

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women
A Case Study in the City of Mascara

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Abstract: This study aims to delve into the social dimensions of romantic relationships between men and women. Conducted through fieldwork in July 2021, focusing on four case studies in Mascara city, we explored their personal stories and viewpoints. Our findings indicate that romantic love, as a deep emotional connection, is influenced by various social factors such as upbringing, religion, family dynamics, traditions, and artistic expression. These elements impart specific social meanings to romantic love, underscoring its importance for sociological analysis. Our primary goal is to uncover the cultural and social implications inherent in romantic love, revealing it as a nuanced social phenomenon fraught with some complexities. The key findings drawn from this research is that family, upbringing, religion, and art profoundly shape the social understanding of romantic love and emotional bonds.

Keywords: Romantic love; emotional relationship; man; woman; social dimension.

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Introduction:

This study is grounded in our daily observations of individuals from diverse social and age groups, all of whom display remarkably similar behaviors in expressing love toward the opposite sex. Romantic relationships are often seen as a manifestation of love and a vehicle through which this emotion is communicated. Those who engage in such relationships are driven by love for the other person and a desire to get closer to them.

Love is a deeply philosophical and sociological concept. Ancient Greek philosophers studied the notion of love and its connection to human nature, linking it to myths and mythology while analyzing its effects on both individual and collective life—namely within Athenian society and, more broadly, on humanity at large. Mythology presents love stories involving specific gods, each symbolizing different domains. These myths hold metaphorical significance related to human emotional experiences, with certain stories, such as those of Pygmalion, Adonis, Cupid, and Narcissus, each offering symbolic representations of love.

Love continues to occupy a central place in human consciousness, influencing thoughts and behaviors across generations. Despite the passage of time and the evolution of civilizations, love remains both an enduring and contemporary subject. Throughout history, humans have engaged in romantic relationships, but with shifts in social structures, these relationships have been shaped by psychological, religious, economic, geographical, and cultural factors, resulting in varying expressions of love across societies, time periods, and individuals.

As a result, romantic relationships and expressions of love have transcended their once-sacred mythological forms. In modern societies, particularly in the West, love has become a symbol of personal liberation and individualism, empowering individuals to express their emotions and desires in ways that align with their personal freedom. In contrast, love within Arab societies has been deeply influenced by religious and cultural settings. Prior to the advent of Islam, Arab societies were conservative, emphasizing the sanctity of honor and opposing anything that might undermine it.

Within this cultural context, a woman's social sphere was traditionally confined to interactions with other women or, at most, with male relatives who shared clear, documented familial ties. This cultural environment contributed to the prohibition of publicly acknowledged romantic relationships without familial and societal approval. As a result, many of the most renowned love stories in Arabic literary history unfolded in secrecy, constrained by social repression.

With the advent of Islam, the role of women in romantic relationships was further formalized. While Islam does not prohibit love, it prohibits relationships between men and women outside the legally recognized frameworks of engagement or marriage, as defined by Islamic jurisprudence. Religious scholars base their interpretations on Quranic verses and Hadiths that govern women's behavior and their interactions with men.

However, the transformations undergone by human societies—particularly within Arab and Islamic cultures—along with a variety of cultural influences, have contributed to reshaping women's self-perception and societal roles. A distinct shift toward the emancipation of women from patriarchal structures has emerged, with women seeking the freedom to express their thoughts, desires, and emotions on equal terms with men. This transformation has resulted in an increase in openly recognized romantic relationships. Yet, despite this growing openness, women's relationships with men remain bound by religious and social conventions. Romantic relationships that fall outside these established boundaries are often viewed as dishonourable and undesirable, as they are perceived as transgressions against the socially and religiously protected domain of women. As a result, love continues to be a subject marked by constraints and taboos within these societies.

This situation presents a sociological paradox that warrants scholarly attention: the widespread occurrence of romantic relationships between men and women, despite the religious, cultural, and social restrictions that oppose them. Our observations suggest that this phenomenon spans across all age groups and both genders, with a particular prevalence among young people. The

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

paradox becomes especially apparent when the high frequency of romantic relationships is juxtaposed with the strict prohibitions imposed by societal norms. In fact, the stronger the restrictions, the more intense the desire to defy them. The pursuit of romantic relationships, or at the very least, the fascination with the notion of love, has come to be a defining preoccupation of contemporary society. Love has evolved from a personal sentiment into a societal matter, a goal sought by many individuals, even as the public acknowledgment of romantic relationships remains shrouded in discretion and secrecy.

Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze in depth this complex social phenomenon, necessitating meticulous examination for a comprehensive comprehension. Love has increasingly emerged as a priority in the aspirations of Algerian individuals, particularly in terms of aspirations and expectations. Consequently, this investigation will scrutinize romantic love from a socio-anthropological perspective. Our primary focus will center on romantic love as a distinct category, differentiated from other forms such as familial affection or friendship. The term "romantic love" is employed here in relation to the Romantic movement, originating in 12th century Germany, which depicted emotional bonds through narrative fiction, emphasizing intense emotional experiences. Over time, the term "Romantic" has come to signify a departure from Classical norms, embodying the new and the innovative (Choudeb, M. 2021).

A review of Western and Arab sociological literature on romantic love between men and women reveals a notable scarcity of rigorous research within the Arab intellectual sphere. The taboo nature of love in Arab societies, coupled with societal discretion regarding romantic relationships, has resulted in a dearth of academic sociological studies on this subject, namely Abdullah Zarou's study, *Sultan al-Ishq: A Contribution to the Sociology of Attachment*, which explores human inclinations and forms of social relationships through the lens of passion and love, emphasizing their anthropological implications. Zarou argues that wherever love exists, it warrants sociological inquiry into its representations and manifestations. He concludes that

the pursuit of love is a universal human experience, justifying its anthropological and sociological examination.

Another significant study is *Romantic Love Between Philosophy and Psychology* by Fares Kamal Nazmi, which questions whether romantic love constitutes a static psychological concept, despite its variations across social and civilizational contexts. Nazmi hypothesizes that all forms of love between men and women are variations of a single philosophical concept—romantic love. Through a historical approach, he underscores the differences in the understanding of love among philosophers and psychologists, noting the variations between genders and cultures, while highlighting the shared historical and theoretical frameworks of love influenced by physiological, emotional, sociological, and civilizational factors.

Helen Fisher's book *Why We Love? The Nature and Chemistry of Love* addresses the problem of love by posing the following questions: Why do we love? Why do we choose specific individuals? Fisher posits that romantic love is rooted in human love chemistry. She conducted field surveys with 437 Americans and 402 Japanese participants, using statistical analysis and neuroimaging technology to study the brain activity of 40 men and women in love. Among the significant findings was the relationship between love and biological hormones and sexual desire. These factors, along with social factors such as ethnicity, timing, social environment, and culture, are identified as crucial determinants of relationship success or failure.

In her study *Why Does Love Cause Suffering? The Experience of Love in Modernity*, Eva Illouz explores the sociological significance of studying romantic love, arguing that the psychological dimension of love takes on a collective and social character. Illouz's research bridges the institutional and psychological aspects of love and its associated suffering. By conducting 70 interviews across different countries and examining online dating sites, Illouz investigates the relationship between love and suffering, which assumes various forms in modernity. She notes that with modernity, significant elements emerged that distinguish the nature of love-related suffering, notably transforming love relationships. For instance, partner selection became a marker of modernity, individualism, and

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

rationality. Illouz draws upon the theory of recognition (la reconnaissance), which explores the relationship between self-recognition through the other and social recognition. The rationalization of love shifted away from its existential meaning, no longer grounded in the conflict between the individual and society or in personal sacrifice. This societal transformation has redefined the spiritual nature traditionally associated with love, aligning it instead with material aspects such as media and internet platforms.

In *Intimate Love in the Digital Age: The Case of Relationships Formed in Social Spaces Online*, Amaranta Cechini, based on her doctoral thesis, examines how relationships are formed through the internet and their trajectory. Cechini addresses emotional and institutional relational aspects to understand the dynamics of intimacy in contemporary times. Among her key findings, she asserts that contemporary privacy (l'intimité) is increasingly associated with the other, rather than with the individual alone, facilitated by online dating and communication platforms.

Research Problem and Hypotheses:

As previously highlighted, love holds a significant place in the daily lives of Arabs in general and specifically Algerians, predominantly expressed through romantic relationships shaped by psychological, social, and cultural influences. Given that love primarily manifests in relationships, our approach transitions from the specific and tangible to the broader and conceptual, while remaining rooted in sociological realities.

Understanding love within a sociological framework necessitates connecting it to behavior and practical application. Therefore, love exists both as an abstract concept and a lived reality, thus becoming a subject of both anthropological and sociological investigation. Within the historical context of sociology, there exists a tradition of examining abstract representations and meanings that are collectively constructed and translated into behaviors. For instance, Émile Durkheim's studies on emotions explored their interplay with reason and societal development.

Our interest in the topic of love lies on two distinct levels: the abstract and the tangible. We acknowledge that investigating love as a behavior requires an exploration of the underlying ideas and meanings associated with it. In everyday life, emotions—manifested through thoughts and feelings—are expressed through behaviors that can either lead to happiness or suffering. This study aims to examine love as a social and cultural institution, situated within specific temporal and spatial contexts, complete with its own symbols and meanings. Ultimately, love is a representation that individuals express through actions and attitudes toward their partners, forming the cornerstone of this research study.

