

African Gender Studies Quarterly



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Editorial Note

It is with great joy that we introduce this inaugural edition of African Gender Studies Quarterly (AGenSQ), a journal established to provide a dedicated platform for rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship on gender and its intersections with African societies and the broader Global South. As a quarterly publication, we are committed to fostering critical dialogue and advancing knowledge that is both theoretically grounded and contextually relevant.

In this first issue, we are pleased to present a collection of articles that exemplify the depth and diversity of gender scholarship. The opening paper, "A Biopsychosocial Perspective on Sexual Disorders and Dysfunctions: Implications for Diagnosis and Intervention," offers a comprehensive examination of sexual health through biological, psychological, and sociocultural lenses, emphasizing the need for culturally informed care in African contexts. The authors make a compelling case for destigmatising sexual health discussions and integrating multidisciplinary approaches to treatment.

The second article, "Love in the Digital Age: Rethinking Courtship and Romance in Contemporary Society," explores how technology, shifting gender roles, and evolving social norms are transforming intimate relationships. By examining phenomena such as digital dating, emotional labour, and self-love, this paper illuminates the complex terrain of modern romance and its implications for psychological well-being.

Following this, "Cultural Influences on the Perception, Regulation, and Communication of Sexual Content" investigates the powerful role of media in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviours. Drawing on psychological theories, the authors critically analyse how different media forms from social media to pornography influence sexual socialisation, particularly among young people, and advocate for enhanced media literacy and psychological interventions.

The fourth contribution, "Marriage, Sexuality, and Cultural Norms in Indigenous Nigerian Films: A Comparative Analysis of Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo Cinema," employs qualitative content analysis to examine how indigenous films reflect and reinforce cultural values surrounding marriage and sexuality. The study reveals persistent gender double standards while noting emergent progressive shifts, demonstrating the pedagogical function of cinema in sustaining or challenging societal norms.

The fifth article, "Gendered Constructed Strategies in Conflict Resolution: Challenges Faced by Female Secondary School Leaders in Chivi, Zimbabwe," illuminates how gender shapes leadership in educational settings. Through rich qualitative data, the authors identify three distinct gendered strategies employed by female school heads: the motherly care approach, the relational strategy, and the inclusive gender-sensitive approach.

The sixth article, "Political Education and Voters' Behaviour in Nigeria," establishes a strong positive relationship between political education and voter behaviour. Notably, with women constituting 64.5% of respondents, the findings invite critical reflection on

gendered patterns of political participation and the need for gender-sensitive civic education approaches.

We believe these articles have been thoroughly reviewed, and the recommendations offered will help to properly formulate effective solutions to identified issues. This inaugural issue has done well by providing a space where both emerging and established scholars alike have engaged to present themes that demand attention and open engagement. We sincerely hope that this collection will not only inform but also invite deeper reflection and continued scholarship on the evolving intersections of gender and its dynamics as they affect Africa and the rest of the third world.

Dr. O. A.T.Olatunji,
Editor, African Gender Studies Quarterly,
Associate Professor / Reader @ Department of Psychology,
Faculty of the Social Sciences,
Federal University, Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State,
Nigeria.
Email: ajoke.olatunji@fuoye.edu.ngvii

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LOVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: RETHINKING COURTSHIP AND ROMANCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Olaleye Fuad Duncan,

Department of Psychology,

University of Lagos

Email: fuadduncan29@gmail.com

Adekanmbi Adebowale Isaac

Department of Psychology,

University of Lagos

Lijoka Tomilola Joshua

Department of Psychology,

University of Lagos

Abstract

Contemporary courtship, romance, and love have undergone profound shifts due to globalisation, technological advancement, and evolving societal norms. No longer confined to rigid traditions, these concepts now encompass a wide range of experiences, orientations, and relationship models. This paper explores how individuals navigate modern relationships in an era characterized by social media influence, economic uncertainties, shifting gender roles, and the search for emotional fulfilment. Drawing from psychological, sociological, and cultural perspectives, the study dissects various elements such as emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution, and commitment in shaping romantic partnerships. It also examines how traditional structures like marriage are being redefined, giving rise to alternatives like long-term partnerships, open relationships, and self-love as valid forms of intimacy. Through critical analysis and the integration of academic research, this paper offers a comprehensive understanding of love as both a deeply personal and socially constructed phenomenon. Ultimately, it argues for a more inclusive, empathetic, and intentional approach to romantic and emotional connections in the 21st century.

