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Only Child Male and their Perception Towards Romantic Relationship and Gender Roles

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Abstract: ***The purpose of this study is to provide a thorough understanding of the attitudes and experiences of only child men by examining their opinions of romantic relationships and gender roles. Due to the lack of siblings, the historical concept of "only child syndrome" has perpetuated unfavourable perceptions about only children, implying possible social skill impairments or selfish behaviour (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Modern research, however, contradicts these theories, showing that only children frequently perform comparably to siblings and, in specific situations, even outperform them in particular areas (Falbo & Polit, 1986). This study (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017) offers a nuanced perspective among only child guys, who value equality, partnership, and mutual respect in their romantic relationships through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis. They stress how important it is to spend time together, give back to the community, and engage in similar interests in order to promote emotional closeness and fulfilment (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Additionally, participants advocate for flexibility and shared responsibility in partnerships, rejecting established gender norms (Bukowski et al., 1987). Good communication techniques, such having candid conversations and paying attention, become essential instruments for resolving disputes and preserving harmonious relationships (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary relationship dynamics by challenging stereotypes and providing insights into building fulfilling and healthy partnerships among male only children (Bukowski et al., 1987).***

Keywords: Only Child male - Romantic Relationship - Gender Roles

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the founding of modern psychology, there has been an interest in the importance of birth order and family size as determinants of an individual's outcomes (Falbo & Polit, 1986). The presence of siblings has been assumed to be essential for a child to develop normally, and a child's position among his or her siblings has been thought to have profound effects on the child's outcomes (Bohannon, 1898; Neal, 1927). Early Research and Assumption of Bohannon, a student of G. Stanley Hall, who amassed a data archive containing information about 1,001 "peculiar and exceptional children," of which 46 were only children. Two-thirds of these only children exhibited what Bohannon described as "disadvantageous peculiarities," especially an inability to interact with peers. On the basis of these findings, G. Stanley Hall is said to have concluded, "Being an only child is a disease in itself" (Neal, 1927).

However, 30 years passed before Hall's conclusion was challenged by the results of studies of normal populations. Examining the results of a survey of schoolchildren and college students, Fenton (1928) reported that the adjustment scores of only children generally overlapped those of children with siblings. More recently, Falbo and Polit (1986) quantitatively reviewed the hundreds of studies conducted since 1928 and found that the outcomes of only children were similar to the outcomes of others in adjustment and sociability. Some studies have indicated that only children had advantaged outcomes, other studies have indicated that only children had disadvantaged outcomes, and still other studies found no significant differences between only children and others (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Hall described only children as spoiled, selfish/self-absorbed, bossy, antisocial, and lonely. Those who buy into the theory believe only children are spoiled because they're accustomed to getting whatever they want from their parents, including undivided attention. The belief is that they'll grow into selfish individuals who only think about themselves and their own needs. Also, a lack of interaction with a sibling is believed to cause loneliness and antisocial tendencies. Some even think these effects carry into adulthood, with only children having difficulty getting along with co-workers, displaying hypersensitivity to criticism as they get older, and having poor social skills. More recent research has shown that being an only child doesn't necessarily make you different from a peer with siblings. And the lack of a sibling doesn't doom you to become self-absorbed or antisocial.

The article "Only Child Syndrome: Proven Reality or Long-Standing Myth?" traces the term's origins back to the late 1800s and criticizes the methods used by psychologists like G. Stanley Hall and E.W. Bohannon, who, based on questionnaires (Hall, 1904; Bohannon, 1895), attributed negative characteristics to only children. This theory has been widely criticized for lacking scientific rigor and evidence.

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While acknowledging the existence of mixed research results, the article cites the majority of studies conducted since the 1970s (Falbo, 1987; Guo et al., 2010) as finding no significant differences in personality traits or mental health between only children and those with siblings. Research by psychologist Toni Falbo even suggests potential benefits for only children in areas like academic achievement, intelligence, and parent-child relationships (Falbo, 1994; Falbo, 1987). Echoing the opinions of many psychologists, the article emphasizes that various factors beyond siblings shape a child's personality (Falbo, 1994). It acknowledges that some only children may exhibit shyness or introversion, but stresses that these traits are not solely attributable to lacking siblings and can be present in children from any family structure. In conclusion, the article highlights the lack of scientific evidence supporting "only child syndrome" and discourages parents from attributing negative behaviors solely to the absence of siblings.

Research exploring the development of only children often attempts to explain observed differences through various mechanisms (Falbo & Polit, 1987). One common explanation is deprivation, suggesting that the absence of siblings limits crucial learning experiences, potentially leading to disadvantages in areas like communication and identity formation (Belmont et al., 1976; Minuchin, 1974). Conversely, the only child uniqueness theory, proposed by researchers like Adler (1964) and Adams (1972), highlights the distinct nature of their experience, differing from both firstborns and later-borns. This unique position is used to explain both positive (Smith & Goodchilds, 1963) and negative (Adams, 1972; Falbo, 1981) traits observed in only children. Another mechanism focuses on the parent-child relationship, emphasizing how interactions with parents shape development. Both only children and firstborns initially receive undivided attention, potentially influencing outcomes like affiliation and achievement motivation (Falbo, 1984; Schachter, 1959). Individual development plays a role, as children's reactions to their environment can change over time due to maturation and life stages (Adler, 1964; Schvaneveldt & Ihinger, 1979). These factors highlight the need to consider a broader range of influences beyond the proposed mechanisms when examining the development of only children (Falbo & Polit, 1987). It further emphasizes the research area's lack of a unifying theory, with researchers often relying on explanations developed after observing differences, rather than using a strong theoretical framework to guide their investigations (Falbo & Polit, 1987). Parents in China raise their only children, considering both the child's gender and the parents' social class. The study found that parents often hold different expectations for boys and girls, even though previous research suggested that having an only child might erase these differences. For example, many parents wanted their sons to be masculine and their daughters to be feminine. This goes against the idea that only children are raised in a more gender-neutral way. Concept of "gendered habitus" from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to explain that children learn these gender expectations unconsciously from their parents. The study argues that these stereotypes can limit both boys' and girls' development. It suggests that parents and schools should be more aware of these stereotypes and work to raise children in a more balanced way (Liu, 2002).