Through repeated and direct observations, we have identified the significant impact of love on individuals, particularly among young people of both genders. For them, love represents a desire they actively seek to fulfill, and that permeates their daily lives. This is evident in their conversations, the music they listen to, the social relationships they form, and the graffiti they draw. The inscriptions and scribbles found on the walls and desks of schools and universities often take the form of broken or bleeding hearts, symbols, names, or initials that signify the proper names of loved ones.

Our exploratory study on romantic love between genders across different age and social groups, conducted in the Wilaya of Mascara in 2014, revealed that love—or more precisely, the search for love—remains one of the most pressing concerns for young people today. It is a constant preoccupation, even if they conceal their obsession and attempt to suppress their desires from public view, in response to the societal restrictions that Arab culture generally imposes on romantic relationships. This perception aligns with the broader social and cultural meanings of romantic love and emotional relationships, which are shaped by the values of the society in which they exist.

In this study, we aim to explore the various social and cultural dimensions of romantic love by addressing the following question: What are the visible social and cultural meanings surrounding romantic love, and how do they reflect deeper psychological significance?

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

Hypothesis

Religion and culture embody social meanings that shape individuals' perceptions of love and influence the way they experience romantic relationships.

Conceptual Definitions

Love: Love is defined as "an emotional or physical relationship between a man and a woman" (Mohammed, 1989, p. 18). The term encompasses various synonyms that reflect different intensities of affection, including passion, infatuation, ardor, devotion, and longing. In this study, love is understood as a combination of perceptions, emotions, and behaviors that an individual develops toward another person. Specifically, the focus is on romantic love between a man and a woman and the diverse ways in which affection is expressed. These expressions are shaped by cultural, social, and civilizational influences, as well as psychological factors that contribute to the variability of love's perception from one individual to another. From a philosophical perspective, Ibn Sina conceptualized love (*ishq*) as a universal phenomenon, positioning human love within a broader cosmic order. His theory, which integrates Aristotelian principles with Platonic influences, presents love as an enchanting and compelling force, illustrating how all beings are drawn toward perfection and goodness (Abdelhamid, 2004, p. 77). Across civilizations, philosophers and scholars have interpreted love in diverse ways. Its conceptualization was later incorporated into Islamic thought, acquiring distinct meanings shaped by religion and cultural context.

Operational Definition of Love: For the purposes of this study, love is defined as a romantic emotion experienced by young individuals toward the opposite sex, expressed through a specific set of symbols, gestures, and behaviors. This form of affection follows particular patterns of perception and, over time, evolves into relationships and actions that embody romantic love. Consequently, the symbols,

gestures, and behaviors associated with love serve as observable indicators, allowing for an assessment of the phenomenon as it manifests in the daily lives of young people.

Romantic Relationships: A romantic relationship constitutes a specific type of social relationship that emerges from interpersonal interaction. More broadly, social relationships are defined as “any connection between two individuals, two groups, or between an individual and a group. These relationships may be cooperative or non-cooperative, direct or indirect, immediate or delayed” (Ahmed, 1982, p. 352).

A romantic relationship, however, is characterized by an emotional and affective bond between a man and a woman. This bond may extend to physical intimacy and may either be legitimized within a religious framework or exist outside religious settings, thereby subjecting it to potential social disapproval. Romantic relationships are largely shaped by cultural and religious values, as well as by the collective perceptions of the community. In Arab and Islamic societies, in particular, romantic relationships are closely intertwined with social norms, religious doctrines, individual psychological factors, and contextual influences such as historical periods and cultural settings.

Operational Definition of Romantic Relationships: In this study, a romantic relationship is defined as an interpersonal connection that primarily expresses love between a man and a woman. This relationship covers various forms and is influenced by diverse social and cultural dynamics.

Social Representations: Social representations are defined as “symbols that hold shared intellectual value and emotional significance among members of a group. They reflect collective perceptions, the historical experiences of the community, and communal emotions. These representations provide the group with a sense of unity and distinctiveness, thereby contributing to social cohesion” (Ahmed, 1982, p. 69). Social representations consist of ideas and meanings attributed to individuals or groups, shaping their behaviors and reactions toward external phenomena. According to

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

Émile Durkheim, social representations are inherently collective, exhibiting both continuity and variability due to evolving social relationships and differing cultural interpretations. This concept is central to social psychology, as representations emerge from the meanings individuals construct through their interactions with the external world. In the context of this research, social representations pertain to the collective set of meanings, interpretations, and beliefs surrounding romantic love between men and women. These representations will be examined through interactions with a sample population from the studied community, which will be defined later.

