

# The Impact of Parental Marital Quality on College Students' Perspectives on Love and Marriage: The Mediational Role of Subjective Well-being

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## **Abstract:**

In the current era of societal change, marriage values are increasingly varied. The family, as a biopsychosocial entity crucial for individual development, significantly influences the mental health and the formation of marriage and love ideologies among college students. The potential impact of parental marital relationships is particularly noteworthy. Understanding how parental marital quality shapes their children's views on marriage and love, and investigating the mediating role of subjective well-being, a core psychological factor, hold substantial theoretical and practical implications for mental health education and relationship guidance in higher education settings. This study aims to explore the influence of parental marital quality on college students' concepts of marriage and love, and to confirm the partially mediating role of subjective well-being. Additionally, the study examines the associations between gender, academic year, and college students' perspectives on marriage and love. The survey utilized the Parental Marital Relationship Scale developed by Taiwanese researcher Cai Hengcui in 2003, the Marriage and Family Values Scale from the Korean Women's Policy Institute, and the Subjective Well-being Scale by Diener et al. A total of 219 college students primarily from Guangdong Province participated in the study, providing data on parental marital quality, subjective well-being, and their views on marriage and love. The findings indicate that parental marital quality not only has a direct negative influence on college students' perceptions of marriage and love but also indirectly shapes these views through subjective well-being, demonstrating a partial mediating effect.

**Keywords:** Parental Marital quality; subjective well-being; college students; attitudes toward marriage and love; partial mediation

## 1. Introduction

Marriage and family, as fundamental societal units, serve as carriers of cultural traditions and pivotal points in an individual's socialization and psychological sense of belonging. From their families, individuals acquire initial interaction patterns, emotional expression norms, and perceptions of intimate relationships. For college students, who are in a crucial phase of worldview, life outlook, and values formation, their perspectives on love and marriage—comprising fundamental attitudes towards love, marriage, and family—are profoundly shaped by their original family environment, particularly the quality of their parents' marital bond. In the contemporary context, college students' attitudes towards love and marriage are increasingly diverse. Investigating the underlying mechanisms of this formation holds significant theoretical and practical implications.

A positive family environment is the fertile soil for cultivating high subjective well-being. Parents' marriage is the first and longest lasting model of intimate relationships to which children are exposed. According to social learning theory, children internalize cognitive scripts of marital relationships through observing and modeling maternal and paternal behavior [1-3]. Time together, positive emotions, and low separation to ensure stability and consistency in the marriage are essential if the marriage is to provide a stable and secure environmental context for children and foster intimate, healthy relationships. On the other hand, poor marital quality can present hazards that ultimately affect children's cognitive and social development. This study examines how parental marital quality influences the relationship attitudes and beliefs of contemporary college students by investigating the role of subjective well-being, looking specifically at attitudes toward love and marriage including family formation values. The higher the score, the more open views are adopted and below zero scores reflect conservatism. The study shows that high-quality parental marriage can enhance children's subjective well-being, making them view themselves and their lives positively, have an optimistic attitude toward the future, and may encourage them to develop similar, more traditional views on marriage and relationships; conversely, low-quality marriages may have the opposite effect.

The relation between parents' marital states and their children's view of love or marriage culture is "complicated, rather than simple direct causal relationship". One's internal psychological condition - including the subjective well-being - may play an important intermediary role in this process. (Subjective Well-being SWB) is an individual's overall cognitive and emotional evaluation of their

quality of life, which is mainly composed of three dimensions: life satisfaction, positive emotion and negative emotion. Measurement tools include the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Diener et al and the Positive and Negative Emotions Scale (PANAS) developed by Watson et al [4,5]. are used to comprehensively measure subjective well-being of respondents. A coherent and positive family environment is an indisputable precondition for nurturing a person's subjective well-being. Therefore, this study proposes a basic hypothesis that the marital quality of parents indirectly influences their children's attitudes towards love and marriage throughout college life by affecting how their subjective well-being is experienced [6]. That is, the study provides strong evidence to support a positive relationship between parents' marital quality and subjective well-being of college students, suggesting that higher-quality parental marriages are associated with greater life satisfaction and more positive emotions among their offspring.

