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Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Love: Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Love Studies, 14-16 March 2025

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Authors: *Lucia Martin Valverde, Alain Delannoy, Adam Bode, Claude-Hélène Mayer, Alex Nelson, Ian Skoggard.*

With a focus on international collaboration and the integration of concepts from various fields studying love, the conference aimed to embrace diversity in love research across disciplines and cultures. The participants emphasized how important it is for researchers to understand cultural contexts when examining how people live and love in different societies.

An overview of thematic sessions and the scope of various presentations is available in [a separate article](#) in this journal.

The following are summaries of the principal points from presentations and discussions as outlined in the abstracts submitted by the presenters for the session **Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Love**,

chaired by *Ian Skoggard from Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, the USA.*

Abstracts of Presentations

Tracing the fundamental necessity to love through systems, monkeys, and humans,

by Lucia Martin Valverde from Romelia Wildlife Refuge, Costa Rica.

Research Background. Throughout history, the study of love has often reduced it to a survival mechanism, primarily linking offspring to their mothers to ensure access to food, warmth, and protection, or connecting individuals to secure similar resources. However, contemporary understanding reveals that love serves a more complex and profound purpose, extending beyond the mere acquisition of these resources. These deeper functions are closely related to coregulation and the establishment of a secure base during infancy. The absence of these processes during development—whether in humans or nonhuman primates—has been shown to lead to challenges in socialization, empathy, cognitive development, self-regulation, and environmental adaptation.

Primates raised without sufficient love, either due to orphanhood or inadequate care, face significant repercussions not only on an individual level but also within their social groups. Given their inherently social nature, disruptions to group dynamics can negatively impact future offspring, perpetuating difficulties in socialization and self-regulation. These cascading effects underscore the broader implications of love deprivation for social systems and overall species well-being.

The aims of the study and its method. The diminishing emotional connection in modern social interactions has led to a societal lack of

love, now recognized as an urgent issue. This study seeks to investigate the effects of love's absence and raise awareness of its critical role in the survival and well-being of primates and other life forms.

Our goal is to develop a multidisciplinary framework that explores love as a spontaneous, dynamic process, challenging the notion that it is exclusively human.

While the term "love" is often reserved for humans, this study conceptualizes it as a process essential to maintaining equilibrium in living systems. As dynamic systems, living beings rely on such equilibrium for survival.

We will collect and compare behavioral data from monkeys raised with their mothers in natural habitats and orphaned monkeys reared in rescue centers and later released into the wild. This comparison will reveal the role of coregulation in early life stages and its crucial importance for development and survival. Additionally, we will examine how the absence of love affects individuals and their social groups.

A group of orphaned infant monkeys in rehabilitation centers will be exposed to recordings of heartbeats to promote coregulation. This method, proven effective in stress management, will allow us to compare behaviors between monkeys exposed to the recordings and those who are not.

We will also review psychological literature on coregulation, social buffering, love deprivation, and existing mitigation strategies in humans. A comparative analysis will identify parallels between human and primate experiences of love, offering insights applicable to both species.

Finally, we will construct a theoretical framework considering systems theory, the self-expansion model, the Kuramoto model, interactional synchrony, kin selection, and other evolutionary theories. This synthesis

aims to redefine love as a spontaneous and essential process within dynamic systems.

Summary of the results and conclusions. This study is expected to demonstrate the pivotal role of coregulation in adaptation, well-being, and survival among primates, establishing it as a key component of love. By fostering a novel, multidisciplinary perspective, we aim to reframe love as a dynamic, spontaneous, and indispensable element of survival.

The role of culture in creating sexual desire and sexual love in early humans,

by Alain Delannoy, an independent researcher from France

Research Background. The source of attraction for a sexual or romantic object of desire remains unestablished in the human species. The nature of the vector that operates from a desiring subject to an object of desire is unclear. Little is known about why humans experience emotions that they interpret as romantic or sexual attraction. However, the question of the origin of this attraction has been little explored. Some theories have used psychology to justify this impulse to sexual love: the Freudian desire to find one's mother or father, the Girardian mimetic desire according to which a being becomes desirable by the fact of being loved by another. But most theories remain naturalistic. They sidestep the problem by resorting to the rhetoric of instinct (Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis).

