

**BRIEF REPORT**

## Cultural and ethnic influences on love and attachment

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### **Abstract**

Recently, theorists have begun to speculate about the nature of passionate and companionate love. Evolutionary psychologists have tended to emphasize the pan-cultural nature of passionate love. Historians have stressed the fact that, in different historical eras, people's attitudes toward love, sex, and intimacy have varied widely. Cross-cultural researchers contend that, even today, societies differ greatly in their attitudes toward love. In this study, 124 men and 184 women from four ethnic backgrounds were asked if they were currently in love and how passionately and companionately in love they were. The four groups differed, as predicted, in their *general* orientations toward life. European-Americans were the most individualistic, Japanese-Americans and Pacific Islanders were intermediate in individualism/collectivism, and Chinese-Americans were the most collectivist. Nonetheless, in the specific area of love, the various American ethnic groups did not differ significantly in the likelihood of being in love, nor in the intensity of the passionate love (PL) or companionate love (CL) they felt. In all ethnic groups, men's and women's adult attachment styles predicted romantic feelings and experiences. The anxious were the most likely to be in a love relationship, and they scored the highest on the PL scale; avoidants scored lowest. The secure scored the highest on the CL scale; avoidants scored the lowest.

Recently, theorists from a variety of disciplines have begun to speculate about the impact of culture and ethnicity on love. Many evolutionary psychologists and anthropologists have argued that passionate love is a cultural universal, existing at all times and in all places. Historians have emphasized how much societies' views of love, sex, and intimacy have changed over time. In the West, for example, until about 1500, political and religious authorities generally viewed passionate love as a threat to the social, political, and religious order, and they attempted to suppress such feelings. By the late eighteenth century, however, Western views of love had been reshaped by the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolu-

tion, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. People now placed a high value on romantic and passionate love, on marriage for love (as opposed to arranged marriage), on intimacy, and on sexual freedom for men *and* women. Today, societies in many corners of the non-Western world are experiencing similar transformations.

Many cross-cultural theorists, on the other hand, contend that, even today, culture and ethnicity (as well as individualism/collectivism) have a profound impact on how men and women view passionate and companionate love and how they deal with such emotions (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, in press).

Three disciplines and three different visions exist as to the relationship between culture and ethnic group and love. To what extent *are* passionate and companionate

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love cultural universals? To what extent are these feelings shaped by culture and ethnicity? Do the same antecedents (say, attachment style) influence susceptibility to love for all cultures? Or, are the precursors of love very different in different cultures and ethnic groups? Surprisingly little research has been conducted to answer such basic questions.

Many social observers have criticized social psychologists for their unthinking ethnocentrism. Since the end of World War II, America has dominated the social psychology scene. Researchers have interviewed hundreds of thousands of American college students (and usually European-American college students at that). Theorists have generally assumed that their findings would generalize not only to America or to the West, but even to the world beyond. But the West is not the world. Recently, cross-cultural psychologists have begun to call for the systematic study of diverse cross-national and American ethnic groups (Smith & Bond, 1994). Such cross-cultural research, they note, could contribute to our understanding of social psychological processes in two different ways. First, it would provide some sense of what social structures and processes are found throughout the human family. Second, it would furnish some sense of how variable social arrangements can be (Berry et al., 1992).

But such calls to action are easier issued than implemented. Previously, when social psychologists have attempted to interview men and women from different cultures, critics have rightly argued that it is impossible to be sure that a given test instrument means the same thing in two very different cultures. (Does "passionate love" mean the same thing in America and in Japan, for example?) When researchers choose to focus in on one country (say, America) and look at the behavior of different ethnic groups that share the same language, critics rightly argue that the very fact that they all speak the same language means that all groups might be Westernized and thus no longer representative of their countries of origin. How-

ever, a start must be made somewhere. In this study, we will look at American ethnic groups from four diverse backgrounds. Although these groups vary greatly in cultural background, they all speak English (thus avoiding intractable translation problems). In this study we will test six hypotheses:

- H1: *Men and women from different ethnic backgrounds will differ in how individualistic/collectivist (I/C) their attitudes are. Specifically, those from European-American ethnic backgrounds will be most individualistic, those from Japanese-American or Pacific Islander backgrounds will be intermediate in individualism/collectivism, and those from Chinese-American backgrounds will be most collectivist.*
- H2: *People from different ethnic backgrounds (and with different I/C orientations) will differ in how likely they are to be in love at any given time. Specifically, people from a European-American ethnic background will be more likely to be in love than are people from Japanese-American, Pacific Islander, or Chinese-American backgrounds.*
- H3: *People from different ethnic backgrounds (and different I/C orientations) will differ in how passionately they love. Those from a European-American ethnic background will score higher on the PL scale than will those from Japanese-American, Pacific Islander, or Chinese-American backgrounds.*
- H4: *People from different ethnic backgrounds (and different I/C orientations) will differ in how much companionate love they feel for their partners. Specifically, those from a European-American ethnic background will score higher on the CL scale than will those from Japanese-American, Pacific Islander, or Chinese-American backgrounds.*

### **Ethnicity, Attachment Style, and Love**

Hazan and Shaver (1987) argued that adults' attachment styles—whether they are secure, anxious-ambivalent, or avoidant

in their attachments—are linked to people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in close relationships. In Hypothesis 5, we plan to explore whether or not ethnicity has an effect on adults' attachment styles.