For instance, studies show that happy relationships are associated with greater well-being, while troubled relationships are linked to higher risks of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Interestingly, improving the quality of an existing relationship appears to have a more positive impact on mental health than improving mental health has on relationships].(Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). The study also highlights that committed relationships, like marriage, tend to have a greater positive influence on mental health compared to less committed partnerships, like cohabitation. (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). The Handbook of Adolescent Psychology (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009) says that the establishment of romantic relationships during adolescence is a crucial aspect of social development. These interactions constitute a previously unheard-of integration of sexuality and intense attraction into the voluntary and reciprocal connections that define the peer world, setting new standards for young people. What sets apart the adolescent experience from the earlier childhood years is the emergence of sexuality and strong feelings of love. Though children may focus intense emotions on a peer (Carlson & Rose, 2007; Hatfield, Schmitz, Corelius, & Rapson, 1988), these sentiments are not connected to sexual desire until the onset of puberty and are then directed towards interacting with a possible partner. Regardless of the partners' gender, our definition of teenage romance as the first fusion of sexuality and passion in a peer relationship holds true for both same- and opposite-sex relationships.

When defining romantic relationships in adolescence, according to Furman and Shaffer (2003), a particular difficulty facing academics today is operationalizing the phenomenon of teenage romance in a way that aligns with young people's real experiences and using terminology that makes sense to them in terms of romantic relationships. When asking teenagers if they are in a relationship or not, researchers typically refer to them as boyfriend/girlfriend or vowantic relationship. All attachment theories favor an understanding of adolescents' internal representations of close relationships, while contextual theories focus more on dynamic individuals and their social contexts. The attachment concept was initially extended to romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver (1987) from parent-child interactions.

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With an emphasis on adult couples in particular, they maintained that mature romantic partnerships offer the attachment functions—secure base, safe haven, and closeness seeking—that people initially encounter in parent-child interactions. These authors and others (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Furman & Simon, 1999; Furman & Wehner, 1994) have observed that the change from family figures to romantic partners typically occurs during the adolescent stage of life.

The emergence of teenagers' sexuality and their increasing ability to experience closeness with peers of the same age are regarded as the driving forces behind the transfer of attachment figures. Adolescents are believed to exhibit different attachment styles—secure or insecure—with their romantic partners, much as they do with their parents (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adolescents who are securely attached feel at ease in their relationships and have faith in their partners to help them through difficult situations. Teens who are insecurely attached, on the other hand, feel awkward asking their partners for help. This unease could manifest itself as a general lack of interest in the emotional aspects of the relationship as well as avoidance or retreat from the partner. Anxiety about the partner's ability to meet their demands and an excessive focus on the emotional dynamics of the relationship are two other ways that people show discomfort. It has long been believed that as teenagers go from being attached to their parents to romantic partners, these secure and insecure attachment styles will not change (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). According to Furman and Simon (1999), there is evidence to show that teenagers' romantic attachments may be influenced by their experiences with romantic partners as well as their past interactions within the family. It is believed that adolescents combine their prior and current interactions with attachment figures to create functional models of romantic relationships. Adolescents' developing love attachment may become somewhat unstable and altered as a result of this transactional process (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009.

Generally speaking, the phrase "gender role" relates to cultural norms on acceptable behavior for different sexes (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The process by which people acquire characteristics associated with their gender roles is known as gender typing. Gender-typed traits, such as gender-typed behaviors, personality traits, beliefs, preferences, and attitudes, are the end results of this process.Naturally, gender typing produces a wide range of overt and covert qualities, hence the idea of gender-typed attributes must be multidimensional (Huston, 1983). Gender-typed behavior is commonly referred to in modern times as "gendered behavior." While expressive qualities like compassion, sensitivity, and joy are indicative of femininity, instrumental attributes like leadership, athleticism, and independence can be used to define masculinity (Holt & Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Ellis, 1998). Gender-typed identities are viewed as belonging to masculine males and feminine females. On the other hand, some people are undifferentiated, exhibiting low degrees of both femininity and masculinity, or androgynous, displaying high levels of both (Bem, 1974). Gender role flexibility is another construct that has some significance. The ability to adapt one's behavior to the needs of the situation, independent of one's gender, has been referred to as gender role flexibility. The taking up of habits conforming to one's gender role might limit an individual's options in life, while being flexible with one's gender role allows for more behaviors and choices, which is why it's believed to be linked to better psychological health (Bem, 1975; Hefner, Rebecca, & Olehansky, 1975; Worell, 1981). According to Galambos, Petersen, Richards, and Gitelson (1985), young adolescent girls who had good attitudes towards gender roles and supported gender equality were more likely to have positive self-images than girls who disapproved of the division of duties based on gender. Stereotypes about gender are also commonly measured in studies on gender roles; these are people's perceptions of the traits that are connected to men and women. Alfieri, Ruble, and Higgins (1996) investigated whether gender stereotypes changed and varied with age during the transitional period from middle childhood to middle adolescence (Grades 4 through 11) using a combined cross-sectional and longitudinal approach. The findings, which held true for both the cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons, demonstrated that while tolerance for gender stereotypes declined during adolescence, it also briefly increased as students entered junior high school (either the seventh or eighth grade). Thus, school transitions appeared to be the cause of the brief increase in tolerance for gender stereotypes, as early adolescents were exposed to a greater variety of peers and personalities (Alfieri et al., 1996).

Biological theories of gender, behavioral differences between males and females are influenced by genes and hormones such as testosterone. According to evolutionary theory, for instance, these variations aid in ensuring child survival and reproduction (Ruble & Martin, 1998; Kenrick & Luce, 2000). For example, gender-based brain structural organization may result from prenatal hormone levels (Lippa, 2002). Research relates exposure to fetal hormones to behaviors associated with gender (Berenbaum, 1999; Udry, 2000). Critics counter that biological theories fail to acknowledge the significance of experience and culture (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). According to more recent models, gendered behavior is shaped by the interaction of biological and environmental factors (Kenrick & Luce, 2000; Susman, 1997). For example, Udry (2000) discovered a connection between maternal support of femininity, fetal hormones, and adult female behavior. Theories of social learning place emphasis on how social interactions influence gender development.

