

“From Romania, with Love”. An Oral History Study on Personal Relationships in Contemporary Romania

Costel COROBAN

Ioana TOADER GAIDARGI

“Ovidius” University of Constanța

Abstract: *This article examines the intersection of romantic love, marriage, and societal influences, focusing on Romania and drawing on multiple studies and interviews. The goal is to analyze respondents' opinions on the definition of romantic relationships, their perspectives on non-marital romantic relationships, and the connection between love and family. Among the most important sources utilized are works by American psychologist Robert Sternberg, Romanian sociologist and historian Constantin Schifirnet, Romanian psychologist Alin Gavreliuc, Romanian sociologist Septimiu Chelcea, as well as numerous international studies on this subject. The article highlights how romantic love, often considered a universal concept, plays varying roles across different cultures and societies. Interviews with Romanian millennials suggested that while romantic love is valued among them, marriage is no longer viewed as essential for a successful relationship. Respondents described love primarily through emotional connection and mutual respect rather than through idealized passion. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about the evolving nature of romantic relationships, cultural variability, and the importance of love in life fulfillment, highlighting how perspectives on marriage and romantic love are shifting in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *personal relationships; contemporary Romania; Sternberg; triangular theory of love; marriage;*

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the different forms of love, their causes, and psychosocial impact, as well as to discuss the relevant theories on this subject. It can be argued that the family unit, described as the smallest unit forming the foundation of society, revolves around romantic relationships. Although romantic relationships may appear to be experiences involving only two individuals, they imply complex dynamics shaped by parents and, especially, by other individuals in society. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perception of romantic relationships among the millennial generation in contemporary Romania.

Love is an intense state of romantic attachment at an interpersonal level, encompassing feelings, emotions, attraction, and sexual desire. The concept of love is often described as a singular, solid entity, universally experienced across the globe. Romantic love has been portrayed similarly by

writers, musicians, and artists throughout history. While it is correct to suggest that love is a universal experience, it is equally important to highlight the cultural, historical, sociological, and psychological factors that shape and create individual experiences of love. Love is a universal, biological experience—a set of emotions and feelings related to attachment to another person. Romantic love is often characterized by the notion that the feeling of love endures forever, never fades, accompanied by unrealistic expectations not only of the object of desire but also of the relationship itself. Analyzing romantic love from socioeconomic, sociocultural, and psychological perspectives, and dissecting various aspects of the romantic narrative, allows for a deeper understanding that shapes the romantic experience.

Theories of love in recent psychology and neuroscience address three main questions: (1) why people fall in love, (2) the nature of love, and (3) the development of unhealthy love. Key factors that contribute to falling in love include readiness, potential for self-expansion, and the allure of novelty and mystery, with neuroscience showing similarities between those in love and individuals with obsessive-compulsive disorder. However, sustaining love depends on factors like familiarity and shared values, supported by stable neurotransmitter levels in the brain.

The nature of love is debated, with some theories viewing it as an emotion and others as an attribute of romantic relationships. While theories that emphasize relationships may overlook aspects like unreciprocated love, they can be modified to include the emotional dynamics between partners.

The Philosophical Nature of Love: *eros*, *philia* and *agape*

The philosophical discussion of love logically begins with questions concerning its nature. This implies that love possesses a "nature", a proposition that some may oppose by arguing that love is conceptually irrational, in the sense that it cannot be adequately described in rational or meaningful terms. For such critics, presenting a metaphysical and epistemological argument, love may be an expression of emotions that defies rational examination; moreover, some languages, such as Papuan, do not even admit the concept of love, which denies the possibility of philosophical inquiry into it. In English, the word "love", derived from the Germanic forms of the Sanskrit *lubh* (desire), is broadly and thus imprecisely defined, creating first-order problems of definition and meaning. These issues are partially resolved by referring to the Greek terms *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

The term *eros* (Greek ἔρως, *érōs*) refers to that aspect of love which constitutes an intense and passionate desire for something; it is often associated with sexual desire, from which the modern notion of "erotic" (Greek *erotikos*) derives. However, in Plato's writings (qtd. in Rowe 2005), *eros* is considered a common desire that seeks transcendent beauty – the particular beauty of an

individual reminds us of the true beauty that exists in the *Theory of Forms or Ideas* (Plato, *Phaedrus* 249E: "he who loves the beautiful, partaking in this madness, is called a lover"). The Platonic-Socratic view holds that the love generated for beauty on this earth can never be truly satisfied until death; in the meantime, the purpose should be aspiring beyond the stimulating image before one to the contemplation of beauty itself.