*H5: Men and women from various ethnic backgrounds differ in adult attachment style. (Different percentages of people from European-American, Japanese-American, Pacific Islander, or Chinese-American ethnic backgrounds may describe themselves as secure, anxious-ambivalent, or avoidant.)*

Attachment theory is assumed to be a pan-cultural theory. If this assumption is correct, culture and ethnicity should *not* affect the basic relationship existing between attachment style and susceptibility to passionate and companionate love. Thus, we propose:

*H6: In a variety of cultures and ethnic groups, attachment style should have an impact on susceptibility to love. When we consider susceptibility to passionate love, it is the anxious-ambivalent who should be most susceptible to love. (They should be most likely to be in love at the present time and should receive the highest PL scores.) The secure should be intermediate in susceptibility to passionate love, and the avoidant should be least vulnerable to passionate love. When we consider the ability to love companionately, it is the secure who should be most capable of companionate love. (They should receive the highest CL scores.) The anxious should be intermediate in their ability to love companionately, and the avoidant should be least capable of companionate love.*

The following survey was designed to test these hypotheses.

## Methods

### Subjects

Subjects were 124 men and 184 women from the University of Hawaii. Their aver-

age was 23.7 years. Of these men and women, 6% were not dating anyone, 56% were casually or steadily dating, 7% were living with someone, 6% were engaged, 20% were married, and 5% indicated their status as "Other."

Subjects varied greatly in educational background: 41% had completed high school; 4% had additional vocational/technical training; 56% had completed at least a year of college; and 2% had received an M.A., Ph.D., or some other advanced degree. Subjects belonged to an array of religious groups: Catholic (42%), Protestant (16%), Buddhist (7%), Jewish (1%), Mormon (2%), "Other" (21%), and "None" (12%).

As is typical of Hawaii's multicultural population, the subjects were from diverse ethnic backgrounds: Chinese-American (8.1%), European-American (29.9%), Japanese-American (32.8%), and Pacific Islanders (29.8%)—an ethnocultural label designating persons from Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia island chains, including such groups as the Filipino-Americans, Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians, Tongans, Tahitians, and Fijians. From this population, we selected three levels of ethnic representation—the European-Americans (as a prototype of an extremely individualistic culture); the Japanese-Americans and the Pacific Islanders (intermediate in individualism/collectivism); and the Chinese-Americans (as a prototype of an extremely collectivist culture) (Hofstede, 1983; Triandis, 1992; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

### Procedure

Subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire (either individually or in small groups of two or three), which contained the following measures.

#### *Assessing individualism/collectivism*

Subjects were asked to complete the 12-item Individualism/Collectivism (I/C) scale, developed by Triandis and colleagues (Tri-

andis, 1992) to assess individualism (idioncentrism) and collectivism (allocentrism). The higher the I/C score, the more individualistic subjects were said to be. (For information on the reliability and validity of the I/C scale, see Triandis et al., 1990.)

#### *Assessing attachment style*

Subjects were asked to complete the Adult Attachment Questionnaire developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987). (For information on the reliability and validity of the Adult Attachment Questionnaire, see Shaver and Hazan, 1993.)

#### *Assessing likelihood of being in love*

Whether or not subjects were currently in love was assessed with a single item: "Are you in love with anyone right now?" Possible answers were (1) "Yes" or (2) "No." (For information on this measure, see Sprecher et al., 1992.)

#### *Assessing passionate love*

Subjects were asked to complete the Passionate Love scale. (For information on the reliability and validity of the PL scale, see Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986.)

#### *Assessing companionate love*

Subjects were asked to complete the Companionate Love scale. (For information on reliability and validity of the CL scale, see Sternberg, 1986.)

## Results

In Hypothesis 1, we proposed that subjects from the various ethnic backgrounds would differ in individualism/collectivism (I/C). When we examined the data, we found that, as predicted, ethnicity did have a significant effect on I/C score,  $F(3, 304) = 5.05, p < .002$ . The European-American sample was the most individualistic ( $M = 56.39$ ), followed by the Japanese-American ( $M = 55.2$ ), the Pacific Islander ( $M = 52.33$ ), and the Chinese-American ( $M = 50.76$ ) samples. When post-hoc Scheffé tests ( $F_s, p < .05$ ) were conducted to determine which ethnic groups differed significantly from one another, European-American subjects were found to have significantly higher scores on the I/C scale than did either the Pacific Islanders,  $F_s(304) = 3.31, p < .05$ , or the Chinese-Americans,  $F_s(304) = 2.75, p < .05$ .