Youngsters pick up social skills through seeing, copying, and experiencing rewards or penalties for engaging in gendered behaviour (Mischel, 1966; Lippa, 2002). According to this idea, gender is shaped by a variety of factors, including self-regulation, peers, parents, instructors, and the media (Bandura, 1986; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Social learning theories, in contrast to biological theories, consider the majority of gender differences to be learned rather than biological. They place a strong emphasis on how each person actively processes and interprets gender-related social cues throughout their lives (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This viewpoint emphasizes how crucial social environments are in determining how gender develops, particularly throughout adolescence, when social influences are more potent. Cognitive theories concentrate on how kids conceptualize gender. According to Kohlberg (1966), children's early gender classification of both themselves and other people can have an impact on their behavior (Ruble & Martin, 1998). According to Bem's (1981) theory of gender schema, individuals form mental models of gender that might be more flexible (gender-aschematic) or stereotypical (gender-schematic). More recent viewpoints recognise the intricacy of these schemas and the significance of examining multiple facets of gender development simultaneously (Martin, 2000).

Research indicates that during adolescence, there are gender variations in friendships and romantic interactions. Girls typically emphasize empathy and emotional support in their friendships, which tend to be closer and more personal. Boys' friendships might be more competitive and frequently center around shared interests. Intimacy and emotional connection are valued more highly by girls than by boys in romantic relationships, according to this pattern g (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hoza, 1987; Connolly & Konarski, 1994; DuBois & Hirsch, 1993; Noack, Krettek, & Walper, 2001; Updegraff et al., 2000; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Boys may value "game-playing" or excitement over other people in relationships. Boys and girls may also experience breakups in different ways, with boys displaying riskier behaviors and girls expressing more emotional pain (Shulman & Scharf, 2000). These results support the stereotype that men are more independent and women are more emotionally expressive in traditional gender roles (Drolet, Lafleur, & Trottier, 2000). Research has shown that adult lone children exhibit different behaviors in romantic relationships compared to those who have siblings. Contrary to the widespread belief that only children become dependent on their relationships,. Research has shown that adult love relationships with only children frequently exhibit greater autonomy (Polit et al., 1980). Compared to female spouses who grew up with siblings, only child wives expressed feeling more autonomous in their marriages, stating that they felt it was entirely their own personal decision whether to work or not, in a study of 537 married couples, which included 62 husbands and 70 wives who reported being only children (Polit et al1980). .When someone can trust someone and have a close relationship, that person is considered to exhibit secure attachment in a romantic relationship in conjunction with their spouse (McGuirk & Pettijohn, 2008). Compared to individuals with siblings, adult-only children have frequently been found to be more firmly linked in their relationships; in fact, they frequently score best in this category across all birth rankings (McGuirk & Pettijohn, 2008). Furthermore, only children have been found to display a more secure orientation in their marital relationships when compared to spouses who grew up with siblings (Polit et al., 1980). It has been suggested that adult only children who experienced their parents' undivided attention as children may have contributed to their high levels of secure attachment to their romantic partner (Buunk, 1997)

Although boys are generally less likely to talk to parents than girls, respondent gender does not moderate the effect of birth order. Instead, sibling gender composition plays a role: having grown up with at least one same gender sibling is associated with a lower communication with parents about intimate matters. This study suggests that growing up with siblings, namely with same-gender siblings, makes a difference in parent-child communication, and this should be considered while evaluating the role of parental involvement in adolescent sexual education (Pasqualini & De Rose, 2020). The pursuit of romance can sometimes lead people, especially when seeking a partner, to act more in line with traditional gender roles. This might involve women appearing more feminine or men appearing more masculine, not necessarily because these traits reflect their true selves, but because they believe it's what the other person prefers. This behavior can also be a way to connect and create a sense of shared identity with a potential partner (Sanchez et al., 2012). However, particularly for women, conforming to traditional roles can have negative consequences. They might feel pressure to downplay their intelligence or ambition to be seen as more desirable, creating a conflict between the desire for love and the desire for respect and self-fulfillment. This dynamic highlights how the pursuit of romance can influence people's behavior, potentially leading to actions that contradict their true selves or aspirations. Additionally, relationships that defy conventional sexual norms typically result in better relationship outcomes and higher levels of sexual satisfaction, supporting Steinem's claim that "cooperation beats submission." (Sanchez et al., 2012).

A. Need and Significance

There is a need to explore the dynamics of romantic relationships, particularly among only child males, to understand their perspectives, expectations, and experiences.

Exploring how only child address traditional gender roles and norms within relationships by examining participants' rejection of these roles and advocating for equality and flexibility. As the population selected were currently not in a relationship, we can understand their perception towards their ideal relationship.

II. REVIEW OF LITRATURE

In their 1988 paper "Only Children and Personality Development: A Quantitative Review," Denise F. Polit and Toni Falbo conducted an extensive analysis of 141 studies across 16 personality domains to examine the personality characteristics of only children. They found that while only children generally share similar personality traits with those having siblings, they exhibit notable advantages in achievement motivation and personal adjustment, particularly compared to later-born children and those from large families. The study suggests that heightened parental attention and warmth play a significant role in shaping only children's personalities. However, not all personality domains show significant differences between only children and those with siblings, indicating potential compensatory effects of sibling relationships. Overall, the findings challenge concerns about substantial alterations in societal character due to a high prevalence of only children, emphasizing the pivotal role of parental dynamics in shaping children's personality development(Falbo & Polit, 1988).

In their 1993 study titled "The Academic, Personality, and Physical Outcomes of Only Children in China," Falbo and Poston surveyed representative samples of schoolchildren in China to compare the outcomes of only children with those of children with siblings. They found that only children generally performed similarly to their peers in terms of academic achievement, with few differences noted in personality evaluations (Falbo & Poston, 1993). Additionally, the study highlighted regional differences in outcomes and persistent sex differences, challenging the perception of only children as "little emperors" and emphasizing the complex interplay of social and economic factors in shaping children's outcomes within the context of China's one-child policy (Falbo & Poston, 1993). Not Special but Different - The Only Child experience Bernice Sorenson (2006) conducted research on the experiences of adult only children as part of her doctorate in psychotherapy. Being an only child herself, she was interested in exploring whether other adult only children shared similar experiences and if these experiences were unique to only children. Through in-depth interviews, online message boards, and chat rooms, Sorenson observed common experiences among only children, although not exclusive to them, across the UK, the US, Canada, and Australia. She also interviewed therapists who specialized in working with only children to validate her findings..

