

# The Diversity of Love Journal

## Experiences and Expressions of Love: Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Love Studies, 14-16 March 2025

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The conference sought to embrace diversity in love research across disciplines and cultures, emphasizing international collaboration and the integration of concepts from various love-related fields of study. When studying how people live and love in various societies, the participants underlined the importance of comprehending cultural contexts.

A [separate article in this journal](#) provides a summary of all thematic sessions and the range of presentations at the conference.

Other articles summarize the talks presented at the sessions on [Love in Popular Culture and Literary Explorations](#) and [Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Love](#).

Below are the summaries of the talks presented at the sessions on **Experiences and Expressions of Love**, chaired by *Sandra Langeslag from the University of Missouri—St. Louis, the USA*, and *Charles Hill from Whittier College, the USA*.

## **Abstracts of Presentations**

### **Comparing the subjective feelings and event-related potential responses of those who experience love and addiction**

by *Sandra Langeslag from the University of Missouri—St. Louis, the USA*

**Research Background.** Lovers seem addicted to their beloved. For example, just like drug users have an attentional bias for drug cues, people have increased attention for their beloved. No studies, however, have directly compared romantic love and addiction.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This study compared craving, attention, valence, and arousal for the beloved and for a vape. Sixteen volunteers (22-49 years, 10 men, 6 women) who were both in love and who vaped participated (data collection in progress). Participants completed questionnaires, viewed pictures of their beloved, vaping strangers, and neutral strangers while their event-related potential (ERP) responses were recorded, and completed valence and arousal ratings.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** Participants reported greater craving for their beloved than a vape,  $p = .002$ . In the ERP, there was an Early Posterior Negativity (EPN) for the beloved (vs. vaping and neutral strangers), both  $ps < .001$ , revealing that the beloved receives more early automatic attention than vape cues. The Late Positive Potential (LPP) amplitude was greater for the beloved than for vaping and neutral

strangers, both  $ps < .002$ , revealing that the beloved receives more motivated attention than vape cues. Participants felt more pleasant while viewing the beloved than vaping or neutral strangers, both  $ps < .001$ . Participants felt most aroused while viewing the beloved, intermediately aroused while viewing vaping strangers, and least aroused while viewing neutral strangers, all  $ps < .010$ . These results suggest that romantic love is even more intense in terms of craving, attention, valence, and arousal than addiction to vaping.

## **Why Do I Need You? Relations Between Emotional Dependence and Investment**

*by Daniela Zibenberg from Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

**Research Background.** The decision of a couple to stay together is influenced not only by relationship satisfaction or love but also significantly by investment. Thus, investment is a crucial factor in maintaining romantic relationships. According to investment theory, investing in a romantic relationship through tangible or intangible resources (e.g., money, children, time) increases dependence. Dependence can be understood as the extent to which an individual relies on a relationship to fulfill relevant needs. While some level of dependence is expected in any romantic relationship, emotional dependence is often regarded as a relational disorder characterized by a chronic pattern of unmet needs being delegated to a romantic partner for resolution.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This study aimed to investigate the relationship between investment and emotional dependence. A total of 1,015 Brazilian adults, with a mean age of 29.7 years ( $SD = 11.7$ ), participated in the study by completing an online questionnaire. The

questionnaire included sociodemographic questions (e.g., age, gender), a scale to assess relationship satisfaction, and additional questions about the relationship, such as perceived investment and relationship length. Data were analyzed using correlation techniques.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** The results revealed weak but significant negative correlations between emotional dependence and investment (i.e., perceived investment and relationship length). This suggests that higher perceived investment does not lead to greater emotional dependence, as one might theoretically expect if dependence and emotional dependence were synonymous. Instead, this finding supports the notion that dependence and emotional dependence are distinct constructs. These results align with limerence theory, which posits that lower perceived investment can heighten emotional dependence, as rejection and uncertainty increase feelings of dependence and rumination. Additionally, relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with investment and negatively correlated with emotional dependence. The limitations of the study include (a) its correlational design, which precludes causal interpretations, and (b) the use of specific questions to measure investment rather than an instrument with previous robust psychometric properties. Nonetheless, this study provides empirical data on investment and emotional dependence within the Brazilian context, contributing to the differentiation of dependence from emotional dependence in romantic relationships.

## **Individual variations in what is considered cheating in romantic love relationships**

*by Charles Hill from Whittier College, the USA*

**Research Background.** Discussions of what is considered cheating in romantic love relationships are generally worded as if what is considered cheating is the same for everyone.

