compatible partners and personal autonomy, and together with short-term experiences and long-term investments, these three orientations form the multifaceted landscape of contemporary university students' attitudes toward marriage and love.

3.3. The dynamic nature of marriage and love choices

Dynamic marriage and love choices refer to individuals' situational adaptive decision-making, phased commitment adjustments, and composite evaluation systems throughout the process of seeking marriage and love ^[9]. College students no longer follow a single relationship script but flexibly alternate between traditional and modern approaches based on life situations and stages. This strategic equilibrium appears as extensive pre-relationship screening via social platforms to balance emotional and practical factors; segmented commitments during relationships, allowing enjoyment of the present while keeping long-term prospects open; and pragmatic adjustments at life junctures, such as further education or employment, often seeking intergenerational support to mitigate risks.

4. Causes of contemporary college students' views on marriage and love

The contemporary outlook on marriage and love among university students exhibits modernized concepts, traditional behaviors, and strategic approaches. These views, marked by inclusivity, diversity, and dynamism, result from the combined influence of individual development and family environment.

4.1. Personal-level drivers

At the individual level, cognitive development, evolving needs, and practical considerations form the core driving forces behind the formation of marriage and relationship values ^[10]. Heightened self-awareness drives value reconstruction, shifting students from a "group-centered" to an "individual-centered" perspective and modernizing views on marriage and love. Increased risk awareness fosters strategic practices, prompting shifts from an "emotion-first" model to strategies like screening, boundary-setting, and timeline adjustments. Developmental uncertainty shapes dynamic choices, as transitions like further education or employment require flexibility, catalyzing the dynamic nature of romantic and marital decisions.

4.2. Impact at the family level

The family, as the primary context for socialization, profoundly shapes college students' views on marriage and love through intergenerational value transmission, resource support, and parenting styles. Traditional values instilled through daily interactions influence students on marital responsibilities and relationship stability, often leading them to rely on family support for major decisions, resulting in a situation where ideas are modern, but behaviors remain traditional ^[11]. Family resources, parenting styles, and household atmosphere shape students' attitudes toward marriage and love: students from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to explore diverse relationships, while those under financial pressure prioritize practical suitability and relationship stability.

4.3. Transmission of social pressure

The structural pressures within economic development squeeze the opportunities for college students' survival and advancement, creating a real-world predicament marked by narrow career paths, rising living costs, and ambiguous developmental prospects. Economic downturns and labor market pressures heighten students' "capability anxiety," a sense of insufficient resilience in facing marriage and love risks. This anxiety promotes risk-averse decision-making, guiding partner selection toward multidimensional compatibility and reliance on traditional family support, which underpins a rational, cautious approach and fosters inclusive, diverse perspectives on marriage and love. It has also led to a dynamic

pattern of choice, characterized by the flexible adaptation of relationship scripts based on practical realities^[12].

5. Conclusion

Contemporary university students' views on marriage and love reflect a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, showing proactive adaptation and innovative responses amid societal transformation. It is crucial to respond to their needs, guiding healthy and rational perspectives on marriage and love, and helping balance tradition, emotional fulfillment, and life values. Collaborative efforts from families, schools, and society are essential to support resilient intimate relationships while respecting individual choices.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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