Falbo and Polit (1986) conducted a comprehensive review of literature on only children, analyzing 115 studies through six meta-analyses to evaluate their developmental outcomes. Contrary to popular stereotypes, their findings revealed that only children excelled in achievement, intelligence, character, and the parent-child relationship, surpassing peers from larger families. Discrediting notions of only child deprivation or uniqueness, the review highlighted the crucial role of the parent-child relationship in shaping developmental outcomes, with heightened parental attention and anxiety contributing to positive outcomes in only children, firstborns, and those from small families. Overall, the review challenged negative perceptions of only children, suggesting that they did not face significant disadvantages and their outcomes were comparable to those of firstborns and individuals from small families.

"The Only Child in America: Prejudice versus Performance," Judith Blake discusses the prevalent negative perceptions surrounding only children in the United States (Blake, 1981). She highlights that being an only child is commonly viewed as a significant disadvantage, with prevailing beliefs associating only children with characteristics such as selfishness, loneliness, and maladjustment. Blake's analysis of nationwide surveys conducted over several decades reveals that the majority of respondents perceive being an only child as a disadvantage, citing personality defects and loneliness as primary concerns (Blake, 1981). Interestingly, very few respondents attribute the disadvantages of being an only child to prejudice from teachers, neighbors, or relatives. Despite the negative perceptions, Blake notes that the preference for having a single child is relatively low among Americans, with most individuals realistically assessing that they may end up with only one child due to factors such as delayed childbearing and divorce (Blake, 1981). She discusses the implications of these perceptions and preferences, especially in the context of rising single-child families globally, driven by factors like divorce rates and delayed childbearing. Blake acknowledges the limited research on only children and calls for more scientifically rigorous studies to understand the actual attributes and behaviors of only children, free from methodological shortcomings and biases (Blake, 1981). She highlights the importance of controlling for various parental characteristics and family backgrounds in such studies. Blake cites a study by Belmont and Marolla as an example, which found that only children did not perform as well as expected on intellectual tests compared to children from larger families, suggesting that the negative perceptions surrounding only children may not be entirely unfounded (Blake, 1981).

Overall, Blake's article sheds light on the complex perceptions and realities surrounding only children in American society and underscores the need for further research in this area. The study by Liu (2006) reveals entrenched gender stereotypes among parents in present-day China, despite the child-centered culture of the only-child community. Higher SES parents may seem to adopt a more gender-neutral approach, but their expectations for daughters still align with traditional gender norms, emphasizing qualities associated with masculinity alongside femininity. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes has implications for children's evolving identities and may contribute to the reinforcement of gender inequality in society. Efforts to challenge and address these gender-specific expectations are needed, as highlighted by Liu's study. Furthermore, research informed by critical social theory is necessary to promote social transformation regarding gender norms in the Chinese context (Liu, 2006).

Braithwaite and Holt-Lunstad's (2017) review explores the intricate relationship between romantic relationships and mental health. They find that while mentally healthier individuals are more inclined to enter into relationships, the quality and type of relationship significantly impact mental health outcomes. Established, committed relationships like marriage tend to yield greater benefits compared to less committed unions such as cohabitation. The association between relationships and mental health is bidirectional, with evidence suggesting that the causal arrow flows more strongly from relationships to mental health. Improving relationships has a positive effect on mental health, but enhancing mental health does not consistently lead to improved relationships. The review also delves into theoretical models like the Marital Discord Model and the Stress Generation Model, which highlight the interplay between adaptive and maladaptive relationship processes, stress, and mental health outcomes. Negative constructs within relationships appear to have a more potent effect than positive ones, emphasizing the significance of addressing negative aspects to maintain relationship health. In terms of implications, the authors assert that relationships are pivotal to human functioning and can influence various mental health outcomes. They suggest that preventing unhealthy relationships may be more crucial than enhancing satisfactory ones, advocating for interventions aimed at averting relationship dysfunction. Such interventions, tailored to prevent relationship problems, hold promise in improving mental health outcomes. [Braithwaite, S., & Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017). Romantic relationships and mental health. Current Opinion in Psychology, 13, 120–125.] The present contribution suggests that in order to most effectively treat couples who struggle with unrealistic expectations, counselors should focus on aversion to disagreement, which seems to have a stronger impact on relationship satisfaction than mindreading expectations or a belief in destiny (Zagefka & Bahul, 2022). This was true consistently across two cultural contexts, Britain and Hungary. In a nutshell, in order to improve relationship satisfaction, it seems pertinent to teach couples not only how to disagree constructively, which is already the focus of many couple interventions, but also to accept the basic fact that disagreement in relationships is normal (Zagefka & Bahul, 2022). From their lay theories about relationships, people extrapolate behavioral guidelines. Lay theories affect information processing, that is, they affect the lens through which people perceive the world (Fehr, 1999). They inform whether people feel that their relationship meets their expectations and whether they want to continue or terminate the relationship. Problems arise when lay theories result in unrealistic expectations. Of course, it is desirable for someone to terminate a relationship because there is an unacceptable level of frequent, vehement, or violent disagreement. However, most counselors will see it as their duty to prevent relationship breakdown over minor routine disagreements that are to be expected in any relationship. Such minor disagreements might seriously jeopardize relationship health when dysfunctional, harmful beliefs about the role of disagreement in relationships is present, and counselors could work with couples on the clients' beliefs that in good relationships disagreements should not arise. The concept of romantic ideology holds significant influence in Western culture, yet our understanding of its impact on specific relationships remains limited. This study aimed to explore the association between romantic beliefs and feelings towards a partner, as well as the stability of relationships. Additionally, it sought to investigate how romantic beliefs evolve over time and in response to relationship changes. Longitudinal data from couples were analyzed, revealing that initially, romantic beliefs were positively linked to feelings of love, satisfaction, and commitment. However, there was little evidence to suggest that changes in romantic beliefs influenced these feelings over time or predicted the longevity of relationships. Interestingly, partners' levels of romanticism did not predict whether relationships endured or ended during the study period. Over time, participants generally exhibited a decrease in romanticism scores, although couples who became engaged did not experience a significant change. Conversely, couples who parted ways saw a notable decline in their endorsement of romantic beliefs following the breakup(Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

