

Exploring the Influence of the Implicit “Social Clock” in Daily Language on the Perspectives of Romantic Love and Marriage among Teenagers Aged 12-18 — Taking Zhejiang and Shanghai as a Regional Example

Yunheng Li

Shanghai Qibao Dwight High School, Shanghai, China

Corresponding author: yhli_tom@qibaodwight.org

Abstract:

For adolescents facing a critical stage of major life choices and social identity change, everyday language that implies a social clock has a profound impact. Meanwhile, the researcher finds that teenagers around his life have all already heard about daily corpus like “leftover women and men”, though they are not leftover women or men. Hence, the researcher put forth effort on specific influence of the implicit social clock in the daily language of marriage and romantic love domain for 12-18 years old adolescents. This study used a questionnaire research method and interview research method. A total of 233 questionnaires and 29 in-depth interviews with adolescents aged 12-18 and their families in Zhejiang and Shanghai were analyzed. Based on previous research centered on the expectations of the social clock hidden in everyday language, the study concludes that the everyday language in marriage and romantic relationships has a profound psychological impact on adolescents, including limited self-consciousness limitation and intimacy stereotyping.

Keywords: The social clock; left women; left men; adolescent.

1. Introduction

Neugarten proposed the concept of a “social clock”. A culturally or socially structured timetable reinforces society’s expectations of human behavior as

appropriate to their age [1]. Although the concept has been studied by other professionals and the table of social practices comprising the “social clock” has changed over time, the core definition of the social clock remains the same as when it was proposed,

providing the theoretical basis for this study. Based on previous studies and observations of daily life scenarios, the researcher found that the “social clock” is hidden in everyday language. It is especially prominent in romantic love and marriage, for example, the popular Chinese term “leftover men and women” has appeared as an official term in *The Language Situation in China 2006*. Broadly speaking, an unmarried woman or man aged 27 is considered a “leftover woman” or “leftover man”. It means that those who do not enter into a relationship or get married are social outcasts. According to Erikson’s eight stages of personality development, for adolescents aged 12-18 years old, identity and role confusion characterize this stage [2]. Based on the above theories, this study takes adolescents aged 12-18 years old as the research object. Based on the above research background, the researcher proposed a research question and made a corresponding research hypothesis:

Zhejiang and Shanghai as a regional example: what is the influence of the everyday language that exists in love and marriage relationships with an implied social clock on adolescents’ perceptions of marriage and love. The hypothesis is that adolescents are negatively affected by limited self-consciousness limitation and intimacy stereotyping on romantic love and marriage conceptions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Core Definitions and Theories

Based on the research hypothesis proposed by the researcher, and previous researchers’ study, some core concepts need to be clarified first. One of them is the social clock theory; secondly, about the definition and characteristics of adolescents. Parents, peers or teachers as well as the Internet through the language exactly to adolescents in the perspectives of marriage and romantic love, but the research still has gaps and deficiencies, because the formation of the concept of marriage is related to social factors, such as the influence of traditional Chinese cultural concepts.

2.1.1 Definition of social clock

Neugarten first introduced the concept of the social clock, which refers to society’s expectations of human behavior in relation to one’s age, or layman’s terms, “what one does at one’s age.” [1]. The theory of social clock as the core theory of this study is also the basic theory, regardless of the follow-up research by subsequent scholars, the basic theoretical foundation remains consistent with that proposed by Neugarten. The study explores the psychological and behavioral effects on adolescents of everyday

discourse in the marital domain, which is a part of life. In corroborating the impact of the inquiry, Social Clock Theory provides the theoretical basis for locating everyday language that fits the social clock of the implicit notion of matrimony, helping the study to move forward and draw conclusions.

2.1.2 Definition and characteristics of adolescents

In Erikson’s eight stages of personality development, it is suggested that teen years from 12-18 is the fifth stage. Identity vs. Role Confusion in psychosocial development is synonymous with this stage. As adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood, teens may begin to feel confused or insecure about themselves and how they fit into society. In seeking to establish a sense of self, adolescents may experiment with different roles, activities, and behaviors [2]. Teenagers are developing at a high speed in their physical, cognitive, psychological, and social relationships, are anxious and tense in their hearts, have a weak ability to solve problems on their own, are susceptible to external influences, and are physically and mentally vulnerable. Although they lack the “stereotypical” vulnerability of the traditionally disadvantaged groups in terms of physical function, family financial strength, or mental illness, the most neglected disadvantaged groups are likely to be negatively affected by the social clock implicit in their daily language, which may have a negative impact on their future concepts of marriage and romantic love. Hence the researcher chose teen years from 12-18 as the study group.