Operational Definition of Social Representations: In this study, social representations refer to individuals' perceptions of romantic love and their attitudes toward forming emotional relationships with the opposite sex. These representations are influenced by past experiences and social interactions. The study will examine participants' perspectives on romantic love, their family dynamics, cultural and religious influences, and their engagement with artistic expressions—particularly the art forms they are drawn to.

Culture: One of the most widely adopted definitions of culture is the one provided by Edward B. Tylor, stating that culture is: "The complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a person as a member of society" (Dennis, 2007, p. 31).

Operational Definition of Culture: In this study, culture refers to the traditions and customs inherited by the Algerian society that shape individual behavior in romantic relationships. Specifically, the study focuses on how religion, customs, and social norms influence the dynamics between men and women in relationships.

Religion: Religion has been defined in various ways, one of which defines it as : "the belief in spiritual beings, encompassing a set of supernatural beliefs and practices regarded as ends in themselves" (Al-Salih, 1999, p. 452).

Operational Definition of Religion: In this study, religion refers to Islamic teachings that guide individual behavior, with a particular focus on Quranic verses and Hadiths that explicitly define the nature

of relationships between men and women who are not related by kinship.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework:

In this study, we adopted a qualitative approach that prioritizes an in-depth understanding of micro-societies over large-scale sampling in order to obtain a comprehensive and precise outcome. The qualitative method is based on individualistic principles, focusing on particular meanings and their connections to actions, a strategy commonly used by sociologists and anthropologists. This approach allows us to engage directly with the youth, studying their perceptions of romantic love and exploring how these meanings and perceptions are intertwined with the social and cultural fabric of their community.

To achieve these objectives, the study employed a descriptive methodology, where "description is an organizational process that involves translation and interpretation, linked to the researcher's search for meaning and knowledge through discourse analysis, aiming to uncover the hidden culture behind it" (Borutti, 1999, p. 40). From this descriptive foundation, the study progresses to analysis a more profound process that involves interpreting symbols and meanings, placing them within sociological frameworks to offer scientific and sociological insights into the spontaneous elements of the daily life of individuals and societies. The analytical process is informed by theoretical approaches that provide key concepts to structure our investigation of this topic.

One of the primary challenges faced in Arab sociology, particularly in such topics, is finding a theoretical framework upon which researchers can rely. As previously indicated, Arab studies on the sociology of love are scarce, making it difficult to draw on a theoretical framework that aligns with the social life of Algerian individuals and the formation of emotional relationships and love within an Arab society, which differs from Western societies. Thus, we have chosen functional theory, which focuses on the functions of patterns and social systems, with Robert Merton being one of its foremost proponents. This theory will be employed to elucidate the

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

function of family, religion, and art in shaping specific representations within the research community regarding romantic love and emotional relationships. Key concepts include function, social control, social equilibrium, change, social pattern, role, among others.

Research Community and Sample

The research community bears a comprehensive/general characteristic, in contrast to the sample, which constitutes a smaller microcosm. The research community consists of Algerian youth willing to express their opinions on romantic love between men and women and on emotional relationships they have experienced or observed through their interactions with others. The sample, on the other hand, includes a specific number of youth who are engaged in romantic relationships, those who are not, or those who have not yet experienced such relationships but have ideas regarding romantic love and the type of emotional relationship they envision having with a partner in the future. The sample consists of four female individuals.

Data Collection Techniques

Given our use of qualitative methodology, observation and semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate methods for engaging with study participants. Through observation, we gained a deeper understanding of the daily lives of individuals in romantic relationships, allowing us to observe their actions, behaviors, communication styles, and their reactions to interview questions, which can vary depending on the topic or inquiry. In addition to observation, conducted semi-structured interviews, guided by a set of predetermined questions. The aim of these interviews is to foster open communication with participants, giving them the freedom to express themselves while allowing us to explore various aspects, indicators, and dimensions of the topic in greater depth. As such,

semi-structured interviews prove to be an essential tool in achieving these objectives.

Spatiotemporal Framework of the Study: Fieldwork was conducted in the Wilaya of Mascara, with the four interviews conducted over a two-week period in July 2021.