Hypothesis 2 proposed that there would be a relationship between ethnic group and the likelihood of being in love. A chi-square test was used to test the association between these two categorical variables. As we can see from Table 1, ethnicity did appear to have a significant impact on how likely people were to say they were currently in love,  $\chi^2(3, N = 308) = 12.79, p < .005$ . The Pacific Islanders were most likely to report being in a current love relationship; the European-Americans were least likely to be in love.

We utilized a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in testing Hypotheses 3 and 4. As is evident from Table 1, Hypothe-

**Table 1.** Ethnic group differences in likelihood of being in love, PL scores, and CL scores

Ethnic group	Likelihood of being in love <sup>a</sup>	PL <sup>b</sup>	CL <sup>b</sup>
European-American	53.3 <sub>c</sub>	103.69	55.91
Japanese-American	53.5 <sub>c</sub>	105.15	57.76
Pacific Islander	75.6 <sub>d</sub>	105.74	59.27
Chinese-American	56.0 <sub>c</sub>	108.92	56.84

Note: Within-column comparisons with different subscripts are significantly different.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of subjects currently in love.

<sup>b</sup>The higher the score, the more PL and CL people report experiencing.

ses 3 and 4 were *not* confirmed. Ethnicity did not have a significant impact on PL scores,  $F(3, 304) = .58, n.s.$  People from all ethnic groups seemed to love with equal passion. The group means were not even in the predicted direction. Subjects of Chinese-American ethnicity scored the highest on the PL; European-American subjects scored the lowest. Ethnicity also failed to have a significant impact on CL scale scores,  $F(3, 299) = 1.09, n.s.$  Subjects with a Pacific Islander background scored highest on the CL scale; European-American subjects scored lowest.

One might argue that it is not ethnic group differences that should be important, but cultural differences in individualism/collectivism. Thus, we also correlated subjects' I/C scores with the three dependent variables. These analyses led us to the same conclusion as our previous analyses. The correlation between I/C score and subjects' statement that they are currently in love was nonsignificant,  $r = .03, n.s.$  A significant correlation was found between the I/C and PL scores,  $r = -.12, p = .03.$  However, it was not in the predicted direction. The more individualistic subjects tended to love slightly *less* passionately than did their more collectivist counterparts. A negative correlation was also found between I/C and CL scores, although this time it was not significant,  $r = -.09, p = .10.$

Hypothesis 5 proposed that people from the various ethnic groups might differ in their attachment styles. When we examined the data from our multicultural sample (see

Table 2), we found no support for this speculation,  $\chi^2(6, N = 308) = 9.85, p = .13.$

We did find strong support for Hypothesis 6, which proposed that attachment style would have a strong relationship with the three dependent variables. A significant association existed between attachment style and the likelihood of being in love,  $\chi^2(2, N = 308) = 15.294, p < .001.$  As we predicted, the anxious-ambivalent subjects were the most likely to report being in a current love relationship, followed by the secure subjects. Avoidant subjects were the least likely to so report. The difference in proportions was only significant for the comparison between the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant subjects ( $z = 3.35, Bonferroni p < .05.$ ) We also found a significant effect for attachment style on PL scores,  $F(2, 305) = 4.119, p = .02.$  In Table 3, we see that, as predicted, the anxious-ambivalent subjects scored the highest, the secure subjects were intermediate, and the avoidant subjects had the lowest PL scores. Only the difference between the scores for the anxious and the avoidant subjects was significant,  $F_s(305) = 3.14, p < .05.$

Finally, we also found support for the prediction of a significant relationship between attachment style and CL scores,  $F(2, 305) = 7.781, p = .001.$  The secure subjects had the highest CL scores, the anxious-ambivalent subjects were intermediate, and the avoidant subjects had the lowest CL scores. Only the difference between the secure and the avoidant subjects was significant,  $F_s(305) = 7.667, p < .05.$

**Table 2.** Ethnic group and attachment style distributions

Ethnic Group	Attachment Style (in %)				N
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Total	
European-American	61.9	4.4	33.7	100	92
Japanese-American	69.3	8.9	21.8	100	101
Pacific Islander	72.2	11.1	16.7	100	90
Chinese-American	60.0	12.0	28.0	100	25
Total	67.2	8.4	24.4	100	
N	207	26	75		308

**Table 3.** Attachment style: Likelihood of being in love, PL scores, and CL scores

Measure	Attachment Style		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Likelihood of being in love <sup>a</sup>	63.77	80.77	42.67
Passionate Love scale <sup>b</sup>	106.20 <sub>cd</sub>	110.81 <sub>c</sub>	100.45 <sub>d</sub>
Companionate Love scale <sup>b</sup>	59.43 <sub>c</sub>	56.46 <sub>cd</sub>	52.85 <sub>d</sub>

Note: Between-column comparisons with different subscripts are significantly different.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of subjects currently in love.

