

# Communicating love: Comparisons between American and East Asian university students

Susan L. Kline<sup>a,\*</sup>, Brian Horton<sup>b</sup>, Shuangyue Zhang<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *School of Communication, 3016 Derby Hall, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, United States*

<sup>b</sup> *Department of Communication, University of Texas-Arlington, United States*

<sup>c</sup> *Speech Communication Department, Sam Houston State University, United States*

Accepted 31 January 2008

---

## Abstract

This study examined cultural differences in communicating love among 143 young adults from the US and East Asian countries of China, Japan, and South Korea. Through inductive analyses we examined similarities and differences in the activities and beliefs Americans and East Asians have about love in friendship and marriage, as well as the activities and ways in which love is expressed. Americans and East Asians reported that caring, trust, respect, and honesty were all important beliefs about love in friendship, and trust was an important belief about love in marriage. Love in marriage was seen as important and unconditional for Americans, while East Asians were more likely to report caring as an important belief. Sports, preparing food, and shopping were activities associated with expressing love for Americans, while talking and preparing food constituted activities for expressing love for East Asians. Finally, both US and East Asian students expressed love to a friend through acts of support, open discussion, and the sharing of common experiences, while they expressed love to a spouse through physical intimacy, acts of support, and expressions of love such as “I love you” and “I miss you.”

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Love; Cross-cultural; Intercultural communication; Communication competence

---

## 1. Introduction

A meaningful aspect of university life is the opportunity to meet and interact with people from different cultures. These intercultural interactions and relationships are reliant upon multiple types of socio-cultural knowledge, including the beliefs, feelings and practices that people have about basic human needs such as love and affection. Understanding how people from different cultures communicate love and affection in their close relationships is becoming an increasing focus for research. Given that affection is regarded as a fundamental human need (Floyd, 2006; Schutz, 1958), understanding how people are similar or different in the way they think about, feel and express love is important for understanding how intercultural relationships are formed and sustained in interactions. While cross-cultural research exists on differences in love styles and romantic beliefs (Goodwin, 1999; Kanemasa, Taniguchi, Daibo, & Ishimori, 2004; Kim & Hatfield, 2004), less work has systematically compared the ways people

---

\* Corresponding author at: School of Communication, The Ohio State University, 3016 Derby Hall, 154 North Oval Mall, Columbus, OH 43210, United States. Tel.: +1 614 292 0464.

E-mail address: [kline.48@osu.edu](mailto:kline.48@osu.edu) (S.L. Kline).

experience and express love in their close relationships. The purpose of our study, then, is to build upon existing research using inductive methods to identify cultural differences and similarities in knowledge about communicating love in their close relationships.

### 1.1. *The importance of relationships for young adults*

Scholars have argued on the importance of close relationships for the development of healthy personalities and interpersonal behaviors (Montgomery & Sorrell, 1998). The benefits of romantic relationships include companionship, happiness, loving, and feeling loved (Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell, 1994). Interpersonal competence in forming healthy relationships acquires particular significance in adolescence and young adulthood (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006), as friendships and romantic relationships become more salient.

With increasing ethnic and racial diversification in the US, the likelihood of dating or forming friendships with members of other cultures will also increase. Yet these relationships are apparently not easy to form or maintain; Wang, Kao, and Joyner (2006), for instance, have found that inter-racial dating relationships (composed of white, black, Asian, or Hispanic adolescents) were less stable than those couples in intra-racial dating relationships. Intercultural relationships can be meaningful experiences, however (e.g., Gareis, 1995). We believe that understanding how relationships work may be advanced by learning the schemas young adults use to get along with others.

### 1.2. *Theoretical models of love*

Various conceptions and models of love have emerged in the last three decades. Hendrick and Hendrick (e.g., C. Hendrick & S.S. Hendrick, 1986; S.S. Hendrick & C. Hendrick, 2000) have validated the existence of six different types of attitudes towards love. Other approaches have focused on distinguishing passionate and companionate love (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Hatfield, 1988; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996/2005), love as self-expansion (Aron & Aron, 1986), and a triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986; for reviews of approaches towards love, see Sternberg & Weis, 2006).

For instance, while Berscheid and Walster (1969) have distinguished passionate and companionate love, in Sternberg's (1986, 1987) model of love, companionate love, comprised of intimacy and commitment, is one of nine types of love. In Hendrick and Hendrick's (1986) model, passionate love, or *eros*, and companionate love, or *storge*, are supplemented by *ludus* (game playing), *pragma* (practical), *mania* (possessive/dependent), and *agape* (altruistic). Aron and Aron's (1996) conception of love asserts that falling *in* love incorporates the other person within oneself, an approach consistent with Asian ontological views of self (e.g., Doi, 1973, 2001).

Although these models of love have been validated within single Western cultures, most scholars acknowledge the role of culture as an important influence on the experience of love and the development of intimate relationships. Hofstede's (1984) theory and research on individualism and collectivism, in particular, has influenced research on love in romantic relationships (e.g., Dion & Dion, 1988, 1993).

### 1.3. *Cross-cultural research between Americans and East Asians on attitudes and beliefs about love*

Analyses of young adults from East Asian and Western cultures suggest that there may be conceptual bases for differences in young adults' attitudes and beliefs about expressing love in their close relationships. In the case of selecting a marriage partner, evolution theory, social exchange theory, cultural orientations or frames perspectives, and their various integrations have been used to explain cross-cultural similarities and differences (see the review in Kline & Zhang, 2004). For instance, Buss and his colleagues have used evolutionary theory to explain why men around the world value physical attractiveness, youth, and chastity in their potential mates more than women, who prefer ambition, industriousness, intelligence, and financial potential in their partners (e.g., Buss, 1994; Schmitt, 2005; Schmitt, 2006). In cross-cultural work Schmitt and his colleagues have also found that emotional investment (as measured by self-ratings of traits like compassionate, passionate, and loving) is associated with secure attachment and self-esteem (Schmitt, 2006). In separate work Fletcher and his colleagues (Fletcher, 2002) have found that US mate preferences cluster into three groups, warmth/trustworthiness, vitality/attractiveness and status/resources, with each group likely enacting a different route to reproductive survival.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947523>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/947523>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)