Study Findings

Definition of Love: Respondents exhibited varying definitions of love, finding it challenging to articulate a specific definition of love. The first and third participants, in particular, struggled to define it, viewing it as an open concept with complex and multifaceted interpretations (Ali, 2009, p. 13). The responses varied widely, often accompanied by silence or laughter, reflecting the ambiguity and intricacy of love as they understood it. In other words, "love is perhaps the most complex and mysterious of human emotions, full of secrets, puzzles, and riddles more than all other human emotions combined" (Yuri, 2006, p. 27). Indeed, love is consistently recognized as a multifaceted emotion that is difficult to express, define, or describe, as it represents the convergence of two distinct selves engaged in a shared relationship. Despite its complexity, however, respondents were able to identify certain specific characteristics of love.

According to the first respondent, love is linked to the ability to seek refuge in another person, encompassing both conflicting and diverse emotions, with mutual recognition and reciprocity affirming the existence of love. This mutual recognition reflects the "law of love," where each individual acknowledges the other and their feelings, thereby maintaining balance. According to the second respondent, love is viewed as a beautiful feeling, particularly when it is pure, and is connected to cooperation between man and woman. Mutual understanding ensures that each partner fulfils their respective roles, and when both sides perform their roles, understanding and harmony naturally follow. The notion of purity here refers to the absence of sex, as sexual relations are perceived to tarnish love when outside the bounds of marriage, according to

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

societal norms. In other words, "love comes in two forms, innocent and non-innocent love. Teenage girls often express satisfaction with their relationship with a specific young man 'because he has no bad intentions' or 'because he does not look at her with a dirty look.' The meaning of 'dirtiness' here is sex outside love". (Boushra, 2020, p. 113). For women, love without sex symbolizes the purity and innocence of both the man and the relationship itself; this is engaging in a sexual relationship is seen as a violation of human purity, transforming it into something profane, "with the potential consequence of the woman losing her purity and virginity—an attribute considered a sign of honor for both the woman and her family" (Boushra, 2020, p. 100). In this context, sex disrupts the balance of love and its function, according to societal representations and norms. The third respondent stated that love is defined as a relationship that binds individuals to "someone who cares about and accepts others in any way". The recognition of the other is a fundamental condition of love—acknowledging the other person's existence, emotions, thoughts, and everything that concerns them. This concept aligns with the "law of love" mentioned earlier, which asserts that the recognition and acceptance of the individual is central to love.

Social Dimensions of Romantic Love:

Customs and Traditions: Customs and traditions play a crucial role in society, reinforcing social structures, particularly in Arab communities. The respondents unanimously agreed that customs and traditions have a significant influence on their romantic relationships. The society operates under its own set of laws, which are imposed on individuals and groups. As for the laws that govern love, "some influence the majority of people, while others affect only a few. Moreover, some people are influenced by certain laws, while others are affected by different ones" (Yuri, 2006, p. 90). These societal laws are evident in the rejection of romantic relationships between men and women outside the bounds of a formal, lawful union, as such relationships are often considered social taboos. A woman's honor is closely linked to the honor of her family. Besides, "virginity is under strict social surveillance" (Leila, p. 97). In some extreme cases, social customs may even condone acts of violence, such as the killing of a

woman if she is seen with a man who is not her lawful partner, or if she loses her virginity. "Thousands of girls around the world are subjected to honor crimes by their families... Some are killed for being seen with a man with whom they have no formal relationship" (Boushra, 2020, p. 176). There is, therefore, a clear connection between individuals and their social environment, represented by social norms, customs, and traditions, which in turn exert pressure on the practice of romantic love. On the other hand, religion rejects relationships between men and women outside the law and does not recognize the integration of individuals except within the confines of what is permissible. Society also rejects such relationships but accepts and socially values a man's romantic relationship with a woman. Conversely, society condemns and does not recognize a woman's romantic relationship, which is related to the patriarchal culture passed down through generations. This still influences the structure of relationships between men and women, as "the man has been, throughout the history of human cultures, the center of debate and conflict regarding his status in relation to women. In many rural and urban societies, the male is often preferred over the female... Thus, we are faced with an unfair reality where male is pictured as the dominator and the female the subordinate" (Noha, 2020, p. 323).

From a religious standpoint, romantic love between males and females outside of marriage is forbidden. The religious ruling plays a key role in preventing the development of romantic relationships, thereby acting as a mechanism of social control. This is because love often leads to the practice of behaviors that are religiously and socially rejected, namely sexual relations between the two partners. In some cases, women perceive love as a sexual relationship that results in the loss of both their virginity and their honor. As articulated by the second respondent in our study, love is "forbidden according to customs and traditions." She further explained, "There is no such thing as love, meaning that once a woman loves someone, even if she does not share her feelings with others, she is no longer pure." This statement is pivotal as it encapsulates the community's customs and traditions: love, as an emotion that may not necessarily lead to the creation of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman, is primarily prohibited for women. This kind of prohibition

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

is even more pronounced if the woman engages in a romantic relationship with a man outside of marriage and is seen walking with him, conversing with him secretly, or interacting with him in any way. A woman who does so is regarded as "impure" - as described by the third respondent -.