**The aims of the study and its method.** To explore variations in what is considered cheating, new analyses were conducted using data from a Multiple Identities Questionnaire completed by 2787 college students (64% women) collected over 25 years at an ethnically diverse small college in Southern California. The questionnaire asked, “To what extent do you consider each of the following activities as being unfaithful for a person in a committed relationship to do in regard to someone else of the partner’s gender (alone not in a group)?” Eight activities were listed, which were rated from 0=NOT AT ALL to 8=COMPLETELY.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** As expected, the mean ratings varied from least unfaithful to most unfaithful in the same order as they were listed in the questionnaire: studying together, discussing personal issues, eating dinner at a restaurant, going to a movie at a theater, feeling affection, fantasizing about sex, flirting, and engaging in sexual activities. But women rated all of the last six to be more unfaithful than did the men, while men rated studying together more unfaithful than did the women, and there was no gender difference for discussing personal issues. Both women and men with more traditional gender role attitudes rated the first four items as more unfaithful. Latina women and Latino men rated the items 4-7 more unfaithful, as did Catholic men. Both women and men rated more items as unfaithful if they had life goals of marriage, children, and time with family. And both women and men who were currently more in love with a partner felt that all but the first three items were more unfaithful. Men who rated themselves more heterosexual rated the last five items as more

unfaithful, while men who rated themselves less heterosexual rated those items as less unfaithful. In conclusion, there are variations in the extent to which certain activities are considered cheating in romantic love relationships, depending on gender and other factors.

## **Validating the Felt Love Scale (FLS) as a Measure of Love as a General Feeling**

*by Yuan Zhang, Mengya Xia, and Caleb Coates from Arizona State University, the USA*

**Research Background.** The experience of feeling loved is critical for individual well-being (Martela, 2024; Oravecz et al., 2020), but existing measures of love as a feeling in interpersonal contexts are limited. A recently developed three-component framework of felt love identified three core components of felt love in interpersonal processes: positive responsiveness to needs (PR), authentic connection (AC), and a sense of stability (SS) (Xia et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study aimed to focus on the three core components identified within this framework to validate the felt love scale (FLS) as a measurement tool for assessing a general sense of being loved. Such a measurement tool is important because it captures a broader sense of emotional security and well-being derived from the perception of love in one's general social environment beyond the feeling from each specific individual, which is a more robust indicator of individual well-being and can provide deeper insights into how love shapes overall well-being beyond specific relational contexts (Martela, 2024).

**The aims of the study and its method.** The current study used two different samples (college sample: N = 314 [Sample 1]; community sample: N = 444 [Sample 2]) to test the structural validity of the Felt

Love Scale for General Feeling (FLS-G) on the 14 items developed to assess each of the three core components of felt love.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** Results indicated that FLS-G had excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .96$  for both samples). Good structural validity was also observed in both Sample 1 ( $\chi^2 [74] = 477.41, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.91, RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.13 [0.12-0.14], SRMR = 0.043) and Sample 2 ( $\chi^2 [74] = 264.20, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.97, RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.08 [0.07-0.09], SRMR = 0.031). Subscale (PR, AC, SS) reliabilities ranged between .84 and .91 for Sample 1 and between .88 and .95 for Sample 2, with subscale intercorrelations ranging from .82 to .91 (Sample 1) and .76 to .93 (Sample 2).

In both samples, FLS-G's convergent validity was evaluated through correlations with established measures of love or similar constructs, such as the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and the Adult Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Scale (AIAS; Lack & Luk, 2019). Results revealed moderate to high correlations (Sample 1:  $r = .32$  to  $.49$ ; Sample 2:  $r = .31$  to  $.41$ ). PLS-G's criterion validity was assessed by examining its correlation with both positive well-being (e.g., the Flourishing Scale; Diener et al., 2010) and negative well-being (e.g., Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale; Muris et al., 2002). Results indicated significant correlations of small to large magnitudes in both samples (Sample 1:  $r = .13$  to  $.59$  for positive indicators,  $r = -.57$  to  $-.15$  for negative indicators; Sample 2:  $r = .13$  to  $.67$  for positive indicators,  $r = -.14$  to  $-.73$  for negative indicators).

In conclusion, this study evaluated the psychometrics of the 14-item Felt Love Scale on General Feeling (FLS-G) and demonstrated its strong structural, convergent, and criterion validity, as well as excellent internal consistency across both samples.