In contrast to the desire and passion of *eros*, *philia* involves love and appreciation for another. For the Greeks, the term *philia* encompassed not only friendship but also loyalty to family, political community, or service. *Philia* for another may be motivated, as Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics* (qtd. in Bartlett 2012), Book VIII, either for the sake of the agent or for the sake of the other. Motivational distinctions are derived from the love for another because friendship can be entirely utilitarian, as in business contacts, or arise from shared character and values (with the implication that if these attractive qualities change, so too will the friendship). The modern concept of friendship roughly captures Aristotle's notion of *philia*: "Things that create friendship are doing a favor, and doing it unasked, and not making it public after doing it; for then it seems to have been rendered for the sake of the friend, and not for any other reason" (*Rhetoric*, II. 4).

The love of God for man, and vice versa, is represented by *agape* (though the Hebrew *ahav* has a somewhat broader semantic range than *agape*). *Agape* can be argued to draw on elements from both *eros* and *philia* in the sense that it seeks a perfect form of love. The concept is expanded in the Judeo-Christian tradition to include the love of God: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5) and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The love of God requires absolute devotion, reminiscent of Plato's love for Beauty (and Christian translators of Plato, such as Saint Augustine, used these connections), involving an erotic passion, awe, and desire that transcends earthly concerns and obstacles. Aquinas, on the other hand, adapted Aristotelian theories of friendship and love to proclaim God as the most rational being and, therefore, the worthiest of love, respect, and contemplation.

Love as Emotion

Several psychologists, including Gonzaga et al. (2006), argue that love should be understood as an emotion. When viewed this way, love can manifest itself as a surge of passion, affection, or a consistent tendency to feel these emotions toward someone. The question then arises whether love is a basic or complex emotion. According to the standard view, there are seven basic emotions (e.g., joy, anger, fear), which are linked to universally recognized facial expressions and cannot be broken down further (Ekman 1992, 169-200). Complex emotions, on the other hand, vary between individuals and cultures,

lack universal facial expressions, and are made up of multiple components, such as joy or jealousy, which is why love is often classified as a secondary emotion.

However, Shaver et al. (1996) argue that love should be considered a basic emotion, similar to anger and joy, citing its universality and prototypical nature. In a study by Fehr and Russell (1984), where 200 students listed emotions, love ranked high alongside emotions like happiness and anger. This supports the idea that love is commonly recognized as an emotion in everyday life. Shaver et al. also point out that, like other basic emotions, love can be a long-lasting feeling or occur in brief episodes, accompanied by physical signs such as blushing or dilated pupils, and actions like seeking closeness or touching the loved one.

Shaver et al. argue that love's universal presence throughout history and its intense feelings of anguish or longing suggest it should be categorized as a basic emotion, despite its association with various other emotions and behaviors.

The Triangular Theory of Love

An alternative to viewing love as an emotion is to treat it as an attribute of a relationship, as proposed by Robert Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love. Sternberg identifies three core components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy represents feelings of closeness and bonding, passion involves romance and physical attraction, and commitment refers to the decision to maintain love over time.

Sternberg explains that different combinations of these components form various types of love, such as romantic love, parental love, and friendship love. While intimacy is common across these forms, passion is key to romantic love but absent in other types, and commitment is often stronger in familial relationships.