In essence, this study seeks to elucidate the impact of parental marital quality on college students' perspectives on love and marriage by examining the mediating role of subjective well-being, utilizing empirical data. The anticipated outcomes of this research are not only to enhance comprehension of intergenerational transmission theory within the realm of attitudes toward love and marriage and elucidate the specific pathway of "parental marital quality → subjective well-being → offspring's perspectives on love and marriage," but also to provide valuable empirical insights for institutions of higher education to facilitate love and marriage education, deliver mental health assistance, and offer guidance on family education.

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1 Survey subjects and Methods

This study primarily surveyed undergraduates in Guangdong Province through online distribution of questionnaires via Wenjuanxing. A total of 278 questionnaires were distributed, and 219 valid questionnaires were collected, with an overall response rate of 79%.

SPSS 26.0 software was used to conduct difference tests and correlation analysis on the valid data. The Bootstrap method was employed to explore the mediating effect of subjective well-being between parental marital quality and college students' perspectives on love and marriage.

### 2.2 Research Tools

#### 2.2.1 Marriage values scale

The marriage values scale utilized in this study is derived

from the (Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families KLoWF), which was administered by the Korean Institute for Women’s Development [7]. The wording of the scale was adjusted locally to meet the needs of the study-imposed research. Consisting of 9 items, the scale using a four-point scoring rubric: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = somewhat agree; 4 = strongly agree with three items reverse-scored. Higher scores mean the expression of freer and fair marriage values, while lower score shows the acceptance of more traditional concepts closely.

**2.2.2 Parental marital relationship scale**

The Parental Marital Relationship Scale: It is developed by Cai Hengcui, a scholar from Taiwan China in 2003 [8]. This scale contains 30 items, which are derived from two major fields: intimacy and harmony in parent marital relationship. The intimacy dimension encompasses observed behaviors reflecting parental proximity or distance, including three sub dimensions: Co-presence, emotional expression and separation tendency. The harmony dimension includes behaviors that can be observed and reflect the level of harmonious or conflictive behavior among parents, composed by two sub-scales: opinion congruence

and conflict phenomena. For positive items, for reverse scored item the item scores need to be reversed and coded so that higher score indicates greater sensation seeking. Reverse scoring is employed on items of the Separation Tendency and Conflict Phenomena subscales to ease in statistical analyses. The higher the full scale score, the more intimacy and symmetry exists in the parental marital relationship.

**2.2.3 Subjective well-being scale**

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), created by Diener et al. in 1985, was utilized in this study. Comprising three sub-scales, the questionnaire employs a 7-point rating system, with higher scores reflecting greater well-being. Widely employed in well-being research in China, this scale has been revised by Chinese scholars Zheng Xue, Yan Biaobing, and colleagues [9]. The revised version encompasses three primary dimensions: life satisfaction, positive emotions, and negative emotions.

**3. Data Analysis**

Basic situation of college students’ views on marriage and love

**Table 1. displays the mean and standard deviation of the average scores across three scales categorized by grade(N=219)**

		Parental Marital Quality		College Students’ Perspectives on Love and Marriage		Subjective well-being	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
grade	freshman	78.14	18.29	26.62	4.09	78.57	13.27
	Sophomore	81.89	20.4	26.56	4.35	83.22	19.99
	junior	84.71	18.92	27.98	4.02	87.25	14.4
	senior	84.84	16.59	27.5	4.21	88.27	18.54
gender	man	85.65	17.57	25.77	4.07	86.65	17.91
	woman	82.57	18.16	28.28	3.98	86.06	17.53

**Table 2. A Comparative Study of Gender Differences in College Students’ Perspectives on Love and Marriage, Subjective Well-Being, and Parents’ Marital Quality(N=219)**

variable	Gender	n	M±SD	t	η <sup>2</sup>
College Students’ Perspectives on Love and Marriage	1=man	79	25.772±4.073	-4.436***	0.083
	2=woman	140	28.279±3.982		
Subjective well-being	1=man	79	86.646±17.911	0.234	0.00
	2=woman	140	86.064±17.534		
Parental Marital Quality	1=man	79	85.646±17.572	1.217	0.007
	2=woman	140	82.571±18.161		

注 : \*p<0.05,\*\*p<0.01,\*\*\*p<0.001

Table 1 displays the relationship between college students' subjective well-being scores and their academic grades. While there is a trend of increasing well-being scores with higher grades, statistical analysis reveals that the differences across grade levels are not statistically significant. The differences in college students' perspectives on love and marriage, subjective well-being, and parental marital quality by gender are shown in Table 2. The analysis results indicate that there is no significant difference in subjective well-being between male and female college

students ( $t = 0.234$ ,  $p = 0.815$ ), nor in perceived parental marital quality ( $t = 1.217$ ,  $p = 0.225$ ). However, there is a significant difference in college students' perspectives on love and marriage ( $t = -4.436$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), suggesting that gender plays a significant role in this domain. Female college students perceive a significantly higher level of openness in love and marriage ( $M = 28.279$ ) compared to male college students ( $M = 25.772$ ). Additionally, comparisons between multi-child and single-child families show no significant variations across the three variables examined.