Despite having straightforward, objective definitions, these two terms evoke strong, occasionally contradictory mental pictures. These two terms can elicit a wide range of surprising emotions due to their numerous personal connotations (Laursen & Collins, 2012). When people think about what sex and gender mean, they associate it with everything from jokes and humiliation to grave worries about power disparities and injustices, from bitter ideas about the battle of the sexes to joyful acknowledgment of the close ties of romantic love, and from disagreements over the distribution of domestic duties to statements about the pleasures of parenthood.

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Pasqualini and De Rose (2020) examine the influence of birth order and sibling composition on parent-child communication regarding sexual matters and romantic feelings among Italian university students. Their study, based on data from the Sexual and Emotional Life of Youths survey (SELFY) conducted in 2000 and 2017, reveals that later-born children, particularly those with same-gender siblings, are less likely to engage in deep communication with parents about sexual development and romantic feelings compared to first-born or only children.

While gender differences exist in communication patterns with girls generally being more open with parents, the moderating role of gender in birth order effect is not confirmed. The findings also indicate changes in parent-child communication over time, with a slight decrease in discussing sexual development and STIs but an increase in conversations about contraceptives and romantic feelings. Regional disparities are observed, with southern Italian students showing less involvement in deep communication with parents. Surprisingly, parental divorce does not hinder communication on these matters but rather intensifies it. The study underscores the importance of considering siblings' influence in designing family-based interventions aimed at promoting adolescent health and education (Pasqualini & De Rose, 2020).

The study examines the influence of gender norms, marital intimacy, age, and marital status on the selection of primary caregivers among spouses facing a crisis situation, such as cancer diagnosis and treatment. The results reveal that despite societal changes, traditional gender role norms still play a significant role, with wives being less likely than husbands to be named as primary caregivers, regardless of other factors like age, education, or employment status. Interestingly, the study finds that while paid work is not a barrier for men to assume caregiving roles, emotional closeness within the marital relationship significantly influences caregiver selection for both genders.

Moreover, the absence of an age effect on helper selection suggests that cohort effects and spousal health status do not differentiate caregiver selection. The discussion also touches upon theories of caregiver selection, specifically Cantor's hierarchical-compensatory model and Litwak's task-specificity model, highlighting the importance of gender as a central analytic category in understanding caregiver dynamics.

The study concludes by emphasizing the need for future research to incorporate a finer conceptualization of support network composition, considering factors like relationship quality, gender, race, and socioeconomic status to better understand the complexities of caregiver selection. Sanchez, Fetterolf, and Rudman (2012) conduct a comprehensive review of traditional gender role adherence and its implications for sexuality among heterosexual individuals in the United States. Despite societal trends toward egalitarianism, traditional gender roles persist in intimate relationships, particularly emphasizing female submissiveness and male dominance.

The article delves into the reasons behind the perpetuation of these roles and highlights automatic associations between sexuality and power, reinforcing gender stereotypic behavior. The negative consequences of adhering to traditional gender roles, especially for women's sexual satisfaction and autonomy, are underscored.

The authors advocate for interventions aimed at reducing women's adherence to submissive scripts and promoting egalitarian sexual experiences, citing research indicating that relationships rejecting traditional scripts exhibit greater satisfaction and improved outcomes. The review concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in sexual expression and relationship dynamics.

III. METHOD

A. *Aim*

The aim of this study is to investigate the perspectives of only child males towards romantic relationships and gender roles.

B. *Objectives*

1) To examine the expectations and preferences of only child males regarding romantic relationships
2) To explore the communication styles and conflict resolution strategiesemployed by only child males in romantic relationships.
3) To investigate the attitude towards traditional gender roles and norms within romantic relationships.

C. *Research Design*

This study used a thematic analysis approach to explore how only child male perceive romantic relationships and traditional gender roles.

D. Operational Definition

1) *Only Child Male:* A male individual who does not have any siblings, either biological or adopted, and has been raised without the presence of brothers or sisters in the household.
2) *Romantic Relationship:* A close interpersonal relationship between two individuals characterized by emotional and physical intimacy, mutual affection, romantic attraction, and often exclusivity and commitment.
3) *Gender Roles:* Socially constructed roles, behaviors, expectations, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for individuals based on their perceived gender identity

E. Sampling Procedure

The participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling. With a sample size of 6 participants, between the ages of 18-25.

1) *Inclusion Criteria:* Individuals who are only child and male who are not currently in any romantic relationships.
2) *Exclusion Criteria:* Individuals who are only child and male who grew up with someone who played a sibling figure.

F. Data Collection

An initial screening process was conducted to see if the individual is suitable to take part in the study. 4-5 screening questions were asked to see if the individual fit into the participant criteria of this study. After confirming that they are suitable to take part in the study, they were given a detailed explanation about what their participation would imply, including confidentiality, freedom to withdraw from participation, recording of the interview and aims of the study. The data was then collected using structured interviews via Zoom meetings and in-person interviews and later transcribed. A list of open-ended questions were prepared beforehand, and phrased in such a way that maximum amount of information would be procured from the participants. The interview audio recordings, associated transcripts, and the data itself were all retained in the data as meaningful segments that underwent processing to enhance comprehension. These portions are called "themes," and the process of giving these themes meaning is referred to as thematic analysis.