In contrast, the fourth respondent held a more nuanced perspective by acknowledging the legitimacy of love while highlighting its societal disapproval. She also expressed puzzlement, stating, "I don't know why?", and recounted challenges encountered within her own romantic relationship. Such challenges often compel women to contemplate ending their relationships to avoid bringing shame upon their families. Conversely, adversities can also intensify passion, with lovers seeming to thrive on obstacles (Helen, 2015, p. 36). This phenomenon resonates deeply in Arab narratives of love, where societal resistance serves to fortify the bond between partners. This dynamic is similarly reflected in romantic relationships within Arab communities, where familial rejection, particularly from one's own family, heightens the intensity of emotional attachment, leading young women to communicate secretly with their partners or orchestrate clandestine meetings. Conversely, "some families impose stringent regulations upon their daughters, employing social control mechanisms to safeguard familial honor. Certain households enforce strict rules through intimidation and punitive measures, often delegated to male siblings by their fathers (Boushra, 2020, p. 118), The prevalence of male authority underscores the perception in Arab societies that the honor of a woman is a matter of familial concern. Historically, a woman's honor was traditionally entrusted to her male relatives; however, societal evolution has eroded this convention. Contemporary norms increasingly permit public displays of affection between men and women in romantic relationships, reflecting evolving societal attitudes. Resistance to such relationships is waning, indicative of cultural shifts adapting to these transformations.

This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the influence of satellite channels. These platforms "have significantly disrupted the once-closed system, leading to an increase in relationships between the sexes. However, the prevailing societal

stance continues to endorse relationships within the framework of marriage or other officially recognized unions" (Arab Women's Center, 2007, p. 116). Another key factor is the evolving role and function of the family. As Zainab (2020, p. 189) explains, "the revolution in communication technology has transformed media institutions into social entities that transmit values through the culture they promote, while the role of the family and other social institutions has declined." This shift in the family's role has contributed to the emergence of new values and behavioral patterns. Additionally, variations in attitudes toward romantic relationships can be linked to the cultural background of the family itself. A study conducted by the Arab Women's Center found that "adolescent girls from affluent social backgrounds who experience a high degree of freedom have firmly expressed their support for romantic relationships" (Arab Women's Center, 2007, p. 116). Given these dynamics, how does the family influence the reality of romantic relationships and love between men and women, as observed in the field study?

Family: The family fulfills multiple functions, including socialization and social control, as previously mentioned. In this study, all four participants concurred that the family plays a significant role in shaping the reality of love. According to the third respondent (case), when a family is strict, it might discourage the daughter from engaging in a romantic relationship. The first respondent indicated that she is likely to keep her romantic relationship secret, which may lead to family issues if she is exposed. In such instances, parents might go so far as to restrict their daughter's education or limit her mobility. Alternatively, as suggested by the fourth respondent, one family member—typically the mother—may be compelled to allow her daughter to engage in this kind of relationship. This aligns with the broader patriarchal structure in which men, whether fathers or brothers, tend to reject such relationships, as the prevailing cultural norm equates a woman's honor with that of her family. The family serves as the cornerstone of society, mirroring its transformations: "In the family, all the forces that drive life converge, and all social tremors are concentrated, intersecting with broader transformations in social education" (Yuri, 2006, p. 166). Additionally, the fourth respondent revealed that the mother had once experienced a love story with her husband, which

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

influenced her acceptance of her daughter's romantic relationship. In this instance, the mother and daughter are reenacting a love story that culminated in marriage—the mother's own experience—leading her to embrace her daughter's relationship in the hope of a similar outcome. This social behavior falls within the concept of recognition through solidarity: by supporting her daughter's love story, the mother grants it social legitimacy. In doing so, she affirms her daughter's self-worth and bolsters her stance within the family dynamic.

However, when a romantic relationship fails, the consequences are perceived not in terms of lost virginity but rather as a loss of dignity—an outcome seen as predetermined by societal norms. According to the fourth respondent, the relationship might lead to an official engagement, signifying its ultimate success. Thus, the family functions as a determinant of either a tragic or fulfilling conclusion. The family's concern for the daughter's well-being operates as a metaphorical safety belt, guiding her along the "correct" path as defined by familial expectations. This stands in stark contrast to men, who are not subjected to the same rigid family rules and restrictions. "In Algerian family upbringing, there is a clear distinction between genders. The male is afforded a superior status, as he embodies strength and carries the family name, while the female is viewed as a potentially disruptive force that must be restrained" (Leila, N.D., p. 97). This imposition of control over young women may lead them to engage in romantic relationships under the notion of "chaste love"—a form of affection devoid of a sexual component. In this way, they believe they are preserving both their own honor and that of their family; and "when sexual relationships are subject to such scrutiny and restriction, a certain percentage of adolescent girls and boys still seek to experience romantic relationships. For them, this represents thwarted love ... Adolescents often distinguish between sexual activity and love." (Arab Women's Center, 2007, p. 110). Within this framework, the family fulfills its role in safeguarding the "purity of love" while ensuring the preservation of social and familial honor.