The aims of the study and its method. In most animal species, instinct directs a loving subject toward an object of sexual desire. Human beings differ from other animals at this point. Neuroscientist Serge Wunsch and sexologist Philippe Brenot reject the unlikely existence of a human sexual instinct (*Sexologies*, 48, 2004). Therefore, what is the process at

work in humanity that allows couples to form in the absence of sexual instinct? In order to answer this question, I have compiled data from all the disciplines touching on love and sexuality and tried to draw some conclusions.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Humans with sensory deficits have no problem feeling amorous or sexual desire. The five senses medium presents a less plausible hypothesis than Cupid's arrow to explain the triggering of desire. Those who do not feel the desire for romantic or sexual love are those who, like feral children, grew up without human society around them. This desire is psychologically constructed thanks to the social and cultural environment in which human beings evolve from childhood. The same is true of chimpanzees, for whom there is a capacity to desire to enter into a love life that must be awakened before the sleeper sensitive period of seven. In the human species, this awakening cannot take place, as in the chimpanzee, through the vision of the mother being mounted in front of the child by a male. Human beings are modest; their loves are intimate, and revelation has to take a different route. Initiation into sexual love makes use of the exceptional brain with which human beings develop complex languages. These languages allow one to verbally reveal the mechanism of coitus. But even before this revelation, in the very young child, these languages allow the desire to later feel sexual love to be triggered. Every human being must desire to love in order to be able to feel desire: it is said that no one can feel the desire to love if he or she has never heard of love before (La Rochefoucauld). The desire to experience love is introduced to everyone when fairy tales tell us the prince will come to his princess, they will marry, and they will be happy with their many children.

An Evolutionary Perspective on Sex Differences in Romantic Love

by *Adam Bode from Australian National University, Australia*

Research Background. Evolutionary selection pressures, most notably sexual selection, have created (and continue to sustain) many psychobehavioral differences between females and males. One such domain where psychobehavioral sex differences may be prominent is romantic love. The ways in which females and males may experience and express romantic love differently have been studied in psychology as well as in the arts down the ages; however, no studies have focused specifically on romantic love (i.e., passionate love) using validated measures of romantic love solely in people who are currently experiencing this form of love.

The aims of the study and its method. This study investigated sex differences in features and aspects of romantic love among 808 young adults experiencing romantic love. Univariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to measure sex differences in the number of times participants had fallen in love, when they fell in love relative to when they started their romantic relationship (love progression), intensity of romantic love, obsessive thinking about a loved one, and commitment.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Univariate analyses showed that men had fallen in love a greater number of times than women. Men had also fallen in love more quickly than women. Women had higher intensity of romantic love, higher commitment, and higher obsessive thinking about a loved one than men. These findings remained robust in multivariate analyses, controlling for several variables believed to influence romantic love, with the exception of commitment, which was no longer significant when other variables were controlled for. The

findings are considered with reference to the evolutionary theory of sexual selection. We suggest that the specific adaptive challenges faced by females and males in the evolutionary history of romantic love may contribute to sex differences in romantic love. The findings shed light on contemporary sex differences in romantic love, as well as the possible evolutionary history and evolutionary functions of romantic love.

How love concepts transformed in South African Indian Gen X women

by *Claude-Hélène Mayer from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa*

Research Background. Love is a concept that is experienced and expressed differently across sociocultural contexts. Its experience also changes over a lifetime, during life events such as marriage, relationships, and divorce, and in specific social and cultural contexts.

The aims of the study and its method. This study explores love and how it changes in the context of socioculturally influenced selected life events from the perspective of three Gen X South African Indian women. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study gives a voice to these women by presenting vignettes of their experiences of love, marriage, and divorce during their lives. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. The study employed qualitative quality criteria.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Findings show that love concepts transform over a lifetime, being strongly influenced by life events such as arranged and love marriages, new relationships, and divorce, but also by individual developments and transformations within

and beyond sociocultural boundaries. Conclusions are drawn, and recommendations for future research and practice are given.