**Table 3. Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Subjective Well-Being(N=219)**

variable	( Model 1)M Subjective well-being		( Model 2)College Students' Per- spectives on Love and Marriage		( Model 3)College Students' Per- spectives on Love and Marriage	
	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t
gender	0.045	0.713	0.300	4.780***	0.3096	5.054***
grade	0.123	1.914	0.134	2.097*	0.1616	2.569*
location	-0.014	-0.208	-0.153	-2.323*	-0.156	-2.427*
How many chil- dren do you have in your family	-0.028	-0.412	-0.044	-0.657	-0.050	-0.768
parental marital quality	0.417	6.726***	-0.283	-4.581***	-0.189	-2.846***
Subjective well-being					-0.226	-3.380***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.2003		0.205		0.246	
F	10.67		10.99		11.511	

注 : \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

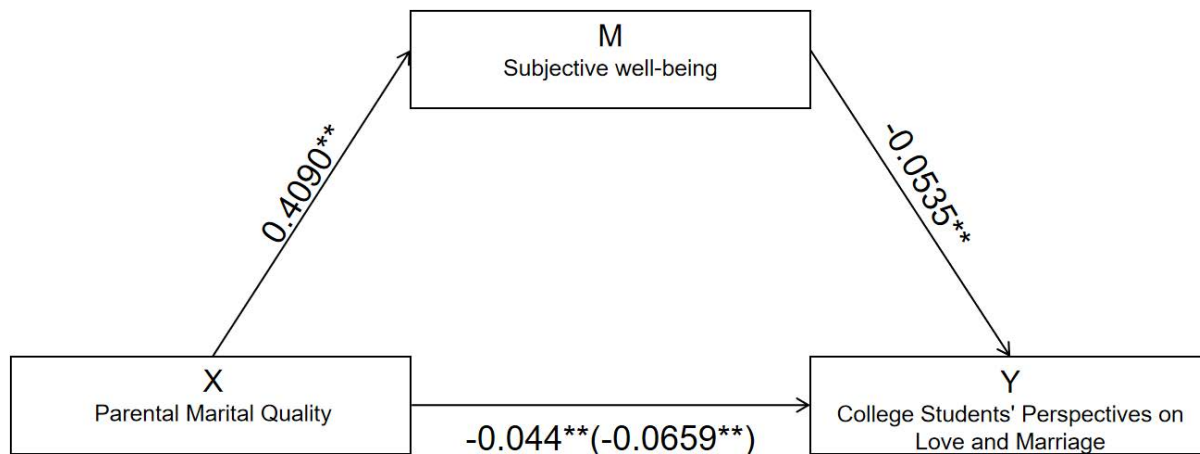
**Table 4. Bootstrap analysis results of subjective well-being and mediation effect values(N=219)**

	effect value	SE	95% confidence interval	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
Total effect	-0.066	0.014	0.000	-0.094
Direct effect	-0.044	0.016	0.005	-0.075
The indirect effect of Subjective well-being	-0.022	0.008	-0.039	-0.007

This study employed the Bootstrap method with 5000 resampling iterations. The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4. In Model 1 of Table 3, parental marital quality has a significant positive effect on Subjective well-being ( $\beta = 0.417$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In Model 2, it can be observed that parental marital quality has a significant negative effect on College Students' Perspectives on Love and Marriage ( $\beta = -0.283$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). From Model 3, it is evident that when both parental marital quality and Subjective well-being are used to predict College Students' Perspectives on Love and Marriage simultaneously, the predictive effect of

Subjective well-being remains significant ( $\beta = -0.189$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The Bootstrap results, as shown in Table 4, indicate that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect is  $[-0.039, -0.007]$ , which does not include 0, confirming the establishment of the mediation effect. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval for the direct effect is  $[0.005, -0.075]$ , demonstrating the presence of partial mediation.



