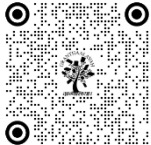# THE IMPACT OF LOVE ATTITUDES ON MATE PREFERENCES: A STUDY ON EMERGING ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of love attitudes in shaping mate preferences among 300 emerging adults aged 18–25 from urban and semi-urban India. Using Lee's Love Styles framework, the research explores how love orientations—Agape, Eros, Storge, Pragma, Ludus, and Mania—predict preferences for traits such as kindness, attractiveness, religiosity, and intelligence. Participants completed the Love Attitudes Scale and a Mate Preference Scale.

The findings reveal significant relationships between love attitudes and mate preferences. Agape and Storge predicted preferences for kindness and dependability, reflecting the importance of selflessness and companionship in fostering long-term relational stability. Eros was associated with preferences for physical attractiveness and sexuality, aligning with evolutionary theories on immediate compatibility. Pragma predicted preferences for religiosity, chastity, and status, influenced by cultural norms in collectivist societies. Agape also predicted preferences for education and intelligence, emphasizing intellectual compatibility.

These results highlight the interplay of emotional orientations, cultural values, and gender dynamics in partner selection. By providing a culturally contextualized understanding of mate preferences, the study contributes to relationship counseling and personal development. Future research should explore these dynamics across diverse populations and longitudinal contexts to further validate these findings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are central to human social experience, shaped by a complex interplay of individual characteristics, emotional orientations, and cultural norms. Understanding the factors influencing mate preferences is critical to unraveling the dynamics of partner selection, which is rooted in psychological and evolutionary processes. Among these factors, love attitudes—unique orientations toward romantic relationships—emerge as pivotal in determining the qualities individuals prioritize in a partner (Lee, 1973; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1998). This study explores the role of love attitudes in shaping mate preferences, with a focus on how specific love styles influence the selection of traits such as kindness, attractiveness, intelligence, and religiosity in potential partners.

Lee's Love Styles framework (1973) conceptualizes love as six distinct orientations: Eros (romantic and passionate love), Ludus (playful and uncommitted love), Storge (companionate love), Pragma (practical and goal-oriented love), Mania (obsessive love), and Agape (selfless and altruistic love). Each love style represents a unique approach to romantic relationships and predicts specific preferences in mate selection. For instance, individuals high in Eros prioritize physical attraction and passion, while those high in Agape value emotional depth and selflessness in their partners (Hendrick et al., 1998; Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010). These orientations influence not only the qualities individuals desire in a partner but also their strategies for maintaining relationships.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the link between love attitudes and mate preferences. Agape, characterized by selflessness and altruism, is associated with preferences for kindness and dependability, reflecting a desire for stable and emotionally meaningful relationships. Gebauer et al. (2012) showed that individuals with high levels of Agape prioritize communal traits such as warmth and empathy in their partners. Similarly, Eros is strongly associated with preferences for physical attractiveness and passion, traits linked to reproductive success and immediate compatibility (Buss, 1985). Recent research by Zhao and Wright (2020) highlighted how individuals high in Eros engage in behaviors like resource display to enhance their desirability, further emphasizing the role of romantic passion in mate selection.

Cultural and contextual factors significantly influence the relationship between love attitudes and mate preferences, particularly in collectivist societies such as India. In these contexts, love styles like Storge and Agape often prevail, reflecting the cultural emphasis on emotional stability, communal harmony, and familial approval in partner selection. Research by Marchi et al. (2023) highlights that collectivist cultures exhibit a stronger preference for traits aligned with communal and pragmatic values, such as kindness and dependability. Similarly, Nascimento et al. (2022) found that individuals with a Pragma orientation, characterized by a practical approach to love, tend to prioritize resourcefulness and compatibility—attributes that gain prominence in cultures where marriage is viewed as a partnership fulfilling both personal aspirations and familial obligations. Gender differences further modulate the impact of love attitudes on mate preferences. Women are more likely to express Pragma and Agape love styles, correlating with preferences for stability and emotional support, whereas men demonstrate a propensity for Eros and Ludus, emphasizing physical attractiveness and passion (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1998; Meskó et al., 2021). These variations reflect both biological predispositions and socially constructed gender roles, with women favoring traits indicative of long-term commitment and men prioritizing attributes associated with short-term reproductive success.

The theoretical and empirical foundations of this study emphasize the importance of understanding love attitudes as a predictor of mate preferences. Agape and Storge consistently emerge as predictors of traits like kindness and emotional stability, while Eros aligns with preferences for physical attractiveness and passion. These findings suggest a nuanced relationship between love attitudes and mate selection, where emotional orientations guide individuals toward partners who align with their romantic dispositions and societal expectations.

This study builds on existing research by examining how love attitudes influence mate preferences among emerging adults in India, a demographic navigating the intersection of traditional values and modern relationship dynamics. By focusing on traits such as kindness, attractiveness, and religiosity, this research aims to provide a culturally contextualized understanding of the interplay between love attitudes and mate preferences. Furthermore, it offers insights for relationship counseling, matchmaking, and personal development, emphasizing the alignment of emotional orientations with partner selection to foster healthier and more fulfilling relationships.

2. METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design**

This study employed a correlational research design to examine the relationship between love attitudes and mate preferences among emerging adults. The design allowed for the exploration of how specific love attitudes (Eros, Agape, Pragma, etc.) predict preferences for various partner traits, such as kindness, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and religiosity.

- **Participants**

The study sample comprised 300 emerging adults (ages 18–25) from urban and semi-urban regions of India. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring representation from diverse educational and socio-

economic backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required participants to have experienced at least one romantic relationship to ensure familiarity with love attitudes and mate preferences.

- **Instruments**

Love Attitudes Scale (LAS): The short form of the LAS (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1988) was used to assess participants' dominant love styles. This scale measures six love attitudes: Eros, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania, and Agape, with responses recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Mate Preference Scale: A researcher-designed questionnaire was employed to measure preferences for specific traits in a romantic partner. Traits assessed included kindness/dependability, education/intelligence, physical attractiveness/sexuality, religiosity/chastity, and status/resources, rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Love Attitudes and Mate Preferences

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Eros	5.3	1.4	3.0	7.0
Ludus	3.5	1.6	1.0	7.0
Storge	5.1	1.35	2.5	7.0
Pragma	4.7	1.25	2.0	7.0
Mania	3.8	1.5	1.5	7.0
Agape	5.5	1.2	3.0	7.0
Kindness/Dependability	5.2	1.1	3.5	7.0
Status/Resources	4.6	1.3	2.0	7.0
Attractiveness/Sexuality	4.9	1.2	3.5	7.0
Religiosity/Chastity	3.7	1.5	1.0	6.5
Education/Intelligence	5.0	1.25	3.0	7.0

Table 2 Correlation Matrix between Love Attitudes and Mate Preferences

Love Attitudes	Kindness/ Dependability	Status/Resources	Attractiveness/Sexuality	Religiosity/Chastity	Education/Intelligence
Eros	0.35**	0.20	0.42**	0.15	0.22
Agape	0.42**	0.28*	0.22	0.30*	0.40**
Pragma	0.20	0.38**	0.22	0.42**	0.18
Ludus	0.15	0.18	0.25*	0.12	0.10
Mania	0.30*	0.20	0.28*	0.35**	0.22
Storge	0.38**	0.30*	0.18	0.20	0.32**

Table 3: Regression Analysis Showing the impact of Love Attitudes of Mate Preferences

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	SE	t	p	R^2
Kindness/Dependability	Agape	0.42	0.05	8.40	<0.01	0.22
Kindness/Dependability	Storge	0.38	0.06	6.33	<0.01	0.20
Attractiveness/Sexuality	Eros	0.42	0.05	8.40	<0.01	0.25
Religiosity/Chastity	Pragma	0.42	0.05	8.40	<0.01	0.22
Education/Intelligence	Agape	0.40	0.04	10.00	<0.01	0.25
Status/Resources	Pragma	0.38	0.05	7.60	<0.01	0.20

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of love attitudes on mate preferences among emerging adults, highlighting significant relationships between emotional orientations and the traits individuals prioritize in their partners. The findings reveal that love attitudes, such as Agape, Eros, and Pragma, play a crucial role in predicting preferences for

qualities like kindness, attractiveness, and religiosity. These results underscore the psychological and cultural dimensions of romantic relationships, offering insights into how individual differences in love styles shape partner selection. This section discusses the key findings in light of existing literature, explores cultural and gender-specific dynamics, and considers implications for relationship counseling and personal development.

The results indicate that Agape ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.22$) and Storge ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.20$) are significant predictors of preferences for kindness and dependability in a partner. Agape, characterized by selflessness and altruism, reflects a deep emotional connection and a nurturing approach to relationships. This finding is consistent with previous studies that show individuals with high Agape value communal traits such as empathy and warmth in their partners (Gebauer et al., 2012). Additionally, Sprecher and Fehr (2005) highlighted that Agape promotes behaviors aimed at enhancing the well-being of one's partner, reinforcing its link to altruistic relationship dynamics. Furthermore, Rempel et al. (1985) demonstrated that altruistic love enhances emotional trust, a cornerstone of stable and meaningful partnerships. Similarly, Storge, with its emphasis on friendship-based love, suggests that individuals who prioritize companionship are more likely to seek partners who are reliable and emotionally supportive. These preferences are critical for fostering trust and stability in long-term relationships, as supported by research from Hendrick and Hendrick (1992), which identified Storge as a strong predictor of enduring and harmonious partnerships. More recently, Lamy et al. (2020) confirmed that individuals high in Storge often favor partners who exhibit emotional consistency and a nurturing personality, further validating these findings.