Keywords: courtship, love, romance, modern relationships, intimacy,

Introduction

Love, courtship, and romance have always been central to human life, evolving alongside societies and cultures. In today's world, however, these concepts have taken on new dimensions shaped by globalization, digital communication, shifting gender

norms, and the rise of individualism. While traditional courtship and marriage practices still hold sway in many communities, particularly in African societies like Nigeria, a modern redefinition is unfolding, one where romantic experiences are more fluid, experimental, and diverse.

Historically, courtship followed a structured path heavily influenced by family, religion, and societal expectations. It was often male-led and primarily aimed at marriage, with love sometimes taking a backseat to duty and tradition. But over the last few decades, changing social values and increased individual autonomy have transformed the way people perceive relationships. Now, people explore love with more freedom, choosing their partners, modes of connection, and the terms of emotional commitment.

Technology, particularly the internet and social media, has become a powerful force in reshaping modern relationships. Dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Badoo have made meeting people easier than ever, creating new opportunities but also new anxieties. Digital courtship offers convenience, but often lacks depth. “Ghosting,” “talking stages,” and “situationships” are now part of everyday relationship vocabulary, reflecting an era where intimacy often develops through screens and emojis rather than face-to-face interaction.

Alongside this is a growing emphasis on emotional intelligence and mutual respect in relationships. Traits like empathy, communication skills, vulnerability, and self-awareness are increasingly valued over wealth or physical appearance. For many modern couples, emotional safety and compatibility are as important as love itself. People are now asking: “Does this

relationship support my growth?” rather than simply “Is this person attractive?”

Gender roles have also evolved significantly. Women’s increasing access to education, income, and leadership has rebalanced romantic expectations. In many urban settings, women now initiate courtship, express their needs, and share financial responsibilities. Men, too, are learning to express emotions and engage more deeply in caregiving and partnership. This shift creates room for healthier, more equitable connections but also sparks confusion for those raised with traditional expectations.

Another significant change is the way commitment is understood. While marriage remains a respected institution, particularly in Nigeria, many people now delay it or view it as optional. Long-term partnerships, cohabitation, and non-monogamous arrangements are gaining visibility, though still limited by cultural and religious resistance. In modern romantic thinking, the idea of “forever” is being replaced with “intentional love”, love that is chosen, nurtured, and sustained by mutual effort rather than obligation.

Mental health awareness has also influenced love and courtship. Individuals are becoming more reflective about their emotional needs, childhood traumas, and boundaries. Therapy and self-help language are slowly entering the relationship space, especially among urban youth. Concepts like attachment styles, trauma bonding, love languages,

and inner child healing now inform how people navigate intimacy.

This paper aims to explore the multifaceted landscape of contemporary courtship, romance, and love. It draws from psychological theories, sociological frameworks, and cultural realities to understand how individuals build relationships in today's changing world. Through analysis of modern dating trends, emotional expectations, gender dynamics, and alternative relationship models, the paper highlights the shifting terrain of human connection. It ultimately argues that while love remains a universal pursuit, the way we approach it today reflects our ongoing journey toward self-awareness, equality, and meaningful partnership.

Literature Review

The nature of courtship, romance, and love has been widely examined across disciplines including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. With evolving societal norms, technological advancement, and cultural globalization, the way people understand and experience romantic relationships has undergone significant transformation. This literature review draws on existing theoretical frameworks and recent empirical studies to explore how love, romance, and courtship are shaped by both personal and sociocultural dynamics.

From a psychological perspective, romantic love is often examined through Robert Sternberg's (1986) Triangular

Theory of Love, which posits that love is composed of three elements: intimacy, passion, and commitment. The theory suggests that the quality and type of romantic relationships depend on the combination of these three components. Relationships high in all three are referred to as consummate love, the ideal many aspire to.

Attachment theory, initially developed by Bowlby (1969) and extended by Hazan and Shaver (1987), has also been central to understanding adult romantic relationships. According to their model, early caregiving experiences create attachment styles (secure, anxious, or avoidant) that influence how individuals form and maintain intimate relationships. Numerous studies (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) support the idea that securely attached individuals experience greater relationship satisfaction and stability, while insecure attachments often lead to relational anxiety, avoidance, or conflict.

Further psychological research has highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in maintaining healthy romantic relationships. Goleman (1995) emphasized self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy as critical for conflict resolution, emotional intimacy, and long-term compatibility. As romantic relationships have shifted from being institutionally defined to personally chosen, the ability to emotionally connect and communicate has become increasingly essential.