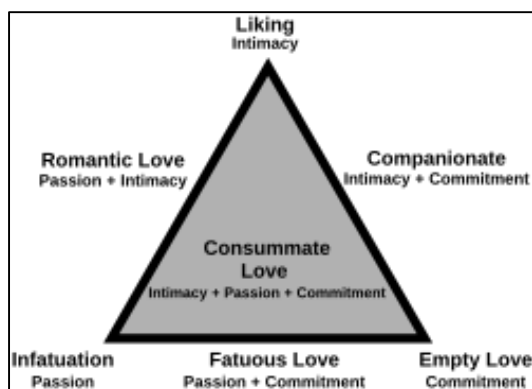


Figure 1. Sternberg's triangular theory of love. Source: "File: Triangular Theory of Love.svg" Wikimedia.org, 2022

Sternberg's theory also outlines seven types of romantic love: liking (intimacy only), infatuation (passion only), empty love (commitment only), romantic love (intimacy + passion), companionate love (intimacy + commitment), fatuous love (passion + commitment), and consummate love (intimacy + passion + commitment). He also describes how these components fluctuate in relationships, with excessive intimacy and passion potentially leading to short-lived relationships. Commitment, however, is crucial for long-term relationship success, as supported by research showing positive correlations between commitment and relationship duration, while intimacy and passion are negatively correlated with longevity.

The Oral History Interview

While cultural psychology is concerned with studying how people are influenced by the norms of their respective cultures, intercultural psychology compares different societies, seeking both cultural similarities and differences (Berry 1997, 121). Both orientations share a common foundation in cultural anthropology, which explores the behaviors, attitudes, and values of a cultural unit as a whole. M.H. Segall, P.R. Dasen, J.W. Berry, and Y.H. Poortinga (Segall et al. 1999) view intercultural psychology as directed towards the scientific examination of human behavior and its patterns of reproduction, with a particular focus on how behaviors are shaped and influenced by social and cultural factors. The definition emphasizes two key characteristics: the "natural" diversity of human behavior and its connection to the cultural context in which it occurs. Intercultural psychology encompasses the study of both population-level and individual-level phenomena, proposing the examination of how individuals and groups acquire cultural elements within specific social, historical, political, and ecological frameworks (Gavreliuc 2011, 67).

The interview, as a data collection technique belonging to social sciences, emphasizes that its use in these fields must go beyond merely establishing relationships between variables and should also involve hypothesis testing. As Kerlinger (1973, 89) stated, the interview is a psychological and sociological measurement tool, subject to the same issues of reliability, validity, and objectivity as any other measurement instrument.

Septimiu Chelcea defines the interview as a technique for obtaining verbal information through questions and answers from individuals and human groups, aimed at testing hypotheses or scientifically describing socio-human phenomena (Chelcea, Mărginean, Cauc 1998, 400). Thus, conversation is fundamental to the interview technique, while the meeting

itself is merely a condition that facilitates the transmission of information from the interviewee to the interviewer.

Oral historians use a set of interview techniques to obtain and record people discussing their memories or past experiences. Although oral history research was conducted prior to the 1960s, it was not until that decade that it became popular among researchers in universities and non-governmental organizations worldwide. This was partly due to the political struggles of the 1960s and partly because of the mass availability of affordable, portable tape recorders.

Oral history emerged as a particular challenge to the dominance of written historical sources and their political and social biases in favor of the ruling classes. Oral historians, even today, tend to focus on marginalized or common people, who are typically not heard, seen, or recorded. However, oral historians also sometimes conduct interviews with elites and often combine written and visual forms of history in their research. Oral history, in its narrowest sense, is a research methodology that records oral accounts based on the first-hand memories of witnesses. The work of traditional oral historians overlaps with that of oral historians, but traditionalists tend to record stories, fables, and legends passed down through generations, going beyond lived experiences and memories (Field 2007, 90).

The oral history interview is not the rapid-fire style used by journalists or on talk shows. Oral history requires a patient, slow approach that allows interviewees to share stories and intimate details and helps trigger memories. Although the stories may not always be significant to the interviewer or others, it is crucial to give interviewees time to share stories that are meaningful to them. Nevertheless, if the interpersonal relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer is not successful, even minor technical errors can have an exaggerated negative impact on the process. If interviewees develop trust in the researchers and the organizations they represent, they will gradually reveal meaningful stories that benefit both the interviewer and the interviewee. These are delicate processes in which meaningful results cannot be guaranteed.