# **A new approach to studying love in daily life through a cultural perspective, using the Cultural Consensus Theory**

*by Saida Heshmati from Claremont Graduate University, the USA*

**Research Background.** Love is a complex positive emotion that remains elusive to define due to the influence of context and culture. This study adopts the view that in order to understand love from a culturally informed perspective, we need to tap into the collective consciousness of a culture, seeking to pinpoint the everyday contexts that most people in a culture agree as loving. Cultural Consensus Theory (CCT; Romney et al., 1986; Romney & Batchelder, 1999; Weller, 2007) offers a powerful inductive framework for identifying collective beliefs within a specific cultural or knowledge domain. Originating in anthropology and ethnography, CCT enables researchers to systematically identify and quantify cultural consensus regarding concepts that lack an objective “truth,” such as love. Within CCT, culture is conceptualized as any group with shared knowledge or beliefs, while consensus reflects the degree of agreement on specific ideas or experiences (Batchelder & Anders, 2012; Romney et al., 1986). Cultural and individual variability shape the daily emotional experiences that evoke feelings of love. For example, some scenarios may universally elicit feelings of love (e.g., receiving unexpected kindness), while others may carry divergent meanings depending on cultural context (e.g., daily check-ins via text being perceived as caring versus controlling). These experiences contribute to the development of individual and shared schemas regarding love—what it feels like, when it arises, and who evokes it. A CCT approach is appropriate for researchers intending to study a particular culture or knowledge domain



without prior knowledge or hypotheses, particularly if the cultural beliefs or concepts have no objective truth—such as love.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This presentation provides an overview of the novel Cultural Consensus Theory approach to understanding cultural beliefs about what it means to feel loved in everyday life. We collected data using the Felt Love Questionnaire, containing 60 scenarios that have the potential to make people feel loved in their daily lives, from 500 participants who were representative of the US population. We conducted Bayesian psychometric modeling to derive a consensus on love in the US population. We then conducted qualitative data collection in Spain (N=100) to assess and examine people's thoughts and beliefs around these 60 scenarios in Spain.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** This presentation provides an introductory overview of the CCT approach to understanding shared beliefs about the concept of love as well as the results of cross-cultural investigations. We presented everyday scenarios of love that the US participants agree are “loving,” as well as those scenarios that they agree are “not loving.” For example, scenarios such as “their pet greeting them when they come home” or “when someone is there for them in difficult times” are some of the scenarios that the US participants agreed upon as “loving.” We also report on the themes that were extracted from our interviews and focus group in Spain around loving and non-loving scenarios. In our initial screening, we have found that spending time with family and friends is a core experience of love for people in Spain. We conclude that the CCT approach can serve as an appropriate inductive-based inquiry method to uncover cross-cultural differences and universal beliefs about what love feels like in daily life.

# Maintaining sexual intimacy while living apart together transnationally

by *Rashmi Singla from Roskilde University, Denmark*

**Research Background.** This paper explores maintaining the sexual relationship of couples who live apart across nations yet are intimately attached. Living under the same roof and sharing geographical proximity is often considered a defining feature of intimate couples; however, it is challenged by increased globalization and an increasing number of couples living apart together (LAT) in the past decades. This phenomenon, especially sexual aspects, has received limited academic attention. In this study, I focused on the phenomenon of living apart together transnationally (LATT).

**The aims of the study and its method.** The empirical study forming the basis of this paper had an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing primarily from social psychology with a decolonizing approach. Broad social contexts, including immigration policies and the normative ‘gender order,’ form a background. Maintaining intimacy through distance was explored through legal and social matters, followed by emotional aspects, concepts of digital technology, physical intimacy, and spirituality. The participants were current/former LATT couples residing in two countries for at least one year, primarily because of their jobs/education and having elements of choice in living apart. Besides Denmark, the participants lived in ten countries.

Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative research approach. I conducted in-depth, face-to-face or online interviews with 20 couples, of which 17 were heterosexual and three were in same-sex relationships. The narratives were subjected to interpretive thematic analysis.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** Most couples were able to maintain this unconventional form of intimate relationships across nations. Digital technology contributes to maintaining emotional intimacy for many and physical for some. One way is to cherish the memories of sexual togetherness when they were apart, which is reflected in online sexual activities (OSA) and telephone sex. OSA (online sexual activities), specifically sexting associated with ‘partnered—arousal activities,’ shows various forms, though some couples use it only in the first phase of their love relationship. However, a number of participants are hesitant about online sexual activity, focusing on the negative aspects, such as a deep mistrust of social media, considering it a vehicle of power. Missing the touch of the partner was yet another negative aspect of online sexual activity, partly countered by haptics. Consensual non-monogamous CNM, an umbrella term involving ‘open sexual relations with other persons’/’don’t ‘ask, don’t tell’ along with continued emotional exclusivity, is one of the ways to avoid jealousy as well as fulfilling a sexual need among a couple who participated in the study. Overall, 4-5% of people in a relationship are currently part of a CNM relationship. The final finding is that love and intimacy go beyond physical, sexual gratification, and the use of digital technology, and include trust, commitment, understanding, trust, shared knowledge, spirituality, and beyond.