**Fig. 1 The Relationship between Parental Marital Quality, College Students' Perspectives on Love and Marriage and Subjective Well-being**

Figure 1 illustrates that parental marital quality positively influences subjective well-being, which in turn negatively affects college students' perspectives on marriage and love. Additionally, parental marital quality directly impacts college students' views on marriage and love.

#### 4. Discussion

This study investigates the associations among parental marital quality, subjective well-being, and college students' perspectives on love and marriage, as well as examines the mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between parental marital quality and college students' attitudes toward love and marriage. The findings indicate that parental marital quality not only directly influences college students' attitudes toward love and marriage in a negative manner but also exerts an indirect influence through subjective well-being, demonstrating a partial mediating effect. Moreover, the study reveals notable gender disparities in college students' perspectives on love and marriage, while demographic factors such as urban or rural residency, being an only child, and academic year do not show significant effects. Subsequent sections will provide a detailed analysis of the research outcomes.

##### 4.1 The Impact of Parental Marital Quality on College Students' Perceptions of Love and Marriage

The study findings reveal a significant inverse relationship between parental marital quality and college students' attitudes towards love and marriage. Specifically, higher perceived parental marital quality, characterized by traits such as harmonious coexistence, positive emotional expression, low separation tendency, opinion consistency, and minimal conflicts, is associated with more conservative views on love and marriage among college students

(lower scores) [10]. Conversely, lower parental marital quality is linked to more liberal attitudes towards love and marriage among college students (higher scores). This underscores the enduring impact of traditional marital norms on the formation of values.

This finding would seem to contradict what is most commonly expected but can be reasonably interpreted in the light of approaches such as social learning theory and compensatory psychology. For instance, in the case of college students who grew up in a cohesive and stable family environment, they tend to internalize their parents' marriage as an ideal. As these couples look back on years of happiness that was wrought from a traditional, long-term commitment because they have witnessed the contentment and certainty result from that state, it is logical to assume this pendulum will swing toward perfectly matching marriage when shaping their views on love and marriage. Thus, they are more conservative in attitude toward premarital cohabitation and place the emphasis on duty liabilities and long-term maintenance on marriage (less „liberal“ about openness in the assessment of determination).

College students raised in families with low-quality parental marriages may exhibit dissatisfaction with traditional marriage norms and may even resist them. Witnessing frequent conflicts and negative interactions between their parents can erode their trust in conventional marital relationships. Consequently, they may gravitate towards more autonomous, liberating, and individualized forms of intimate partnerships. This compensatory mindset, often referred to as „reverse construction,“ predisposes them to embrace unconventional notions of love and marriage, such as cohabitation, childlessness, or prioritizing personal emotional satisfaction over familial obligations. As a result, their attitudes towards love and marriage tend to be more progressive and inclusive.

## 4.2 The Role of Subjective Well-being: Partial Mediating Effect

The primary discovery of this research is that subjective well-being partially mediates the relationship between parents' marital quality and the perspectives of college students regarding marriage and love. The sequential pathway identified is as follows: parents' marital quality → subjective well-being → college students' views on marriage and love.

### 4.2.1 The positive impact of parents' marital quality on subjective well - being

Studies have consistently shown a significant positive correlation between parental marital quality and the subjective well-being, encompassing life satisfaction and positive emotions, of college students. A nurturing family environment characterized by positive emotional exchanges among parents can offer robust emotional support and a stable foundation for their offspring, fostering a supportive and congenial developmental milieu. Individuals raised in such settings typically exhibit elevated self-esteem, enhanced feelings of security, and a more positive outlook on life, leading to increased life satisfaction and heightened positive emotional states during their college years.

### 4.2.2 The adverse effects of subjective well-being on the perspectives on marriage and love among college students.

Research indicates that college students exhibiting higher levels of subjective well-being often hold more conservative perspectives on marriage and love. This correlation may stem from their heightened contentment with their current life circumstances. One plausible rationale is that individuals experiencing elevated well-being typically demonstrate greater satisfaction with their present life situations, fostering a serene and optimistic outlook. They may possess a reduced inclination to challenge conventions or pursue tumultuous relationships, as they are imbued with positive emotions and a sense of fulfillment towards life. Consequently, they may avoid the need to assert their individuality or seek external stimulation through unconventional views on marriage and love. Rather, they may gravitate towards stable, harmonious, and close relationships aligning with societal norms, viewing them as a reliable avenue to enduring happiness.