Oral historians document the past by preserving perspectives not found in printed sources. The skilled practitioner must remain impartial, listen, stay in the background, and act as a catalyst, guiding the line of inquiry by asking questions that probe areas of interest, clarify ambiguous statements, and create transitions for the reader. The goal is not interpretation but the recording of factual evidence, thereby creating primary documents from which historians can reconstruct social realities (Hirsch et al. 2008).

Due to their focus on subjectivity, oral histories can offer perspectives not typically found in more traditional sources. Viewed from this angle, oral history is one of the most important analytical tools available to today's researchers; its significance is likely to grow as technology continues to transform the types of materials sent to archives. In the absence of traditional sources like correspondence files, diaries, and personal notes, oral history may become the only viable alternative for obtaining the same kind of insights these traditional sources provided. If this trend continues, the need to preserve existing oral history collections, collect private ones, and create accessible finding tools will become even more urgent.

Previous Studies

Research shows that while romantic love is a universal concept, it is not always considered a key factor in marriage across cultures (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1999). A 2005 study by Emily Sorrell at the University of Nebraska explored the relationship between romantic love and marriage, suggesting that love can serve as a stabilizing factor in marriages in certain societies. Romantic love is present in 89% of modern societies, supporting the idea that it is a widespread cultural trait (Jankowiak, 1995).

Studies emphasize the functional role of romantic love, either as a stabilizer in marriage or as an evolutionary mechanism for maintaining pair bonds and reproductive relationships. Researchers generally view romantic love as a complex and adaptive concept shaped by biological, psychological, and cultural influences. William R. Jankowiak suggests that romantic passion arises from the interaction of biology, the self, and society, making it more complex than basic emotions, which are universally recognized across cultures.

A study by Sorokowski et al. (2010) sought to test Sternberg's triangular theory of love across 25 countries, including Romania. Piotr Sorokowski, Agnieszka Sorokowska, Maciej Lorowski, and Agata Groyecka-Bernard, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Wrocław, along with professors from each of the participating countries, used the "Triangular Love Scale" (TLS) developed by Sternberg to measure the triangle of love in a sample of 7,332 individuals (approximately 150 males and females in relationships from each country). The study included 3,288 men and 4,028 women, aged between 18 and 76, of whom 887 (12.1%) were engaged, and 2,816 (38.4%) were married, with an average relationship duration of 8 years (Sorokowski et al., 2010).

The "Triangular Love Scale" (TLS) includes 15 items to measure intimacy (e.g., "I receive strong emotional support from..."), 15 items to measure passion (e.g., "Nothing is more important to me than my relationship

with..."), and 15 items to measure commitment (e.g., "I consider my relationship with... to be permanent") (Sorokowski et al., 2019, 180). The conclusion of this cross-cultural research, which demonstrates the universal applicability of Sternberg's triangular theory of love, is that as relationships evolve over time the level of intimacy increases. It was found that couples in newly formed relationships exhibit the highest level of passion, which tend to decrease over time. However, the level of attachment shows an inversely proportional relationship with the duration of the relationship, increasing in time.

The data presented by Piotr Sorokowski, Agnieszka Sorokowska, Maciej Lorowski, and Agata Groyecka-Bernard also revisits earlier research on the influence of culture on romantic relationships. For example, American couples were found to experience greater passion than Chinese couples, but the two groups showed similar levels of intimacy and commitment (Gao, 2001, 329-342). In the case of Romanian respondents, the main components of the triangular theory of love (intimacy, passion, and attachment) were higher than the average for the overall sample. Intimacy ranked highest, followed by passion, and lastly, commitment. Thus, we can conclude from this study that romantic love among Romanians is primarily characterized by the desire to care for the loved one, with a focus on intimacy rather than commitment. Although the profile for each country in this study may not be fully representative due to the relatively small sample size, it still provides an overview of what is unique and distinctive about love in different cultures around the world. One thing is certain: love is universally regarded as a fundamental social value.