While psychology examines love on the individual level, sociology considers the broader structural forces that shape romantic relationships. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) introduced the concept of the “pure relationship”, in which emotional intimacy and mutual satisfaction replace economic dependence and social obligation as the basis for romantic partnerships. In his work *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens argued that modern love is shaped by self-disclosure, egalitarianism, and emotional equality. This theory reflects trends in contemporary relationships where personal growth and authenticity are prioritized over permanence or tradition.

Courtship rituals, traditionally regulated by culture and religion, have also undergone radical transformation. In many African societies, including Nigeria, courtship was once a community-involved process that emphasized family compatibility, fertility, and bride price (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995). However, globalization, urbanization, and western media have led to a more individualistic approach where romantic love and personal preference guide partner selection. As Adegbite (2019) notes in his study of urban Nigeria, dating practices now often involve informal relationships that may or may not lead to marriage, with young adults navigating these interactions through social media, peer influence, and pop culture.

The digital age has redefined romantic interaction. With the emergence of dating apps and social networking sites, courtship has become more immediate and wide-reaching. According to Finkel et al. (2012), online dating has increased access to potential partners but also introduced new complications such as decision fatigue, superficial judgment, and ghosting. The virtual nature of many modern relationships has created emotional ambiguity, as partners communicate primarily through text, emojis, and curated online profiles.

Fox and Moreland (2015) explored how social media platforms like Facebook can create psychological stressors in romantic relationships, including jealousy, surveillance, and miscommunication. While technology allows couples to stay connected across distances, it also introduces distractions, insecurity, and performative intimacy. Online culture has also given rise to new dating vocabularies like “situationships,” “talking stages,” and “benching”, that reflect the uncertainty and fluidity of digital romance.

The shifting landscape of gender roles has further impacted romantic dynamics. Traditional gender norms assigned men the role of initiators and providers, while women were expected to be passive, nurturing, and emotionally available. These scripts are being challenged by the feminist movement, LGBTQ+ advocacy, and greater access to education and economic empowerment for women. A study by Israel et al (2023) noted that

women are gradually moving towards an equitable society where they feel they have power over their choices.

Studies have shown that equitable partnerships, where both partners contribute emotionally and financially, tend to be more stable and satisfying (Pepin & Cotter, 2018). In urban Nigerian settings, young women are increasingly voicing their romantic and sexual preferences, initiating relationships, and questioning patriarchal expectations (Adepoju, 2020). Similarly, young men are beginning to embrace emotional vulnerability and reject hyper-masculinity in favor of authenticity and partnership.

However, tensions remain. Traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity still persist, especially in conservative regions, creating internal and relational conflicts. The expectation to marry, have children, and conform to religious norms continues to exert pressure on many individuals, often conflicting with personal desires or modern aspirations.

The literature has also expanded to include non-traditional relationship structures. Polyamory, cohabitation, long-term dating without marriage, and even asexual partnerships are gaining attention. Moors et al. (2017) argue that consensual non-monogamy is becoming more visible and less stigmatized in academic and public discourse, though it still faces significant societal resistance.

In Nigeria, cohabitation is increasingly practised among university students and

young professionals, often as a trial phase before marriage (Adepoju, 2020). While not widely accepted by older generations or religious institutions, such arrangements reflect a broader shift toward flexibility, experimentation, and personal choice in romantic commitments, with more romantic relationship failures during and post COVID-19 (Akinwale et al 2023).

Finally, an increasing body of literature highlights the intersection between mental health and relationship quality. Romantic relationships can serve as both sources of emotional support and triggers for psychological distress. Studies by Whisman and Uebelacker (2006) reveal strong links between relationship satisfaction and mental well-being, emphasizing that communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills significantly influence emotional health.

Contemporary romantic discourse increasingly draws on mental health language such as boundaries, trauma, attachment, and self-love to frame relationship expectations and healing in this digital age (Bada et al 2024). The normalization of therapy, especially among the youth, reflects this shift, enabling people to engage in love more consciously and intentionally.

The Transformation of Courtship in the 21st Century

From Traditional Models to Digital Dating

Courtship has evolved dramatically over the last century. Traditional forms of romantic engagement were often structured, with specific gender roles, formal rituals, and clearly defined objectives, typically marriage. In many African societies, including Nigeria, this involved families playing a major role in partner selection, either through arranged marriages or deeply monitored courtship. Marriage was often seen as a family alliance rather than purely a personal romantic decision.