<sup>b</sup>The higher the score, the more PL and CL people report experiencing.

We have seen that, in the entire sample, adult attachment style had the predicted effect on all three dependent variables. But does the same link exist in *all* the ethnic groups? If so, we should find the same pattern of results when looking at men and women in all four cultural groups—European-American, Japanese-American, Pacific Islander, and Chinese-American—separately. In each sample, adult attachment style should have a predictable and profound impact on susceptibility to passionate and companionate love.

To test the hypothesis that adult attachment style would have a systematic effect on the likelihood of being in love across ethnic groups, a log-linear model was used to test for interactions among the four categorical variables: attachment style, gender, ethnicity, and the likelihood of being in love measure. After adjusting for empty or sparse cells ( $\text{delta} = 5$ ), no significant interactions were found across samples,  $\chi^2(24, N = 308) = 36.18, p = .053$ .

Next, we conducted a  $3 \times 2 \times 4$  (Attachment Style  $\times$  Gender  $\times$  Ethnicity) ANOVA for each of our measured outcome variables: PL and CL scores. Across the ethnic samples, relations between attachment style and love were the same. The anxious-ambivalent subjects scored the highest on PL, the secure subjects were intermediate, and avoidants scored the lowest. On CL, the secure subjects in all ethnic groups scored the highest, the anxious-ambivalent subjects were inter-

mediate, and the avoidants scored the lowest. Again, there were no significant interactions of gender and attachment style or ethnicity and attachment style on either measure. These findings suggest that, for both men and women and for subjects from different ethnic groups, attachment style had the same effect on susceptibility to passionate and companionate love.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Research on cross-cultural and ethnic differences in love, sex, and intimacy is still in its infancy. Some pioneering evolutionary psychologists, historians, cross-cultural researchers, and social psychologists have offered compelling, but contradictory, theories about the impact that culture and ethnicity should have on love. However, very little research exists to confirm or disconfirm their intriguing speculations. This study was designed to *begin* exploring the questions that have been raised. This study (and a decade of research in this area) leads us to several tentative conclusions.

1. In America, or at least Hawaii, the various ethnic groups are consistently found to differ in individualism/collectivism. European-Americans tend to be the most individualistic, Japanese-Americans and Pacific Islanders to be intermediate in individualism/collectivism, and Chinese-Americans to be the most collectivist.

2. If we had studied the impact of ethnicity and individualism/collectivism on attitudes toward education, or work, or duty, or almost anything else, we suspect we may have found that ethnicity and individualism/collectivism did have a significant impact on attitudes and behavior. But when we were dealing with one of the most powerful of emotions, passionate love, we have been forced by this and other research to the conclusion that, when it comes to love, men and women from the various cultural and ethnic groups seem to possess very similar attitudes and behavior. In this and other as yet unpublished research, we and our colleagues have found few differences in Western or Eastern, or individualist or collectivist cultures—just as long as the societies are *modern* (as opposed to traditional), *urban* (vs. rural), and *affluent* (vs. poor) (Hatfield & Rapson, 1994, in press; Sprecher et al., 1992). We suspect that today, if researchers wish to study cultural differences in attitudes toward love and romantic behavior, they should probably begin by focusing in on differences between Western, Westernized, or even Eastern cultures, which are urban, affluent, and modern, and societies that still possess a tradition of arranged marriages; are poor, rural, and traditional; or rely on large extended kinship networks. We suspect it is only there that scientists will still be able to interview

young men and women who have relatively negative attitudes toward passionate love and perhaps companionate love.

3. Of course, researchers must begin to take cultural and ethnic differences into account when designing research (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). On the basis of this very preliminary study, however, we have some hint that perhaps advocates of the attachment perspective can take heart. Men and women from the various ethnic groups were equally likely to identify with the various attachment styles. Further, for both genders and in all ethnic groups, attachment style had a significant impact on susceptibility to love. Across gender and ethnicity, the anxious-ambivalents were the most likely to be in love, and they scored highest on the PL scale. The secures were intermediate in PL, and the avoidants lowest on PL score. Across gender and ethnicity, the secures had the highest scores on the CL scale. The anxious-ambivalents were intermediate, and the avoidants lowest in CL score.

Certainly, we recognize that this research, like any cross-cultural research, is not without problems. Researchers must always worry about the multiculturalism of theoretical perspectives and the representativeness of samples.

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