Education: Education plays a fundamental role in shaping perceptions of love and romantic relationships between individuals. The participants' responses regarding education highlighted two key

aspects. The first concerns how education can discourage a young woman from engaging in a romantic relationship, thereby influencing emotional attachments. This impact is particularly evident in the answers of the second and third respondents. The second respondent stated that she was raised to distrust men and to avoid forming romantic connections, adding that "since my childhood, I was told not to engage in romantic relationships and to stay away from men, as they had intentions. This made me fear them and prevented me from attempting to enter a relationship with them." This statement highlights the profound influence of upbringing on an individual's worldview. The socialization process, especially within the family, instils values and principles that later shape one's interactions and relationships. Similarly, the third participant mentioned that engaging in a romantic relationship with a man reflects a lack of proper upbringing. This perspective is directly linked to the socialization she received from her family, which shaped her perceptions of romantic relationships and love between men and women.

Education is regarded as a core function of the family, allowing it to fulfill certain objectives such as maintaining social stability and adapting the educational system to align with societal needs. The participants' statements revealed two distinct perspectives on the influence of education on romantic relationships. The second aspect concerns how education affects the nature and quality of romantic relationships. When a young woman receives a proper education, it positively influences her relationship with her partner by fostering mutual respect and effective communication. In this regard, the participant noted that: "If a man encounters an uneducated woman, he will never make her his wife." Therefore, a man would not consider marrying an educated woman, even if they were romantically involved. This underscores Algerian society's strong adherence to moral values and the significance of proper upbringing, particularly in the context of marriage, which is regarded as a transformative and defining phase of the lovers' lives. The fourth participant asserted that an educated individual would experience love sincerely, whereas someone raised with poor values would develop a distorted understanding of love. This suggests that upbringing and education play a critical role in shaping the nature of

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

love, the form of emotional relationships, and the way communication unfolds between partners.

Religion: The religious perspective on romantic love, particularly in the context of romantic relationships outside of engagement or marriage, is unequivocally clear: such relationships are strictly prohibited. All participants in the study expressed this stance in their statements. The second and fourth respondents acknowledged that love itself may be permissible, citing the example of Khadijah and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, they maintained that engaging in a romantic relationship remains unlawful. The second participant supported her argument by citing the Qur'anic verse: [They should be chaste, neither of those who commit unlawful intercourse randomly nor those who take secret lovers. (An-Nisa 4:25); adding that this applies to friendship, let alone romantic relationships". The first respondent emphasized that while religion prohibits sexual relationships, it does not forbid emotional attachments. This distinction explains why engagement and marriage are central to romantic involvement. This perspective is widely shared among all participants and reflects the broader social consensus in Algeria.

Despite the widespread understanding that romantic relationships are religiously forbidden, a large group of youth still engage in them. This disconnect between religious doctrine and personal behavior can be attributed to various factors, including a lack of deep engagement with religious teachings. Often, individuals interpret religious texts based on personal needs and interests rather than adhering strictly to Islamic doctrine. Consequently, in this context, religion may be perceived as functionally deficient, as it fails to guide individuals in accordance with religious teachings. Instead, personal desires often take precedence, preventing religious doctrine from achieving the social equilibrium that societal systems aim to uphold. Religion is closely aligned with tradition, customs, values, and societal norms in rejecting romantic relationships outside of marriage or official engagement. This alignment helps explain why "individuals involved in romantic relationships often go to great lengths to conceal them, as such relationships are perceived as deviations from established social values (Nora, N.D., p. 155). Hiding a romantic relationship

from family, neighbors, and acquaintances serves as an implicit acknowledgment of its status as a social transgression; “and because we consider it a social deviation, we concur with many researchers who argue that the term deviation does not relate to the behavior itself, but rather to how that behavior is evaluated in relation to societal norms.” Nora, N.D., p. 147).