In contemporary society, however, individual choice has become central to courtship. This shift is most visible among younger generations who increasingly resist rigid expectations. Technological advancements, particularly the rise of smartphones, dating apps, and social media have profoundly reshaped how people meet, communicate, and form romantic bonds. Apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Badoo allow users to connect with others based on location, interests, or appearance, removing many physical and social limitations that previously governed courtship. The digitalization of romance makes love more accessible, but it also introduces complexity.

For instance, while digital platforms offer more freedom, they have also led to the rise of new relational behaviors such

as ghosting (suddenly cutting off communication), breadcrumbing (leading someone on with no real intent), and situationships (undefined romantic/sexual relationships). These phenomena, once rare or unnamed, are now commonplace, especially among young people navigating the fluid nature of modern relationships.

Moreover, digital courtship affects emotional expectations. The pace at which relationships develop online can lead to intense early connections that may not stand the test of real-life dynamics. Algorithms suggest compatibility based on superficial data, potentially reducing love to a checklist of attributes rather than a deep emotional connection.

Changing Gender Roles and Expectations

One of the most profound changes in courtship and romantic dynamics has been the redefinition of gender roles. In traditional settings, men were expected to pursue, provide, and protect, while women were nurturers, submissive companions, and homemakers. These roles, though still present in many cultures, are being challenged across the globe. In Nigeria, urbanization, education, and economic advancement have empowered women to negotiate relationships on their own terms.

Women now initiate conversations, express sexual agency, and choose partners based on emotional compatibility rather than material

provision. Men, on the other hand, are increasingly expected to be emotionally present, vulnerable, and supportive. These shifts challenge the deeply patriarchal norms that previously governed romance.

This reconfiguration of expectations has led to tension in some relationships, particularly where one partner is still influenced by traditional ideals. For instance, men raised to expect deference may struggle with women who assert their opinions and career ambitions. Conversely, women taught to expect material provision may be disillusioned with partners who value emotional equality over financial dominance.

This clash creates a transitional space where modern and traditional ideals of romance coexist, sometimes in harmony and other times in conflict. Navigating this space requires communication, empathy, and a willingness to redefine love beyond societal prescriptions.

Sexuality and Intimacy in the Modern Era

Sexual intimacy is a key part of romantic relationships, and modern attitudes toward sex have evolved significantly. In many societies, including Nigeria, conversations around sex were traditionally taboo, especially for women. Virginity was often seen as a marker of morality, and sexual pleasure, particularly for women, was downplayed or ignored.

Today, sexual liberation and education are becoming more widespread. Young

people increasingly view sex as a component of mutual pleasure, emotional connection, and personal exploration. While religious and cultural norms still influence sexual behaviors, access to the internet, sex education, and mental health awareness have introduced more nuanced conversations.

The concept of consent, once largely ignored in romantic discourses, is now central. Partners are encouraged to discuss boundaries, preferences, and comfort levels. Terms like “sexual compatibility,” “kinks,” and “libido differences” are gaining visibility in public discourse, helping partners understand and respect one another’s needs.

Additionally, intimacy now extends beyond sex. Emotional intimacy, that is, the ability to be vulnerable, open, and connected is increasingly prioritized. Many people now seek relationships where emotional and physical closeness reinforce one another. Sex without emotional connection is often viewed as unfulfilling, while emotional intimacy without physical connection is also sometimes perceived as lacking.

This dual emphasis underscores the complexity of contemporary love, where both partners are expected to meet emotional, intellectual, and sexual needs in a balanced way.

Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness

A defining trait of modern relationships is the increased emphasis on emotional

intelligence (EQ). Coined by Daniel Goleman (1995), EQ includes the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, as well as empathize with others. In romantic relationships, high EQ is associated with healthy communication, conflict resolution, empathy, and trust.

Today's couples are increasingly reflective about how past experiences, especially childhood trauma, shape their relationship patterns. Psychological concepts like attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) have entered mainstream conversations, helping individuals understand whether they have secure, anxious, or avoidant tendencies in relationships.

Therapy, once stigmatized, is now embraced by many as a tool for growth and relational health. Couples' therapy, premarital counseling, and individual psychotherapy are used to resolve issues like communication breakdown, trust deficits, or emotional unavailability. The rise of social media therapists, self-help books, and podcasts also allows individuals to engage with mental health resources informally.