2.2 Previous Study

2.2.1 Everyday language implies a social clock

In two studies by Chen Yu’an. and Zheng, Xiaoxue & Li, Joan. it was shown that social clocks are exactly implied in everyday language [3, 4]. The researcher analyzed the interviews to stereotypically study the implicit everyday use of what people hear and the implications for the interviewees. Through the feedback from the respondents, the study shows that the social clock is exactly implied in everyday language, with frequent occurrences of phrases such as “leftover man and leftover woman”. These two previous studies exactly helped the researcher to pave the way for exploring the specific impact of social clocks in everyday language in the marriage segment, suggesting that social clocks are implicit in everyday usage.

2.2.2 Leftover women and men issue

Mao, Jonas Y., Ji, S. M. & Wan, L. L. showed that from 2000 to 2020, the desired age of marriage in China has risen from the early twenties to 27 years old [5]. In addition, questionnaire data suggests that the younger generation’s

“independent choice” to fall in love, get married, and have children is based on the emotional well-being of both partners and the stability of their own careers. These findings indicate that the problem of leftover men and women exists and is becoming more serious in China. The existence of this phenomenon helps the researchers to promote the concept of marriage and love, which is a social clock implicit in the problem of leftover men and women, as a foundation for the research. In a study by Ding, Xiuwei., it is shown that the concept of “leftover men and women” is the result of the generation of modernity in China [6]. The concept of “leftover men and women” is a strange concept squeezed out by the traditional concept of marriage in the generation of Chinese modernity. The traditional concept of marriage coexists with the phenomenon of older singles with the intention of getting married, and the absence of either does not constitute the phenomenon of “leftover men and women”. The study further by Dou, Hui demonstrates that the language of traditional concepts is the same as everyday language, such as “a man is old enough to get married and a woman is old enough to get married,” has an impact on the concept of marriage, leading to the phenomenon of “leftover men and women,” and paving the way for the study to be carried out [7].

2.2.3 The impact of language on thinking

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is used as the basis to study the relationship and influence of language and thinking in both studies [8]. It is clearly stated in them that the language used by human beings can have a great impact on their way of thinking. Therefore the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and related follow up studies help the researcher to validate the implicit social clock in language in this study. As a prerequisite element aids in proving that there is a social clock implicit in language and also that language has an impact on human thinking.

2.2.4 Adolescents' perspective of marriage and romantic

In the study, TV dating programs are used as an example to explore the impact of the concept of marriage on adolescents [9]. The article clearly indicates that dating programs introduce the issue of leftover men and women as a focal point and have an impact on adolescents' concepts of marriage. The article can help this study to determine that adolescents are aware of the concept of leftover men and women through the media and that these concepts have an impact on adolescents, which can help to prove the feasibility of this study. In Liu L.'s study, the article indicates that adolescents have formed concepts of marriage and that parents' concepts of marriage have a strong influence on their children, it also shows that adolescents'

concepts of marriage can be influenced by the concept of an implied social clock [10].

3. Research Methods

3.1 Questionnaires

In the questionnaire section, 233 out of 235 valid questionnaires were collected. These questions focused on seven core phrases, focusing on love and marriage relationships. These seven core phrases were identified in two steps: first, according to the common corpus heard by the researcher in everyday contexts; second, the researcher conducted corpus-based validation with the help of the Corpus Center of Beijing Language and Culture University, and finally selected the seven most frequently used phrases.

The questionnaire was structured into three parts: first, basic information such as age, geography, and education; second, participants were asked if they had ever heard the seven core phrases; and finally, psychological and behavioral influences were examined in the corpus of marriage concepts containing the social clock. In addition, the questionnaire avoided suggestive phrases when asking participants in order to prevent participants from receiving interference from external factors in the process of answering and to improve the reliability of the questionnaire.

Of the 233 valid data, 50.21% of the respondents were adolescents aged 12-18 in Zhejiang and Shanghai. The rest were language exporters who make up the language environment around the adolescents, including current students who have already reached adulthood, parents and teachers.