In Algerian society, social norms regarding romantic relationships are deeply influenced by Islamic teachings, which have roots in pre-Islamic tribal customs. During the pre-Islamic era, a woman’s interaction with a non-relative man was deemed shameful and a violation of tribal codes. This rejection persists today, despite significant societal transformations within Muslim communities. Although romantic relationships have become more visible in public spaces in Algeria, engaging in a romantic relationship with continues to be viewed as a violation of societal values and a sinful act. The absence of social recognition for romantic love in Algerian society hinders the development of mutual respect among individuals engaged in love-driven relationships and can result in a loss of self-confidence. This contributes to the widespread practice of secrecy among those involved in such relationships.

Art: Music, songs, films, and literature play a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive love. Art serves as both an emotional and intellectual stimulus, prompting individuals to construct specific mental images and representations. A novel, for instance, encourages readers to imagine its characters, protagonists, and events, while songs, films, plays, and other forms of artistic expression evoke similar mental processes. When participants were asked about the impact of art on their perception of love, they affirmed its strong influence. The first participant noted that listening to music intensifies the longing for the beloved, stating: "One should never listen to romantic songs so that they don’t long for them or suffer." This response underscores how music intertwines mental imagery with emotions, often amplifying feelings of absence and emotional pain. The dynamic between presence and absence in such contexts creates a deep sense of loss, which is reinforced by artistic expression.

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

Films, on the other hand, play a pivotal role in shaping lovers' behaviors, as they often imitate the characters they see on screen. Korean, Turkish, and Indian films, in particular, have gained immense popularity, especially with the expansion of the internet and modern technology, making them readily accessible at any time. TV channels have further reinforced this by broadcasting these films and series. In this context, "satellite TV has greatly contributed to disrupting the closed system, leading to the normalization of romantic relationships between men and women " (Arab Women Center, 2007, p. 116). The influence of satellite TV has reshaped cultural dynamics, fostering greater openness and the adoption of different relationship models. The second participant mentioned that films strongly influence adolescents' behaviors, who tend to imitate what they see on the screen, though she personally remained unaffected. In contrast, the third participant stated that watching Korean films expanded her imagination, making her envision herself as one of the movie characters, adding that: "Adolescents tend to lean towards romantic and emotional love similar to what is presented in TV series" (Arab Women Center, 2007, p. 113).

Regarding novels, participants agreed on their powerful impact in shaping perceptions of love. Stories such as Qays and Layla or Romeo and Juliet were frequently mentioned as good examples in this regard. The fourth participant emphasized this point, stating: "Yes, you start wanting to experience this kind of relationship, treating my partner as if he is a king". This highlights how literary narratives inspire individuals to incorporate romantic ideals into their real-life relationships. Unlike religion, which often imposes moral and social constraints on romantic relationships, art allows individuals to freely internalize and express love, ultimately enhancing their self-confidence. Through artistic representation, love is validated and embraced, reinforcing its emotional significance. Besides, art and love share an inherent beauty that resonates deeply with the human soul. In other words, "love and beauty may be intertwined, inherited neural circles closely tied to human nature." (Ibrahim, 2020, N.P.) This connection explains the reason why young people, especially those in love, form a profound and reciprocal bond with art, particularly through music.

Conclusion:

Our analysis of the participants' responses reveals that the meaning of romantic love is shaped by both individual experiences and broader social context. Love, as an emotion, is inherently complex, difficult to define, and impossible to fully control. It is strongly influenced by social factors, particularly customs and traditions deeply rooted in Arab-Islamic culture. These cultural norms have profoundly impacted women's behavior, especially in their relationships with non-relatives. The preservation of virginity is often perceived as a familial duty, primarily from the perspective of male family members, reinforcing patriarchal structures.

Despite these constraints, it has become increasingly common in Algeria to see young people engaging in romantic relationships with non-relatives, a trend that no longer raises the same level of societal disapproval. This shift reflects broader changes within Algerian society, influenced by evolving family dynamics, cultural transformations, and the expanding role of media. The family unit itself can either facilitate or hinder emotional relationships. Mothers, in particular, may play a supportive role in legitimizing these relationships, while dominant patriarchal values often act as a significant barrier.

Religion, on the other hand, continues to serve as a powerful deterrent to premarital romantic relationships. However, despite the participants' declared adherence to religious teachings, contradictions between belief and behavior are evident. Many young people interpret religious texts in ways that align with their personal desires, leading to a selective application of religious principles.

In contrast, art—particularly music—supports and reinforces romantic relationships. Algerian youth are especially influenced by the portrayal of love in songs, which often validate and romanticize emotional connections. These various social elements—family, religion, and art—interact in complex ways, shaping how love is understood and practiced. Based on the study's findings, love is not merely a psychological or individual emotion; it extends beyond personal feelings to function as a social institution, deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and artistic frameworks.

The Social Dimensions of Romantic Love Between Men and Women - A Case Study in the City of Mascara

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