Interviews' Analysis

Based on the theoretical and empirical information presented above, the two research hypotheses of this case study are as follows:

- Love holds a secondary place in the lives of millennials in Romania (there is a correlation between age and the importance placed on personal relationships).
- In contemporary Romania, marriage is no longer considered necessary for a successful romantic relationship.

In this research, a semi-structured interview was used to collect information. The semi-structured interview is an organized form of interview where the researcher uses a fixed set of questions but has the flexibility to ask follow-up questions or explore topics that arise during the conversation. The respondents are 11 individuals—6 women and 5 men—aged between 29 and 38 (therefore qualifying as millennials), from urban areas in Romania, ranging from high school to postgraduate education. At the moment of the interview, three of the

subjects were engaged, two were in a relationship, five were married, and one was single. The respondents met their partners through mutual acquaintances, friends, public places, or social media. The age at which they married ranged from 28 to 31, with four of the married interviewees being female and only one male.

The interview consisted of the following questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current relationship status? Single/in a relationship/engaged/married.
3. How did you meet your partner?
4. At what age did you get married?
5. How do you define love?
6. What criteria guide you in choosing a partner?
7. How have your family/society influenced your perspective on love?
8. Do you believe you need a partner to have a fulfilled life?
9. Do you think you can lead a happy life without experiencing love?
10. Do you consider marriage necessary to maintain love between partners?

According to the responses to question 5, love was defined as:

- "Love is everything." (F, 36)
- "Love is a connection between two people, through good times and bad; it's trust, loyalty, and devotion. It's friendship and honesty. It's the strength to walk together, no matter the circumstances. Love is a whole that surpasses everything." (F, 33)
- "An abstract concept, different for each person." (M, 29)
- "A beautiful feeling that binds people together." (M, 35)
- "Respect, communication, and affection." (M, 33)
- "Love is when you resonate deeply with the other person to the point where you don't need to explain why you love them, why you accept their mistakes, or why their presence fulfills you so much." (M, 36)
- "The perfect balance between friendship and physical attraction." (F, 33)
- "Peace, stability, a sense of belonging, well-being, trust." (F, 34)
- "Beautiful." (M, 38)
- "Love is a feeling based on affection, passion, respect, care for the other, and positive emotions." (F, 33)
- "A profound feeling that unites, elevates, and simultaneously destroys." (F, 34)

Although love seems to symbolize something different for each individual and is viewed subjectively, a common idea in these responses is the reference to

connection and union. This is built on trust in the partner, respect, communication, stability, peace, and physical attraction.

Setting aside gender differences, most respondents described romantic love positively. Even the few descriptions that included less idealistic language still conveyed generally positive feelings. Furthermore, there was no strong adherence to an idealized romantic ideology. Instead, romantic love was most often described using language that evoked feelings of affection, calm, and admiration, rather than passion or excitement. Attributes such as care, admiration, friendship, appreciation, trust, and respect were more frequently used than language typically associated with passion, such as euphoria or obsession.

When asked about the criteria by which they choose their partners, the respondents gave various answers:

- "Funny, smart, attractive, with nice lips." (F, 36)
- "Personality, how he behaves in private and in society, and of course, appearance." (F, 33)
- "Naturally, most people are initially attracted to physical appearance, and later to the person's qualities or even flaws. So, the criteria are related to appearance, empathy, humor, and honesty." (M, 29)
- "Love, trust, respect, and devotion." (M, 35)
- "Good looks, passion for travel." (M, 33)
- "Character, temperament, communication, tolerance, physical appearance." (M, 36)
- "Behavior, appearance, intelligence, financial situation, occupation." (F, 33)
- "Makes me feel protected and loved, attracts me physically, mentally, and emotionally." (F, 34)
- "Charisma, character, appearance." (M, 38)
- "Love, mutual respect, loyalty, and understanding each other's needs." (F, 33)
- "Sharing the same values, visions of the future, emotional balance, and stability." (F, 34)