3.2 Interviews

In the interview section, it was conducted by using a semi-structured, semi-open-ended outline, with personalized interview outlines designed for different respondents among total of 29 interviews. After the interviews were organized in an anonymous coding form, they were analyzed in a categorical manner against the research hypothesis.

18 adolescents, to verify whether they had heard everyday language containing the social clock, whether it was high-frequency or not, and how they were affected by it in their perspectives of romantic love and marriage.

11 adults (7 parents and 4 current students), to verify whether this group, as one of the main social networks of adolescents, corresponds to the description of the phenomenon by the research hypothesis.

4. Research Analysis

4.1 Questionnaires Analysis

In the questionnaire survey, the researcher focused on analyzing the psychological and behavioral impact of the

daily language of “leftover men and women” and “a man should be married when he is old enough to get married, and a woman should be married when she is old enough to get married” on adolescents, for example, with the perspectives of marriage and love as a social clock.

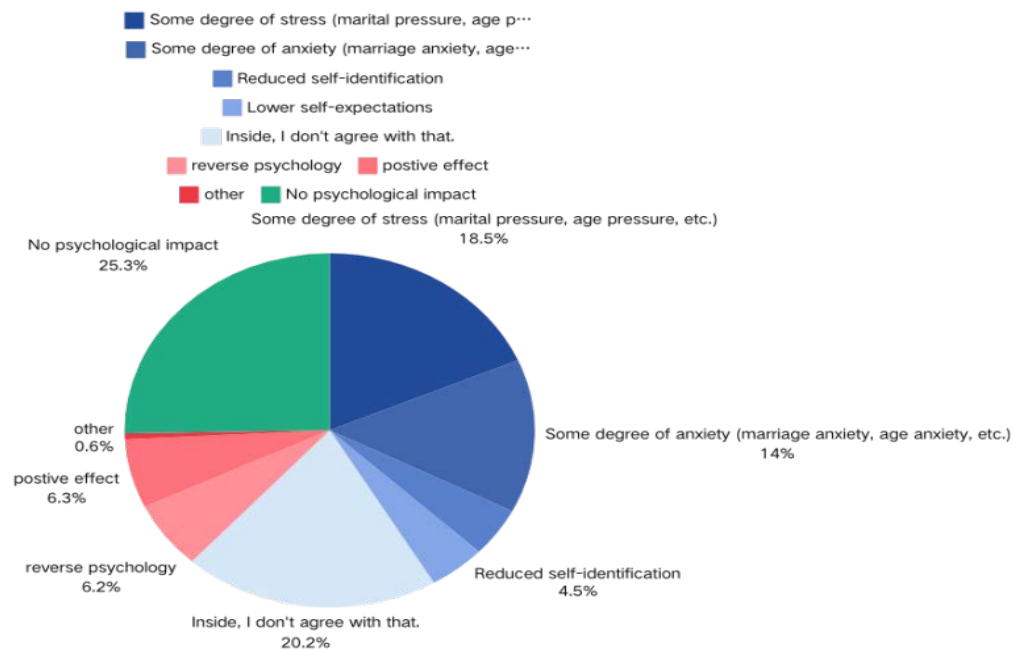


Fig. 1 Psychological effect

From figure1 about psychological effect, 112 valid adolescent questionnaires were sent to adolescents. Of the 112 valid adolescent questionnaires, 58.93% of the respondents indicated that they were negatively affected by this type of language, and 36 of the adolescent participants

indicated that they did not agree with this prediction in their hearts. The more pronounced negative psychological effects were a certain degree of marital, age-related stress and anxiety, fear of not being able to cope with the expectations of family and friends, and rebelliousness.