G. Data Analysis

One of the most important benefits of theme analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is flexibility. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." The freedom of researchers to choose the subjects and formats of thematic analysis in accordance with their research questions reflects this flexibility. This study's data analysis method primarily adheres to Braun and Clarke's six-phase theme analysis technique. Conducting thematic analysis starts with getting familiarized with the data, then generating initial codes or labels to capture different aspects of the content. These codes are then grouped into broader themes that reflect recurring ideas, patterns, or concepts. Through an iterative process of coding and refining, a coherent and meaningful set of themes that help us understand the central ideas, experiences, or perspectives within the data will be developed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts by identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within the data to gain insights into the research questions. It serves as a technique employed to detect, scrutinize, and elucidate recurring patterns or overarching ideas within a dataset, encompassing sources like interviews, surveys, or written material. It provides a systematic framework for comprehending the abundance of diverse information acquired in research by methodically arranging and delving into the underlying significance and emerging concepts.

H. Ethical Considerations

1) The participants were contacted through phone and were invited to participate only after going through the screening process first.
2) The interviews were scheduled according to the convenience of the participants, with a choice of their desired mode of interview (video call/voice call/in person)
3) After receiving consent, the interviews were recorded, which were later converted to transcripts for interpretation and data analysis.
4) The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any time without any consequences.
5) Confidentiality was maintained by keeping their identities private and not mentioning any other kind of identifying information

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

Table

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Romantic relationship	Quality time Act of service Personal service Shared activity
Gender role	Parenting Domesticity Financial Contribution
Communication	Open Discussions Honesty Builds Connection
Conflict	Communication Active Listening

B. Discussions

1) Romantic Relationship

The first theme is romantic relationships. People frequently look for emotional support, tenderness, and companionship in romantic relationships. Johnson and Bradbury (2020) state that long-term commitment, affection, and reciprocal attraction are the hallmarks of romantic relationships. In romantic relationships, partners usually take part in activities that promote emotional intimacy, like showing affection and gratitude, having deep conversations, and offering assistance when things get tough.Gottman and Silver's (2015) research emphasises the significance of communication, trust, and shared values in preserving happy romantic partnerships.

" So, for me, a relationship is like a partnership, you know? Mutual love and respect, understanding, and all those basic things."
"Okay, so in a partner, I'm looking for someone who's sweet and kind, i cannot handle people who are rude or anything, so yeah, someone who is caring."
"So, when I look for someone,I want them to be down for some crazy adventures and just be ready to explore life together."
"and someone who is a good listener, who i can talk to…."
"cooking together or watching a series together….."

People enter love relationships with preconceived notions about their partner's behaviour, their relationship dynamics, and their future together, according to a 2019 study by Miller and Anderson. Under the romatic relationship theme, the organising theme is expectations towards a romantic partner and how a relationship should be.Personal values, prior experiences, and cultural conventions may all have an impact on these expectations. People may feel more fulfilled and satisfied in their relationships when their expectations match reality. Unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations, however, can cause unhappiness in the relationship as well as conflict and disappointment (Fletcher et al., 2017). As a result, maintaining happy love relationships requires open communication and a clear knowledge of expectations. We found out that there are 4 basic theme to romantic relationship expectations,we will see them one by one.

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2) Quality Time

Quality time in romantic relationships refers to the deliberate spending of time and attention in each other's company in order to promote intimacy and emotional connection. In order to establish and preserve solid romantic relationships, quality time is crucial, according to research by Larson and Richards (2021). Prioritizing quality time together is associated with increased levels of intimacy and relationship satisfaction in couples (Pistole et al., 2016). Many of the participants have shown their need for quality time with their partner by stating that doing chores together, watching shows or series , cooking together, and even actively listening and being there to support.

3) Acts of Service

"In romantic relationships, acts of service are deeds done with thoughtfulness to show support, love, and concern for one's partner. Cooking a meal, doing housework, running errands, or providing assistance when needed are a few examples of acts of service. Engagement in acts of service has been shown to improve relationship satisfaction and fortify emotional relationships between couples, according to research by Bodenmann and Cina (2019). While participants did not directly address whether they would like act of service from their partner, they indicated that their partner should be reliable, understand their needs, and be supportive, which are all part of an act of service.

4) Personal Space

In romantic partnerships, "personal space" refers to the requirement that partners preserve their individuality, privacy, and autonomy. Respecting one's personal space is essential for fostering both individual well-being and interpersonal happiness, according to research by Mashek and Sherman (2018). A sense of balance and harmony in romantic relationships is fostered by setting up good boundaries and making time for hobbies, self-care, and social connections outside of the relationship (Kelly & Huston, 2020). Thus, creating a strong and happy romantic relationship requires preserving personal space in addition to intimacy and closeness." 5 out of 6 participants clearly mentioned that they need their personal space in a relationship by using various statements such as “do my own thinng”, “ my space” and “ personal space”.

5) Shared Activities

"Partnership activities are essential for creating a sense of connection, rapport, and sturdiness in romantic relationships. According to research by Berg and Archer (2017), sharing interests, pastimes, or activities fosters intimacy and relationship happiness. Engaging in pleasurable activities together fosters a sense of unity and togetherness as couples establish shared memories, experiences, and inside jokes. Additionally, engaging in shared activities fosters mutual support, communication, and teamwork, all of which improve the resilience and quality of relationships (Reissman et al., 2020). As mentioned in the quality time, participant wanted a partner who can share a hobby or do activities together and mentioned “ do things together”, “ do cool stuff” and “ try new things together”

6) Gender Roles

The next theme is Gender roles, which refer to societal expectations and norms regarding behaviors, attitudes, and activities deemed appropriate for individuals based on their perceived gender. These roles can influence various aspects of life, including parenting styles, career choices, and domestic responsibilities (Smith, J., & Johnson, R. (Year).From the whole interview, we can find that only child male have simply rejected the traditional gender roles that society plays. The interview was structured to get their opinion of gender roles in domestic work, parenting, and financial contribution. We can see that they all want to form an equal and balanced relationship with their partner.

“I'm all about keeping things smooth in the family by talking openly, teaming up, and sharing the load. Forget about traditional roles; let's divide up tasks based on what each person is good at and what they enjoy, That's it.”