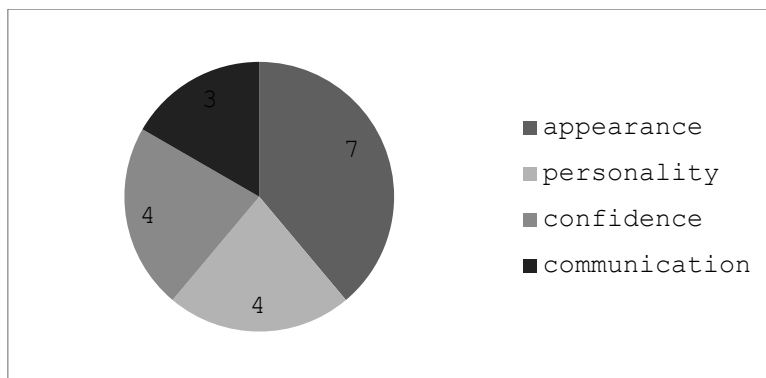


Figure 2. What criteria guide you in choosing a partner?

What we observe from the respondents' answers is that both men and women equally consider physical appearance when choosing a partner (4 men and 4 women). While the men's responses were more focused on the present and centered around the partner's personality, such as "appearance, empathy, humor, honesty," "charisma, personality, appearance," "personality, temperament, communication, tolerance, physical appearance," the women leaned more towards the idea of safety, belonging, and building a future together, including financial stability: "sharing the same values, visions for the future, emotional balance, stability," "love, mutual respect, loyalty, and understanding each other's needs," "to make me feel protected and loved, to attract me physically, mentally, and emotionally."

The family is one of the primary agents of socialization, and individuals often observe and internalize relational models and expectations from their parents or guardians. The modeling within the family unit influences how individuals perceive and interpret romantic relationships. For example, children who witness healthy and respectful relationships between their parents are more likely to develop similar expectations for their own partnerships.

Cultural norms and traditions vary from one society to another, uniquely influencing relationship expectations. For example, in collectivist cultures, where the needs of the group outweigh those of the individual, relationship goals may focus more on family approval and commitment than on individual happiness. In contrast, individualistic cultures may prioritize personal fulfillment and self-expression in relationships (Coroban 2020, 61-65).

Social norms are unwritten rules that guide behavior in a society. In the context of relationships, societal norms can dictate acceptable relationship structures, roles, and behaviors. Peer pressure and the desire to conform to these norms may lead individuals to adopt certain relational expectations, even if they do not align with their true desires or values.

Based on these considerations regarding family and society, when asked, "How have your family/society influenced your perspective on love?" the respondents gave the following answers:

- "I wasn't influenced in any way; it was my choice, and that's all that matters." (F, 36)
- "Neither my family nor society influenced my view on love." (F, 33)
- "My parents' divorce made me realize that things are never 100% certain and that feelings are fluid in a long-term relationship." (M, 29)
- "In my family, I saw harmony, love, and happiness." (M, 35)
- "In no way. But that's not because it isn't trendy for family and society to decide what's best for you, but because I'm more nonconformist." (M, 33)
- "Family and society did not have a major impact on changing my perspective on love, but my past life experiences in relationships played a significant role." (M, 36)
- "The way I was raised made me not idealize love too much but see it in a more realistic way." (F, 33)
- "I don't know if I was influenced. Maybe within the family—I saw a lot of mutual respect." (F, 34)
- "I saw multiple perspectives in terms of realizing myself." (M, 38)
- "Family and society did not have a direct influence in guiding me in this regard; I believe the final choice was exclusively personal." (F, 33)
- "To a large extent, encouraging me to choose my life partner more carefully than they did." (F, 34)

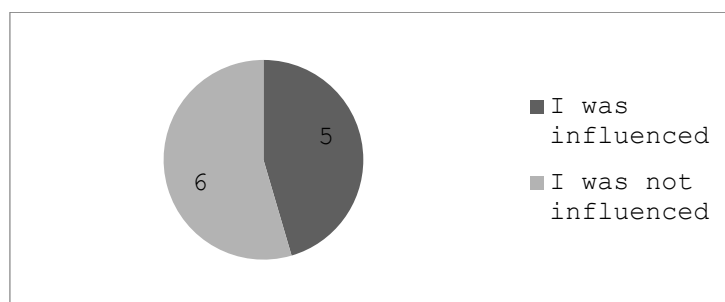


Figure 3. How have your family/society influenced your perspective on love?