The result is a generation of people more emotionally self-aware and committed to building intentional, fulfilling relationships. This self-awareness also means many are willing to leave relationships that no longer serve their emotional needs prioritizing peace and self-growth over tradition or fear of judgment.

The Role of Communication

Modern love thrives on communication. Unlike traditional relationships where roles and expectations were predefined, contemporary couples must constantly negotiate needs, boundaries, and values. Open, honest communication is essential, not only during conflicts but in everyday interactions.

Research by John Gottman (1999) shows that successful couples practice active listening, express appreciation, validate each other's emotions, and avoid destructive behaviors like contempt or stonewalling. These communication tools are increasingly emphasized in online relationship content, workshops, and popular media.

Communication also includes the use of love languages, a concept introduced by Gary Chapman (1992), identifying five ways people express and receive love: words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch. Understanding a partner's love language can foster deeper connection and reduce misinterpretations.

In Nigerian contexts, however, communication in relationships can still be affected by cultural scripts that discourage vulnerability, especially for men. Societal pressure to appear "strong" or "unbothered" can hinder emotional transparency. Nevertheless, growing exposure to global cultures and mental health advocacy is helping to dismantle these barriers, encouraging partners to engage more openly and authentically.

Relationship Trends, Alternative Models, and the Future of Love

The Rise of Relationship Trends: Talking Stages, Situationships, and “Soft Life” Dating

Modern romance has birthed new relationship formats and stages that are neither traditional nor permanent but increasingly common, especially among Gen Z and Millennials. Among these is the “talking stage”, a period where two individuals are getting to know each other, often with the possibility of dating but no clear commitment. It can last weeks or even months, characterized by regular chats, flirting, and emotional vulnerability without any label.

The talking stage often precedes what is now termed a “situationship”, an undefined romantic or sexual relationship where both parties act like a couple without committing to exclusivity or labels. While some people enjoy the flexibility of situationships, others find them emotionally draining due to the ambiguity and lack of clarity. Many young people remain stuck in such arrangements, afraid to demand commitment or risk losing the other person.

Another notable trend is the pursuit of the “soft life” in dating. This refers to an aspirational lifestyle where individuals, particularly women, avoid stress, drama, or struggle in relationships. Instead of embracing the “suffering wife” or “ride-or-die” stereotype, they seek comfort, emotional peace, and financial stability.

Social media has further amplified this trend, with many advocating for luxury, ease, and reciprocal love. Men, too, are redefining what they expect from relationships, looking for nurturing partnerships and rejecting toxic masculinity narratives.

These trends reflect a generation that values autonomy, clarity, and emotional well-being over traditional timelines. While some criticize this shift as commitment-phobic or superficial, others see it as a necessary correction to decades of patriarchal and emotionally repressive relationship norms.

4.2 Non-Monogamy and Polyamory: Emerging Acceptance

Another major shift in contemporary romance is the increasing visibility of non-monogamous relationships. While monogamy remains the dominant model in most cultures, polyamory and open relationships are gaining recognition, especially in Western contexts and urban Nigerian circles.

Polyamory refers to consensually maintaining multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships at the same time, with transparency and respect among all parties involved. It challenges the traditional idea that romantic love must be exclusive to one person. While still stigmatized in conservative societies, polyamory is slowly entering public discourse through podcasts, documentaries, and online communities.

Open relationships, where partners agree to sexual or romantic experiences with

others outside the primary relationship, are also becoming common among couples who reject the idea that sexual exclusivity is necessary for love. Critics argue that non-monogamy can cause jealousy, insecurity, and instability. However, advocates highlight that with honest communication and strong boundaries, it can foster personal freedom, emotional honesty, and less possessiveness.

It is important to note that non-monogamy is not new. Many traditional African societies practiced polygyny, where one man had multiple wives, though often rooted in patriarchy. The modern polyamory movement, however, emphasizes equality, consent, and mutual emotional engagement.

As more people experiment with relationship structures that reflect their values and needs, society is beginning to grapple with the idea that love does not look the same for everyone.

Long-Distance Relationships and Digital Intimacy

In today's interconnected world, long-distance relationships (LDRs) are more common than ever. Whether due to school, work, or migration, many couples find themselves navigating love across time zones. Technology has made this possible. Video calls, instant messaging, voice notes, and collaborative apps allow partners to stay in touch and maintain emotional intimacy despite physical separation.