### 4.2.3 Integrated interpretation of the mediating effect

The partial mediation of subjective well-being elucidates the internal psychological pathway by which parental marital quality influences their children's perspectives on love and marriage. High-quality parental marriages serve as direct models, prompting children to align with conventional views on love and marriage. Additionally, positive

parental marital relationships boost children's subjective well-being, fostering a desire for stable and harmonious relationships, thereby shaping their conservative attitudes towards love and marriage.

The presence of a partial mediating effect suggests that, in addition to the pathway of promoting subjective well-being, the direct impact of parents' marital quality on their children's perceptions of love and marriage—such as social learning and imitation as previously discussed—constitutes a significant pathway that warrants attention.

## 4.3 Findings and Discussions of Demographic Variables

A key discovery of this research is the notable gender variations in attitudes towards marriage and love among college students. Specifically, women exhibit greater acceptance compared to men regarding concepts like premarital cohabitation and postponed marriage. This trend partly mirrors the evolving social constructs of gender roles in contemporary society. As women's educational attainment and financial independence improve alongside the shifting societal gender norms, their sense of self-reliance is bolstered. In contrast to the traditional emphasis on familial obligations and reliance, present-day female college students prioritize self-actualization, egalitarianism, and emotional fulfillment within romantic and marital partnerships. Consequently, they demonstrate more progressive and varied perspectives. They may display increased willingness to embrace premarital cohabitation and delayed marriage, or hold a broader spectrum of expectations for their partners beyond mere economic and domestic duties.

The study revealed no significant disparities in attitudes toward love and marriage among students based on urban or rural backgrounds, sibling status, or academic year. In the contemporary era of information proliferation, societal norms concerning romantic relationships and marital unions appear to be aligning, thereby diminishing distinctions rooted in geographical location and family composition. This trend suggests that amidst globalization and digitalization, characterized by the ubiquitous presence of mass media, online culture, and higher education, university students from diverse upbringings are increasingly exposed to uniform ideologies regarding love and marriage. The impact of regional disparities, family configurations, and academic progression on the formation of beliefs regarding romantic relationships and marital unions may be attenuated within this converging social and cultural milieu. Regardless of their urban or rural origins, or whether they have siblings, students exhibit a degree of uniformity in their value systems cultivated within the shared environment of the university campus.

#### 4.4 Limitations of the Study and Future Prospects

Although this study has drawn some valuable conclusions, there are still some limitations:

The cross-sectional study employed in this research has limitations. While it can reveal correlations among variables, establishing a definitive causal chain is challenging. Future investigations could benefit from a longitudinal design to track the evolving perspectives on marriage and love among a cohort of college students from matriculation through graduation and into their professional lives. This approach would offer a more nuanced understanding of the developmental trajectory and influencing factors.

Measurement tools have limitations when assessing views on love and marriage, as this concept is intricate and continually evolving within socio-cultural contexts. Scales can only capture certain aspects of this construct. To address the shortcomings of quantitative research in elucidating motivations and nuances, future studies may integrate in-depth interviews.

Issue of sample representativeness: The study samples are predominantly drawn from specific geographic regions or universities, requiring caution when extrapolating the findings to the broader population of college students nationwide. To enhance the generalizability of the conclusions, future studies should consider diversifying the sources of samples.

Based on the preceding discussion, future research can further explore the following areas:

Investigating additional mediating or moderating factors: In addition to subjective well-being, an individual's attachment style, personality traits, and social support network may serve as significant intermediaries or moderators in the relationship between parental marital quality and their offspring's attitudes towards love and marriage.

Future research should concentrate on specific samples, such as college students from distinct family backgrounds like divorced or reconstituted families, to investigate the distinct perspectives they hold regarding love and marriage.

#### 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the questionnaire survey provides evidence that the quality of parental marriage has a substantial impact upon college students' belief in love and family values, both directly and indirectly. More specifically, children from higher-quality parental marriages support more traditional beliefs regarding love and marriage and report higher subjective well-being. Furthermore, a higher level of SWB increases their adherence to traditional atti-

tudes toward love and marriage; SWB also plays the mediating role in this relationship. Furthermore, gender does shape love and attitude to marriage of college students to some extent; the female is more open-minded than male. The results explore in depth the mechanism of family influence transmission across generations, which is based on evidence and theoretical reference for the practice of school curriculum such as love, marriage and mental health education. Figure 1 illustrates that parental marital quality positively influences subjective well-being, which in turn negatively affects college students' perspectives on marriage and love. Additionally, parental marital quality directly impacts college students' views on marriage and love.

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