Discourses of love, sacrifice, and selfishness in South Korea

by *Alex Nelson from the University of Indianapolis, the USA*

Research Background. Over recent years, sociological and anthropological research has observed the transformation of love and intimacy in romantic relationships. Researchers identify a pattern of increasing individualization and de-institutionalization that challenges hegemonic norms of gender and marriage (Giddens, 1992; Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Bauman, 2003; Yan, 2003; Davis & Friedman, 2014). This process of the individualization of intimacy is theorized to be a major contributing factor to marriage and fertility decline (Lesthaeghe 2014). Ethnographic studies on marriage delay also show that young men's unstable finances can cause them to put off or skip marriage because it's hard for them to live up to expectations of being a breadwinner (Inhorn & Smith-Hefner, 2021). South Korea has the lowest fertility rate in the world and a steadily declining marriage rate. In order to understand marriage and fertility decline, which poses significant economic challenges to nearly all highly industrialized countries, this study examines Koreans' conceptions of love and romantic relationships to better understand this process of individualization in the society with the world's lowest fertility rate.

The aims of the study and its method. This study aims to describe the pattern of individualization in Koreans' conceptions of love and romantic relationships and theorize the relationship between individualization of love and marriage and fertility decline in South Korea. In particular, this study examines gendered patterns in Koreans'

attitudes toward love as they relate to the material conditions of their romantic relationships.

This study is based on content analysis of interview transcripts (N=75) and field notes from ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2016 to 2018 in South Korea, as well as statistical analysis of survey data (N=250) collected during that same period on Koreans' conceptions of romantic love.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Korea survey responses differed significantly by gender on questions related to sacrifice and attitudes towards the importance of the material conditions of romantic relationships. These differences show new and changing gender norms and ideologies in Korea. Men struggle to meet ideals of breadwinner masculinity and worry about material requirements for love and courtship. At the same time, expectations of sacrifice from women in romantic relationships, which used to be the norm, are becoming more and more incompatible with women's life goals and sense of self, especially college-educated women. Korean women perceive romantic relationships as likely to demand they make sacrifices that are incongruent with their sense of self, such as maintaining a degree of financial independence and an identity based in academic achievement and work outside the home.

Love motifs in Taino and Pueblo art

by Ian Skoggard from Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, the USA

Research Background. Art has its many interpreters from many disciplines. Anthropologists interpret art based on its use, including ritual objects in religious ceremonies. Insofar as anthropologists have interpreted ritual and religion to have a social function, they have

interpreted the meaning of ritual artifacts in terms of social function. More recent interpretations see art as having a social agency and power to affect individual behavior to fit the social structure, or to invoke an ontology that connects self to the world, both natural and social. Some anthropologists recognize love as a deep feeling that can be extended outward by ritual means to substantiate the social group and validate social organization. I see ritual art as a means to invoke love and extend it outward socially. Such art comes in many forms. This presentation examines some of them.

The aims of the study and its method. This paper is a continuation of a prior study presented at the First Conference of Love Studies that employed a cross-cultural comparative approach to understanding commonalities and differences across cultures. In the earlier paper, I examine three artifacts from three cultures: the Turkana (Kenya) milk jug, the Aranda (Australia) bullroarer, and the Haida (Canada) raven rattle. Each artifact has what Canadian anthropologist Wilson Duff identifies as a vulvic-phallic form, which I argue is an invocation of the love act in particular and love in general. The aim of the study is to continue to search for similar artifacts across other cultures. In the present paper, I primarily examine Taino (Caribbean) stone sculpture and Pueblo (United States) pottery.

Summary of the results and conclusions. The Taino people lived in the Caribbean basin from 800 to 1550 AD. The triform Taino stone sculpture has a vulvic-phallic shape noted in my earlier study. The earliest Taino art objects were made from conch shells with their hollow interior and conic-shaped exterior. The later stone sculpture replicates the shape of the conch shell with its elongated top and concave base. The sculpture also includes incised motifs of interlocking bird heads, which anthropologists interpret as expressing a dualistic worldview that

includes gender. And, I would argue, it is an expression of sexual intercourse. This motif has origins in the Olmec culture (1600–350 BCE) of Mesoamerica. Ancestral and contemporary Pueblo pottery design also incorporates this motif. I conclude that looking through the lens of love, we can appreciate the power of art beyond its aesthetic dimension. In conclusion, we can learn a lot about art from love and about love from art.

You can see the abstracts from the sessions [Love in Popular Culture and Literary Explorations](#) and [Experiences and Expressions of Love](#) in other articles.

See other articles on related topics in the rubrics of [cultural evolution](#), [modern love studies](#), [social evolution](#).