However, LDRs also present unique challenges. Lack of physical presence, time differences, and limited shared experiences can strain emotional connection. Trust becomes paramount, and effective communication is critical. Many couples use strategies like "virtual dates," sending surprise gifts, and scheduled check-ins to maintain their bond.

Interestingly, some relationships now start and even thrive online without the partners having met in person. These digital romances can be deeply emotional and intimate, sustained by constant communication, shared vulnerability, and common interests.

While some dismiss online or long-distance relationships as less "real," many successful couples prove otherwise. With patience, planning, and emotional maturity, long-distance love can transition into strong, lasting partnerships.

Marriage and Its Changing Meaning

Marriage has long been seen as the ultimate goal of romantic relationships, particularly in African cultures. However, the meaning of marriage is undergoing transformation. In the past, marriage was associated with duty, reproduction, financial alliance, and societal acceptance. Today, people are rethinking its purpose and timing.

Many individuals now delay marriage in favor of career advancement, self-exploration, and financial stability. Among urban Nigerian youths, the

average age of marriage is increasing. The pressure to “settle down” by a certain age is gradually being replaced by the desire to marry the right person at the right time.

Additionally, the definition of a “successful marriage” has expanded. Emotional intimacy, friendship, mutual respect, and shared goals are now considered more important than just staying together. Divorce, though still stigmatized in some circles, is increasingly accepted as a reasonable option when the relationship becomes toxic or unfulfilling.

There’s also a rising awareness of the economic and emotional risks of marriage. As a result, some couples choose cohabitation, civil partnerships, or long-term dating without ever marrying. This is especially true among people who witnessed unhappy parental marriages or endured domestic violence.

Even among those who choose marriage, the expectations are changing. Traditional roles are being renegotiated: women may prioritize their careers alongside motherhood, while men take on emotional labor and housework. Pre-marital counseling, financial transparency, and conversations around sexual compatibility are becoming part of the process, reflecting a more intentional and conscious approach to commitment.

4.5 Self-Love and the Individualization of Romance

Perhaps one of the most significant shifts in contemporary romance is the growing emphasis on self-love and personal fulfillment. Influenced by psychology, feminism, and wellness culture, many individuals now see romantic relationships as one part of a broader journey of self-development.

Self-love involves accepting oneself, setting boundaries, healing from past traumas, and not relying on external validation. It means being whole as an individual before seeking love with another person. This concept is especially popular among women who are learning to prioritize their peace, goals, and emotional safety after generations of being taught to “endure” for the sake of love.

The “romantic partner as soulmate” ideal is being replaced by a more balanced view: that partners should support, not complete, each other. A relationship is no longer where people go to find happiness, but rather a space to share it.

Social media trends like “main character energy,” “hot girl walks,” and “solo dates” reflect this shift. They empower individuals to enjoy their own company, celebrate themselves, and not settle for less than they deserve. Men, too, are gradually joining this self-love movement, challenging toxic masculinity and exploring vulnerability, emotional expression, and mental health.

This shift toward self-love doesn’t eliminate the desire for romantic relationships, it redefines how people

approach them. Instead of desperation or fear of loneliness, relationships are now sought from a place of wholeness and choice.

Emotional Labor, Romantic Resilience, Religion, Class, and Global Perspectives

Emotional Labor in Modern Relationships

In contemporary romance, emotional labor refers to the often invisible work of managing emotions, both one's own and one's partner's, to maintain harmony in the relationship. This includes offering reassurance, resolving misunderstandings, initiating apologies, remembering anniversaries, and soothing emotional distress.

Traditionally, women have been expected to carry the bulk of emotional labor in heterosexual relationships. They are socialized to be emotionally expressive, empathetic, and nurturing, often putting their partner's emotional needs before their own. This expectation persists today, but it is being increasingly challenged.

Many modern relationships are now navigating a new emotional economy where men are encouraged to share more emotional responsibility. Emotional intelligence, defined by self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills, is becoming a highly desirable trait in partners of all genders. In therapy-informed relationships, both partners are expected to contribute emotionally, ensuring that one does not

become the constant "giver" while the other "takes."

When emotional labor is unbalanced, it can lead to burnout and resentment, especially for women who feel like unpaid therapists in their romantic lives. Healthy partnerships now strive for emotional reciprocity, where both individuals feel heard, seen, and emotionally supported. This rebalancing is essential for sustainable love in the modern age.

Resilience in Romantic Relationships

Resilience, the capacity to recover from challenges, is a critical component of romantic relationships, particularly in an era marked by mental health struggles, economic hardship, and rapid social change. Resilient couples are those who can adapt, communicate openly, and rebuild trust after conflicts.