Parenting

Influence in parenting refers to the impact parents have on their children's development, including their values, beliefs, behaviors, and overall well-being. Parents' actions, attitudes, and communication styles significantly shape their children's personalities and life trajectories (Brown, A., & Williams, B. (Year)

Person 1 highlights the importance of allowing kids to explore and learn without imposing traditional gender norms. Person 3 emphasizes understanding each child's unique personality and supporting their individual growth.

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Person 4 advocates for giving children equal chances and instilling the belief that they can pursue any path they desire, irrespective of gender. Person 5 stresses the significance of creating an open-minded environment where children feel free to express themselves without judgment.

"Every kid's got their own vibe regardless of their gender, right? So, I'm all about getting to know them as individuals…"

Domesticity

Domesticity refers to the activities, responsibilities, and behaviors associated with managing a household and maintaining familial relationships. It encompasses various tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, and home maintenance, as well as the emotional connections within the family unit (Garcia, M., & Martinez, L. (Year)

Person 1 rejects traditional roles, advocating for teamwork and finding what works best for the family. Person 3 acknowledges the evolving nature of families and the importance of flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances. Person 4 emphasizes individual autonomy within the family unit, encouraging each member to pursue their own interests and aspirations. Person 5 highlights the importance of fairness, teamwork, and mutual respect in creating a harmonious domestic environment. Person 6 underscores the value of open dialogue, mutual respect, and flexibility in promoting familial well-being.

"Being with someone and doing things together,even chores we should keep it flexible and understandable."

7) Financial Contributions

Financial contributions in families involve the distribution of resources and responsibilities related to earning income, budgeting, saving, and spending money. It encompasses discussions about financial goals, priorities, and values within the family context (Jones, S., & Thompson, D. (Year)

Person 1 emphasizes fairness in financial matters and chore allocation, considering each member's contribution and availability. Person 3 underscores the importance of an equitable distribution of responsibilities to maintain balance within the family. Person 4 suggests utilizing individual strengths to optimize task allocation and promote efficiency. Person 5 acknowledges the value of everyone, regardless of age, contributing to household chores and financial obligations. Person 6 emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collective effort in ensuring the smooth functioning of the household.

"Financial stuff and chores? It's gotta be fair, contribute what one can ... It's all about knowing the situation and keeping things balanced'

8) Communication

Communication is a fundamental aspect of any successful relationship.According to a study published in the Journal of Marriage and Family, effective communication is crucial for relationship satisfaction and stability (Markman, H. J., & Rhoades, G. K. (2012). It involves not only expressing one's thoughts and feelings but also actively listening to one's partner. The role of communication in determining relationship satisfaction, such as open and honest communication leads to higher levels of relationship satisfaction and lower likelihood of conflict escalation (Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2006).

9) Open Discussion

Open discussions refer to the practice of freely exchanging thoughts, feelings, and opinions between individuals in a relationship. It involves creating an environment where both partners feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment or reprisal.A study by Laurenceau, J. P., & Bolger, N. (2005) found that open communication, characterized by frequent and candid discussions, is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and intimacy. Partners who engage in open discussions tend to feel more connected and supported by each other. Open communication fosters trust and emotional intimacy between partners. It allows individuals to share their vulnerabilities, resolve conflicts, and deepen their bond through mutual understanding (Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (2016)).

"But it's all about how you handle it.Talking things out, listening to each other, and finding solutions together, i know its not that easy as I'm saying it now but i feel like when there is a conflict, there are space where things can be done right and talk it out. No blaming games, just honest convos and maybe a bit of compromise."

10) Honesty

Honesty entails being truthful and transparent in communication, refraining from deception or concealment of information. Sprecher, S., & Hendrick, S. S. (2004) highlights honesty as a key predictor of relationship satisfaction and stability.

Couples who prioritize honesty in communication are more likely to experience higher levels of trust and commitment. Honesty promotes trust, integrity, and authenticity in relationships, laying the foundation for a strong and enduring connection between partners.honesty promotes effective conflict resolution and reduces the likelihood of relational distress. Partners who engage in honest communication are better equipped to address challenges and maintain relationship harmony (Andersen, P. A., & Guerrero, L. K. (1997)).

"No blaming games, just honest convos and maybe a bit of compromise."

"Of course, trust, honesty and all that jazz are important."

11) Building Connections

Building connections refers to the process of establishing and nurturing emotional bonds between partners through communication. Communication plays a central role in developing emotional connections between partners. By actively listening and validating each other's emotions, couples can strengthen their bond and cultivate a sense of mutual understanding and support(Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988)). It involves sharing experiences, expressing empathy, and validating each other's feelings to foster intimacy and closeness in the relationship.

"We both gotta have our own things going on, but making time for each other and doing stuff together is key"

12) Conflict

Conflict arises when individuals or groups have opposing goals, interests, or values, leading to tension or disagreement (Deutsch, 1973). It can manifest in various forms, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, or organizational conflict (Rahim, 2017). Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, influenced by factors such as communication styles, cultural differences, and power dynamics (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). Managing conflict effectively is essential for maintaining healthy relationships, promoting cooperation, and achieving organizational goals (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

13) Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution involves identifying, addressing, and resolving disagreements or disputes in a constructive manner (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2013). It encompasses various approaches, including problem-solving, negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Effective conflict resolution is essential for maintaining social harmony, promoting organizational effectiveness, and fostering positive interpersonal relationships (Fisher et al., 2011). By addressing conflicts promptly and respectfully, individuals and organizations can prevent misunderstandings, reduce stress, and enhance productivity (Deutsch, 2006).

14) Active Listening

Active listening involves fully attending to the speaker, understanding their message, and providing feedback to demonstrate comprehension (Rogers & Farson, 1957). It fosters rapport, trust, and mutual respect in interpersonal interactions (Miller, 1984). Active listening encourages speakers to express themselves openly and feel validated (Burley-Allen, 1995).