To this question, the respondents' answers are nearly tied, and even though they were not directly influenced in adulthood, the way they were raised and the environment they come from, as mentioned above, had a real impact on how they view a life partner and partnership from a realistic perspective: "largely encouraging me to choose my life partner more carefully than they did," "I saw a lot of mutual respect in the family," "the way I was raised made me not idealize love too much but to view it more realistically,"

"my parents' divorce made me realize that things are never 100% certain and that feelings are fluid in a long-term relationship." Among those who were not influenced, 4 are women and 2 are men.

A main source of life fulfillment is meaningful relationships and a community in which people share and go through life together. Having a profession is another vital source of fulfillment, especially if the occupation is enjoyable, allows one to use their skills to contribute to the happiness of others, and aligns with their calling. Other fulfilling activities may include self-improvement, quality leisure time, volunteer work, and spirituality. In general, fulfillment comes from satisfying relationships, meaningful roles, and personally significant activities that allow self-expression and also contribute to a cause beyond oneself (Frankl 2006).

The next question complements these aspects, and we wanted to see if finding a life partner contributes to a fulfilling life:

- "Yes and no." (F,36)
- "I don't think you necessarily need a partner to have a fulfilled life, but I believe life can be easier and more beautiful with a partner." (F,33)
- "It's not mandatory, but it can help." (M,29)
- "Yes." (M,35)
- "Pretty much, yes." (M,33)
- "No." (M,36)
- "No, as long as I have a good friend in old age who might become widowed so we can spend a lot of time together." (F,33)
- "Yes." (F,34)
- "Definitely." (M,38)
- "Fulfillment in life is not exclusively dependent on having a partner, but I would say it positively complements personal life aspects." (F,33)
- "Not necessarily. It's a bonus, but not a necessity. To have a fulfilled life, you need to be content with yourself first, and the rest follows naturally." (F,34)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the previous responses, women once again lean more toward a pragmatic and realistic view. Although only one of them had a clear negative response and another had a positive one, the rest oscillated between the idea of a partner and the help they provide toward a fulfilling life, but they don't see the partner as a key factor: "I don't think you necessarily need a partner to have a fulfilled life, but I believe life can be easier and more beautiful with a partner," "no, as long as I have a good friend in old age who might become widowed so we can spend a lot of time together," "fulfillment in life is not exclusively dependent on having a partner, but I would say it positively complements personal life aspects."

To question number 9, whether the respondents believe they can have a happy life without love, they answered:

- "No." (F,36)
- "No, life without love is black and sad, it's bleak and makes us meaner." (F,33)
- "I don't believe we can have a happy life without love." (M,29)
- "No." (M,35)
- "No, but I also don't think love can 'put food on the table.'" (M,33)
- "No." (M,36)
- "Yes." (F,33)
- "No." (F,34)
- "No." (M,38)
- "Without love, I don't think you can be a happy person, and I'm not just referring to love within a couple, but also to the love received and given within the family and group of friends." (F,33)
- "Love takes many more forms than just that of a partner. Life is dry and without charm without love... self-love, love for family, friends, the love in a child's eyes, love for everything beautiful around us." (F,34)

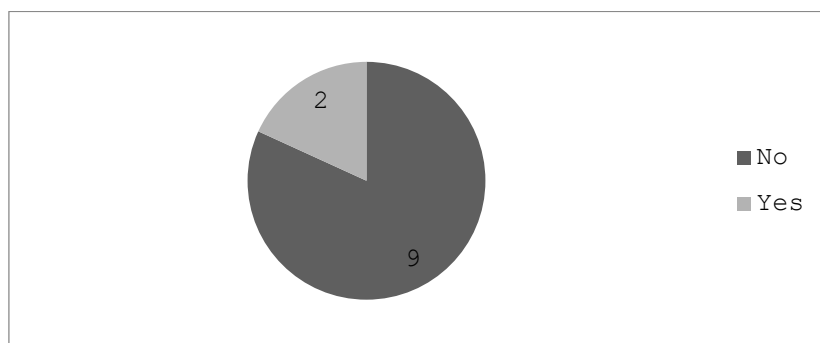


Figure 4. Do you think you can lead a happy life without experiencing love?