Research shows that conflict itself is not necessarily harmful to a relationship; rather, the way couples manage and recover from it is what determines long-term success. Resilient relationships often include the following features:

- Open communication about emotions, expectations, and disappointments.
- Repair rituals such as apologies, hugs, or shared activities to restore connection after conflict.
- Mutual respect, even during disagreements.

- Shared goals and vision, which give the relationship direction and stability.

Mental health awareness also plays a significant role in resilience. Couples are increasingly attending therapy, engaging in self-reflection, and adopting coping tools like journaling, mindfulness, or regular check-ins. This evolution has led to more emotionally robust partnerships.

However, resilience should not be confused with endurance. In toxic relationships involving abuse, manipulation, or betrayal, walking away is a valid and often courageous act. Modern love allows for the choice to leave, understanding that healing and self-preservation can also be forms of resilience.

Religion, Morality, and Romantic Norms

Religion remains a powerful influence on courtship, love, and marriage, particularly in African and Middle Eastern societies. In Nigeria, Christianity and Islam shape expectations around sexuality, gender roles, and marital duty. Courtship is often expected to lead to marriage, sex is generally reserved for wedlock, and romantic involvement is meant to align with religious values.

For many believers, religious teachings serve as moral guides that uphold fidelity, forgiveness, patience, and sacrificial love. Couples are encouraged to pray together, seek divine guidance,

and uphold marital vows as sacred. Premarital counseling in churches or mosques is common, preparing couples for spiritual and emotional commitment.

However, this religious framework also presents limitations. Strict doctrines may stigmatize divorce, discourage sexual expression, or reinforce unequal gender dynamics. For instance, in some communities, women are expected to submit to their husbands, regardless of emotional well-being, while men are culturally excused for infidelity.

There is a growing movement among young believers who seek to reconcile faith with feminist ideals and emotional authenticity. They engage in “intentional dating,” where God, mental health, and compatibility are all taken into account. Some Christian and Muslim couples practice celibacy while fostering emotional intimacy, setting boundaries rooted in mutual respect rather than fear of sin.

Religion can serve as both a source of strength and a site of tension in romantic relationships. Modern lovers of faith often find themselves navigating the delicate balance between spiritual commitment and emotional freedom.

Socioeconomic Class and Love

Economic factors have always played a role in love and courtship. In contemporary romance, socioeconomic class continues to influence how relationships are formed, sustained, and perceived. Class impacts dating options,

expectations, communication styles, and even the longevity of relationships.

For many young people, especially in developing countries, the economic realities of joblessness, inflation, and limited opportunities delay romantic plans. Some delay marriage because they cannot afford the traditional bride price, wedding ceremonies, or even rent. In some cases, love is postponed entirely due to financial instability.

In contrast, financially stable individuals may enjoy more options for leisure, travel, therapy, and relationship growth. They can afford “soft life” dating experiences, bougie restaurants, surprise vacations, and consistent check-ins, which enhance emotional connection and reduce stress. Economic privilege enables more intentional, emotionally driven relationships.

Class also affects gender expectations. Men are still often expected to be providers, which can create pressure, especially in relationships where women are earning equally or more. Some men feel emasculated by financially independent women, while others adapt and thrive in egalitarian partnerships.

Additionally, class disparities within relationships may lead to power imbalances. A financially dominant partner may unconsciously or deliberately exert control, while the less affluent partner may struggle with self-worth. Open dialogue about money, values, and boundaries is key to navigating these dynamics.

Romance is easier when people share similar socioeconomic backgrounds. But in our increasingly globalized world, cross-class relationships are growing. With empathy and communication, love can thrive even in the face of economic inequality.

Cross-Cultural Love in the Global Age

Thanks to globalization and migration, cross-cultural relationships are more common than ever. People fall in love across national, ethnic, racial, and linguistic lines, especially through study abroad programs, social media, international work, and tourism.

Cross-cultural romance is enriching. Partners are exposed to new traditions, worldviews, and cuisines. They develop cultural sensitivity and broaden their understanding of love. These relationships also challenge stereotypes and foster global empathy.

However, cross-cultural love comes with unique challenges:

- Language barriers may affect communication.
- Differing cultural expectations regarding gender roles, family involvement, or conflict resolution can lead to misunderstandings.
- Immigration laws, long-distance logistics, and racial bias can also interfere with love’s natural course.