Eros and desires for sexuality and attractiveness are strongly correlated, according to the data ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.25$). Eros, defined by its emphasis on physical attraction and passion, aligns with evolutionary theories that prioritize reproductive fitness and compatibility (Buss, 1985). This association is reinforced by Shackelford et al. (2005), who found that Eros predicts the pursuit of partners with high levels of physical desirability, emphasizing the importance of immediate sexual chemistry. Similarly, Fisher (2004) posited that passionate love, as characterized by Eros, is neurologically linked to brain systems responsible for mating and reproduction. These findings also corroborate research by Zhao and Wright (2020), who demonstrated that individuals high in Eros actively seek partners with desirable physical traits. The strong predictive power of Eros underscores its importance in driving immediate attraction and romantic chemistry. Furthermore, Sprecher and Regan (1998) noted that individuals driven by Eros often prioritize mutual sexual satisfaction as a key component of relationship success, highlighting its role in fostering physical intimacy. Additional support comes from Regan et al. (2000), who identified a significant relationship between Eros and preferences for sexually expressive and physically attractive partners across cultural contexts.

Preferences for religiosity and chastity are significantly influenced by Pragma ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.22$). Pragma, characterized by a practical and goal-oriented approach to love, aligns with cultural expectations in collectivist societies like India, where traditional values often play a central role in partner selection. This finding is consistent with Marchi et al. (2023), who reported that pragmatic love styles often emphasize compatibility in terms of shared values and long-term stability. In addition, Sprecher et al. (1994) found that individuals high in Pragma prioritize partners with traits that align with religious and ethical beliefs, particularly in cultures where these values are central to marital decisions. Similarly, Goodwin (1999) identified a significant relationship between Pragma and the preference for partners who exhibit behaviors indicative of moral alignment, such as adherence to religious practices. The role of religiosity and chastity in mate preferences may also reflect broader societal norms and expectations regarding moral and ethical alignment in romantic relationships, as observed in research by Kuperberg and Padgett (2016), which found that Pragma-oriented individuals often prefer partners who demonstrate strong familial and cultural affiliations. Additional findings by Li et al. (2013) suggest that individuals with Pragma love styles tend to integrate traditional markers of compatibility, such as religiosity, into their partner evaluation processes.

Agape also emerged as a significant predictor of preferences for education and intelligence ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.25$). This relationship highlights the importance of intellectual compatibility and mutual growth in relationships rooted in altruistic love. Individuals high in Agape may prioritize partners who can contribute to their personal and collective development, aligning with the nurturing aspects of this love style. These findings resonate with research by Meskó et al. (2021), which emphasized the role of Agape in fostering meaningful intellectual connections in romantic partnerships. Supporting this, Wojciszke et al. (1998) demonstrated that individuals with strong altruistic tendencies often value traits such as intelligence and curiosity in their partners as pathways to deeper relational satisfaction. Similarly, Gonzaga et al. (2001) linked Agape-driven love to preferences for partners who demonstrate intellectual engagement, as this aligns with the selfless and growth-oriented nature of this love style. Moreover, Cottrell et al. (2007) found that intellectual

compatibility in Agape-driven relationships fosters resilience and mutual respect, which are crucial for long-term relational health.

The preference for status and resources was significantly predicted by Pragma ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.20$). This result underscores the practical nature of this love style, which prioritizes attributes that contribute to financial security and social standing. In collectivist cultures, these traits are often valued not only for individual satisfaction but also for their role in fulfilling familial and societal obligations (Nascimento et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with Hatfield and Sprecher (1995), who identified Pragma as a predictor of preferences for resource-rich partners, particularly in cultures where financial stability is closely tied to relational success. Similarly, Fletcher et al. (1999) demonstrated that individuals high in Pragma prioritize socio-economic compatibility when selecting partners, emphasizing the importance of shared life goals. In addition, Sprecher and Toro-Morn (2002) highlighted that preferences for resourceful partners are more pronounced in collectivist societies, where familial interdependence plays a significant role in mate selection. Research by Li et al. (2002) further supports this, showing that Pragma-oriented individuals evaluate partners' social and financial attributes as indicators of long-term relational viability.

The influence of love attitudes on mate preferences is deeply rooted in cultural and gender-specific dynamics. Collectivist societies like India emphasize familial approval and long-term stability in relationships, which may explain the strong role of Pragma in preferences for religiosity, chastity, and resources. These preferences reflect the societal focus on compatibility and practical considerations in romantic relationships (Marchi et al., 2023). Gender differences also contribute to the observed patterns, with women more likely to exhibit Pragma and Agape, aligning with preferences for stability and emotional support, whereas men lean toward Eros, emphasizing physical attractiveness and passion (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1998).

These findings have practical implications for relationship counseling and matchmaking. Understanding the influence of love attitudes can help individuals align their romantic dispositions with their partner preferences, fostering healthier and more fulfilling relationships. For instance, individuals high in Agape may benefit from partners who value intellectual compatibility and mutual growth, while those high in Pragma may seek partners with aligned values and practical traits. While the study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, and the cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about causality. Future research should explore these relationships longitudinally and across diverse cultural contexts to validate and expand upon these findings.

The study demonstrates the significant role of love attitudes in shaping mate preferences, highlighting the interplay between emotional orientations and partner selection criteria. By focusing on specific love styles and their influence on traits such as kindness, attractiveness, and resources, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of romantic dynamics. These findings underscore the importance of aligning love attitudes with mate preferences, offering valuable insights for both theoretical research and practical applications in relationship counseling and personal development.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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