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study looks into the perceptions of only child males, with a particular focus on their attitudes towards both romantic relationships and gender roles. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how only child males perceive and navigate these aspects within their relationships. The findings reveal a nuanced perspective among participants, who prioritize equality, partnership, and mutual respect in their romantic relationships. They emphasize the importance of quality time spent together, acts of service, and engaging in shared activities as fundamental components of building emotional intimacy and satisfaction. Additionally, participants stress the significance of personal space and autonomy, highlighting the need for boundaries and individual fulfillment within the relationship. Regarding gender roles, participants exhibit a rejection of traditional societal expectations, advocating for a more egalitarian approach. They reject rigid gender roles and instead embrace flexibility and shared responsibility within their relationships. This attitude towards gender roles aligns with their broader perspective on romantic relationships, emphasizing mutual understanding, communication, and trust as essential elements for relationship satisfaction. Effective communication strategies, such as open discussions and active listening, emerge as crucial tools for resolving conflicts and maintaining relationship harmony.

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Honesty and trust are identified as foundational pillars that underpin the strength and resilience of these relationships, contributing to a sense of security and connection.

This study sheds light on the complex interplay between attitudes towards romantic relationships and gender roles among only child males. By prioritizing equality, partnership, and mutual respect, participants navigate their relationships with a nuanced understanding of the importance of emotional intimacy and individual fulfillment. The rejection of traditional gender roles reflects a broader commitment to egalitarian principles within romantic relationships, emphasizing communication, trust, and shared responsibility. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics of modern relationships and provide insights that can inform individuals and professionals alike in fostering healthy and fulfilling partnerships.

A. Limitations

1) As the number of participants in the study were less and did not fulfill all the characteristics of the population, the results cannot be generalized.

2) As the questions used for data collection are not standardized, the validity of the findings can be questioned.

B. Implications

1) While exploring individuals who are only children and their communication skills, uncovered the importance of regular and meaningful communication to nurture emotional intimacy. Honesty and transparency were highlighted, as were being open about their feelings, concerns, and future plans, which contributed to building trust and reducing misunderstandings.

2) Insights from the study emphasize how individuals who are only children promote equality and mutual respect in romantic relationships, challenging traditional gender norms in the process.

3) Honesty and transparency were highlighted as foundational elements of communication. Participants emphasized the importance of being open about their feelings, concerns, and future plans, which contributed to building trust and reducing misunderstandings.

C. Suggestions for Further Research

For researchers who may conduct future research on the topic of Only child male and their perceptions towards romantic relationships and gender roles, it would be advisable to do a comparative study with individuals with siblings.This could shed light on whether being an only child has a significant influence on these attitudes and behaviors. Future researchers should also consider taking an equal number of male and female participants to understand if gender differences exist and identify them.

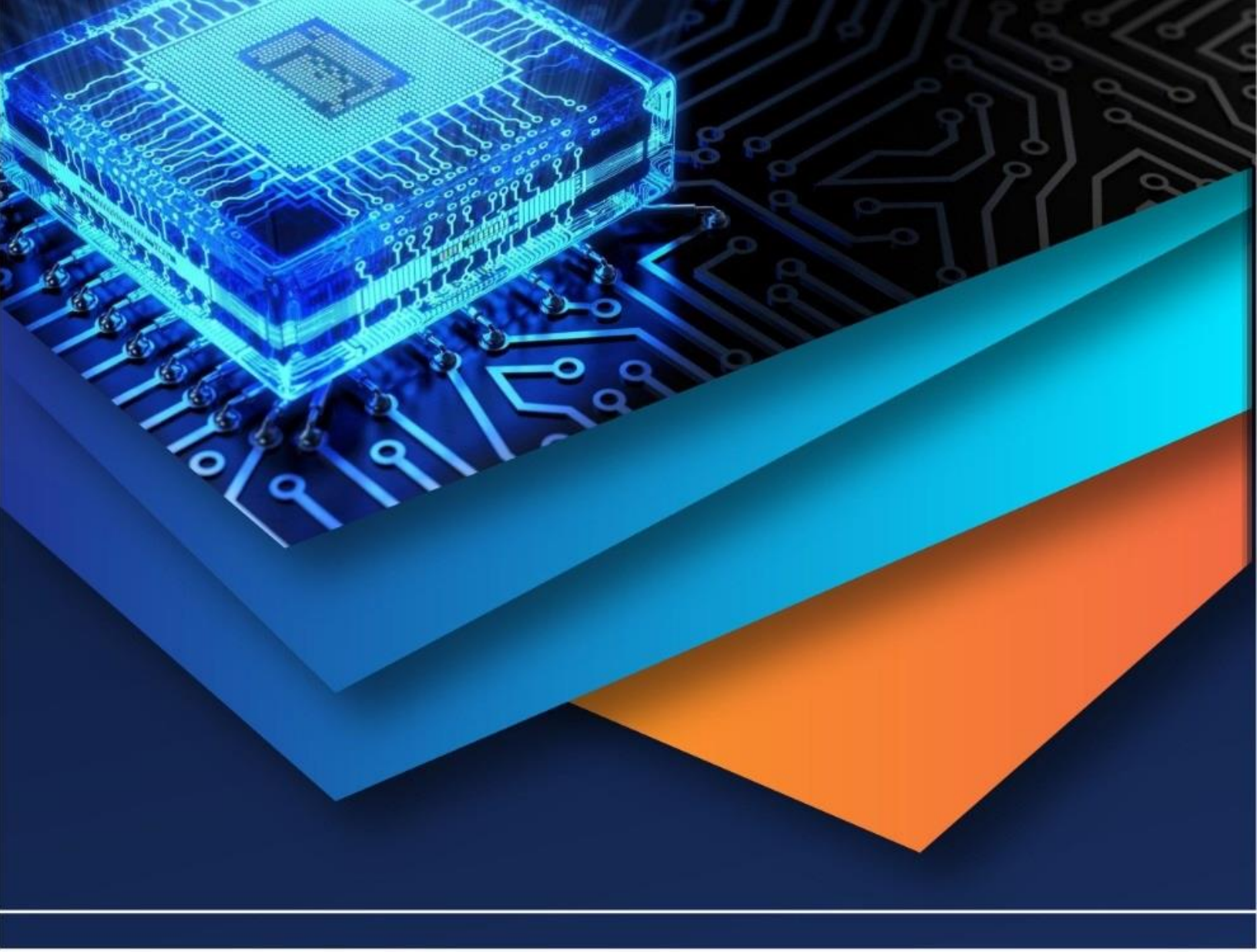
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