For example, a Nigerian woman dating a European man may face pressure from her family to “marry within.” Similarly,

an Asian man in a Western country may be stereotyped or fetishized by potential partners. These biases can add emotional strain.

Successful cross-cultural couples often share strong communication, curiosity, and willingness to adapt. They respect each other's backgrounds and create new traditions together. Prejudice may exist in society, but love that is open, respectful, and intentional can bridge cultural divides.

Social media has also played a role in normalizing interracial and intercultural romance. From YouTube couples to TikTok influencers, modern audiences are increasingly exposed to diverse expressions of love, shifting public perception.

In all, love in the global age is no longer bound by geography. Though not without challenges, cross-cultural romance represents the richness and adaptability of the human heart.

Discussion

The evolution of contemporary courtship, romance, and love illustrates a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. As observed throughout this paper, romantic relationships today are not confined to a single model or narrative; they are shaped by a variety of cultural, technological, economic, and psychological influences. This complexity reflects broader societal changes, including increased autonomy, shifting gender roles, and the rise of digital culture.

One key takeaway is the profound impact of digitalization on romantic interaction. While the internet and social media have democratized dating and made love more accessible, they have also introduced emotional detachment and a culture of disposability. The phenomenon of "talking stages," ghosting, and instant gratification creates uncertainty, making it more difficult to establish and maintain deep emotional connections. At the same time, access to relationship content, podcasts, and counseling resources has empowered people to become more self-aware and intentional about how they love.

Equally significant is the redefinition of gender roles within romantic dynamics. As women gain greater economic and educational independence, they have begun to renegotiate what partnership means. Men, too, are gradually becoming more emotionally expressive, challenging toxic masculinity and embracing vulnerability. This reconfiguration contributes to the rise of emotionally intelligent partnerships but also to a clash of expectations when traditional mindsets persist. In countries like Nigeria, this cultural tension is especially visible, as the younger generation seeks modern love while still navigating societal pressure to uphold customary roles.

Another central issue is the growing emphasis on mental health and emotional labor in romantic relationships. While previous generations often prioritized survival, stability, or religious expectations, modern lovers increasingly

seek self-fulfillment and emotional compatibility. This shift, though liberating, also demands more from romantic partners in terms of empathy, communication, and personal growth. Relationships are no longer just about companionship, they are spaces of healing, transformation, and co-evolution.

Furthermore, socioeconomic and religious factors remain deeply entwined with how love is pursued and sustained. For many individuals, financial instability delays or disrupts romantic aspirations. Religion, too, can be both a support system and a constraint, offering moral guidance while also limiting personal expression. As shown in this paper, people now navigate romantic decisions with increasing care, balancing personal needs with familial, spiritual, and societal expectations.

Cross-cultural and global perspectives add another layer to this complexity. Love, once largely local and homogenous, now crosses borders and traditions. While such relationships offer the possibility of cultural fusion and growth, they are not immune to prejudice, misunderstandings, or identity conflicts. Navigating these differences demands a high level of communication, mutual respect, and cultural humility. Young people are handling relationships differently, with a number dealing with suicide, anxiety, depression, and unwanted pregnancy, dropout among other challenges (Akinwale, et al 2023; Akinwale, et al 2024; Akinwale, et al).

In summary, contemporary courtship, romance, and love are no longer passive inheritances of culture; they are active choices shaped by self-awareness, social context, and evolving values. Though

challenging, this shift offers individuals the opportunity to construct more authentic, equitable, and emotionally fulfilling relationships.

Discussion

Love, courtship, and romance in the modern era are increasingly shaped by individuality, emotional intelligence, and evolving societal values. No longer confined by rigid traditions or gender roles, romantic relationships have become more fluid, diverse, and centered on personal fulfillment. This shift is evident in how people now approach commitment, communication, sexuality, and emotional connection. The influence of digital platforms, growing mental health awareness, and cultural globalization have all played roles in reshaping expectations and practices around love.

While challenges like miscommunication, insecurity, and shifting norms persist, the growing emphasis on empathy, self-awareness, and emotional literacy offers hope for more meaningful connections. Moreover, the recognition of alternative relationship models, from long-term partnerships to consensual non-monogamy, underscores the need for inclusive narratives that validate different ways of loving.

Ultimately, there is no universal template for love. What matters most is the intentional effort to build relationships grounded in respect, understanding, and shared values. As society continues to evolve, so too will the ways people give and receive love with authenticity and care at the Centre.

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