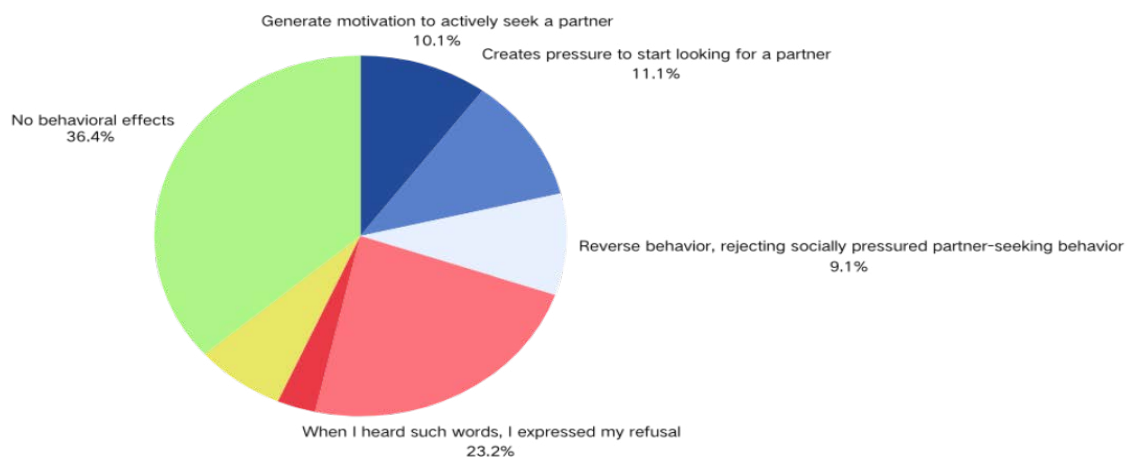


Fig. 2 Behavioral impact

From the figure2 about behavioral impact, as for the behavioral effects on adolescents, the researchers found that

of the 80 validated adolescent questionnaires, 25% of the participants reported that they were pressured to start looking for a partner or to engage in counterproductive behaviors, rejecting socially pressured behaviors to find a partner. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the daily language that implies the social clock's notion of marriage causes adolescents to feel confused about starting a relationship or entering a marriage in the future, and to develop age and marriage anxiety, or even to develop rebellious behaviors, which leads to the emergence of the so-called "leftover men and women" problem. At the same time, however, researchers have found that the language of the implied social clock has had a small number of positive effects, such as generating motivation to actively seek a partner.

4.2 Interview Analysis

The researcher found in the interviews that among the 6 parents interviewed, as many as 4 parents believed that their children should start a family before the age of 30, mentioning words such as "golden age" that imply the best time for their children to start a family. P3MH48: "The golden age of a girl is around 25, if you pass 30, it's too late for you to find a boyfriend. Similarly, about 72% of the 18 adolescent respondents indicated that their parents or elders in their families had clear expectations for their relationships and marriages and those of their peers around them during the interviews.

In further exploring the specific influence of everyday language on the perspectives of marriage and romantic love on adolescents, although some of the adolescent interviewees were not aware of the social clock implicit in the language in terms of the influence of the concept of marriage on them, through the interview transcripts, the researcher found that the exact social clock implicit in the language led to a solidified mindset on the concept of marriage for the interviewees, as exemplified in the interviews of S1MH16 and S19FS16. About how the phenomenon of grasping for a relationship in college or after graduation is viewed due to the general environment that prohibits students from falling in love in high school; S1MH16: "I feel like it's just two maybe the two systems are just complementary to each other, you can't talk about it in high school anyway, and then you hurry up to talk about it in college"; S19FS16: "Hurry up and get married, not hurry up and fall in love."

In the adolescent stage, physical, cognitive, psychological, and social development at a high rate, for example, in identity orientation development: adolescents are in the identification of self-perception, positioning, and switching identities and thus more adapted to the social

environment. However, identity can be affected by the environment in which they live. The social clock implied by language in the context of marriage and relationships tends to solidify and stereotype adolescents' concepts of intimacy, leading to the deepening of stereotypes and the deepening of the social clock implied by language in the context of marriage and relationships, amplifying its negative effects.

5. Conclusion

Taking Zhejiang and Shanghai as regional examples, through the questionnaire and interview method, the researcher found that the social clock implied in the daily language of the concept of marriage and romantic love has a negative impact on the youth's future concept of marriage and their own relationships, including limited self-consciousness limitation and intimacy stereotyping, and generating age marriage pressure, and even rebellious psychology or behavior. Finally, it leads to the formation of the problem of "leftover men and women". However, researchers have also found a tiny positive effect of this type of corpus or language on the motivation to find a partner. In general, however, this type of language has a predominantly negative impact on adolescents' perceptions of marriage and love and subsequent choice of spouse, with a secondary positive impact. Both questionnaire and interview data were collected through close friends and family who filled out and forwarded questionnaires or were interviewed on social networks, so the data lacked some diversity. In the future, more general questionnaire collection and better and more targeted personalized interviews can be conducted on different social media.

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