The answer to this question is clearly "no", but we can observe that two of the respondents viewed love beyond the realm of partnership, looking at self-love, love for family, and love for friends. The only affirmative responses came, unsurprisingly given the previous answers, from women.

Marriage is a socially or legally recognized union between individuals, typically involving a formal commitment to a partnership that often includes emotional, economic, and/or legal responsibilities. It commonly serves as a framework for forming a family, raising children, and sharing assets. Marriage traditions, roles, and significance vary across cultures and legal systems, and it may be seen as a religious, civil, or social institution. The last question also touches on one of the initial hypotheses: Do you consider marriage necessary for maintaining love between partners?

- "No." (F, 36)
- "I don't consider marriage necessary to maintain love between partners. Love is sustained based on each person's desires and how much they both want to keep that love alive." (F, 33)
- "No, it's just a formality." (M, 29)
- "No." (M, 35)
- "No, but I do think a prenuptial agreement is the death of passion." (M, 33)
- "No." (M, 36)
- "Definitely not." (F, 33)
- "No." (F, 34)
- "No." (M, 38)
- "Marriage is not mandatory for maintaining love between partners. It is a legal formality, sometimes necessary for daily life, and religious marriage is a choice depending on each person's beliefs. There are couples who have lived their entire lives without being married, and that did not diminish their love." (F, 33)
- "Regarding the feeling itself, no, but it can be a decisive factor in building or destroying a relationship." (F, 34)

The respondents' answers generally indicate that they do not consider marriage essential for maintaining love between partners, with many describing it as merely a formality or a social construct rather than a necessary component of a loving relationship. Some suggest that love is sustained through personal desires and mutual effort, while others note that while marriage itself may not directly influence love, it can play a role in shaping or even challenging the dynamics of a relationship.

Conclusions

The two hypotheses that served as the foundation for this case study were, as previously mentioned: 1. Love occupies a secondary role in the lives of Romanian millennials; 2. In contemporary Romania, marriage is no longer considered essential for maintaining a healthy relationship.

Based on an analysis of the responses from the 11 participants, it is evident that the second hypothesis is fully confirmed. The majority of respondents view love as central, describing it as a profound, beautiful, and fulfilling emotion that brings peace and stability. However, some responses also highlighted a more pragmatic perspective, addressing the potential future offered by a partner, financial stability, and the importance of understanding mutual needs. Love, in these cases, was not viewed solely as an idealized concept. The role models with whom some respondents interacted or observed in their lives further demonstrated that love could manifest itself through respect, communication, tolerance, devotion, and understanding.

While a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn, it is reasonable to suggest that the first hypothesis was not confirmed. Love continues to play a primary role in the life of Romanian millennials, even if it is not exclusively romantic love. Other forms of love—such as love for family, parents, or even self-love—remain significant.

Self-love is often dismissed by many as an unnecessary or even narcissistic endeavor. In modern society, the pressures to achieve social status, wealth, or beauty can lead individuals to focus more on their perceived shortcomings, neglecting the areas in which they have experienced growth. This relentless pursuit of perfection can cause people to overlook their fundamental needs, such as psychological safety, companionship, and personal creativity.

However, self-love is not synonymous with selfishness. It involves recognizing the importance of attending to one's needs, rather than simply indulging in desires, and pursuing self-improvement without sacrificing personal well-being to prioritize the happiness of others. In recent years, the concept of self-love has shifted away from its traditionally negative associations with narcissism and egotism. It is now viewed as a practice grounded in positive psychology, one that can help individuals manage their emotions and mental health more effectively. Although self-love may come more easily to some than to others, it is a skill that can be learned and developed by anyone.

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