## **Disentangling Gratitude and Love: A Network Analysis into Their Unique Links to Well-being and Cultural Differences**

*by Irene Teulings from the University of Oslo, Norway*

**Research Background.** Both gratitude and love are central to people’s well-being. Researchers find that people elicit, appraise, and act upon

gratitude and love in similar ways, demonstrating a high correlation between them. While these studies highlight the conceptual and empirical similarities between both emotions, recent theorizing emphasizes the value of considering differentiations between different positive emotions. To date, few studies have examined how gratitude and love are unique in terms of how they are experienced and the psychological benefits of these experiences. By shedding light on the unique experiences of gratitude and love and their contributions to well-being, our research could potentially inform well-being interventions and public health policies. Gratitude interventions seem effective, but scholars point out the need to show why and compared to what. Recent work suggests people's well-being might be more strongly connected to experiences of love than gratitude, raising the question of whether interventions focused on love experiences might be more fruitful. Other research suggests that these emotions may affect different parts of well-being. For example, love experiences are strongly linked to eudaimonic well-being outcomes (such as meaning, purpose, and self-acceptance) and negative well-being outcomes (such as stress and depressive symptoms). Gratitude, on the other hand, is mostly linked to hedonic well-being outcomes (such as life satisfaction and positive affect).

**The aims of the study and its method.** Here, we studied whether gratitude and love uniquely relate to specific well-being aspects. We used cross-sectional data (N=24,000; 63 countries) and a network approach to look at how gratitude and love are connected to hedonic well-being (such as life satisfaction), eudaimonic well-being (such as having a meaning and purpose in life and accepting yourself), ill-being (such as a score that includes stress, tiredness, and depression), and mental health.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** Results suggested that gratitude was most closely tied to hedonic aspects of well-being (compared to eudaimonic aspects, ill-being, and mental health), while love was strongly linked to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (compared to ill-being and mental health). Moreover, we found that all well-being aspects, except hedonic well-being, were more strongly associated with love than with gratitude. Our analyses also revealed cultural differences: We found that collectivism moderated the link between love and mental health, suggesting that the positive association between love and mental health was stronger for more collectivistic countries. These results shed light on the unique features of gratitude and love and thereby contribute to the field's broader effort of disentangling positive emotions and highlighting the importance of cultural differences. Moreover, by employing network modeling, our study provides a novel methodological approach to examining the nuanced relationships between positive emotions and various well-being dimensions. In light of the rising popularity of gratitude interventions, our findings should also urge scholars and practitioners to target other emotions, like love, to enhance individuals' well-being.

## **Love Doesn't Run Out: Children and Adults Do Not View Love as Zero-Sum**

*by Fan Yang from The University of Chicago, the USA*

**Research Background.** Extensive research shows that people often perceive abstract social issues—such as success and status—as zero-sum, particularly in contexts involving antagonistic relationships or competition. While zero-sum thinking may aid in competition, it also leads to negative outcomes, such as intergroup prejudice (Burleigh et al., 2017), reduced prosocial behavior (Jiang et al., 2020), missed

opportunities for cooperation (Thompson, 1991), and lower life satisfaction (Różycka-Tran et al., 2021). To address these challenges, it is essential to understand the underlying mechanisms: Is it shaped by specific social contexts and identities, or does it arise from a more fundamental belief that social resources are inherently limited?

**The aims of the study and its method.** The study aims to explore the nature and origins of zero-sum beliefs about love and social resources in general. Our research addresses three main questions: (1) Do people perceive love and social resources in general as inherently zero-sum, and how do these perceptions compare to material resources? (2) Is (non)zero-sum thinking about social resources rooted in childhood? (3) Does the renewability of resources influence zero-sum beliefs about both social and material resources? We investigated these questions in two preregistered studies, presenting children and adults with scenarios involving love and other social and material resources in multi-party exchanges, independent of any competitive cues. In particular, we told them stories such as “This is Anne, and this is her mom. Anne has love from her mom, which means her mom really cares about her. This child is adopted into Anne’s family and also has her mom’s love. Do you think Anne now has less love from her mom, or the same amount of love as before?” (Study 1). We also manipulated beliefs about the renewability of love (e.g., her mom has a big heart, so if another child also needs love right now, she is able to create more love all by herself). To measure zero-sum beliefs, participants were asked whether one party’s gain of love resulted in another’s loss.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** In two preregistered studies, we found that children aged 4-9 and adults perceived love and trust as non-zero-sum and significantly less so compared to material resources (Study 1). Furthermore, zero-sum thinking was influenced by

perceptions of resource renewability rather than the intrinsic nature of the resources: stronger beliefs in the renewability of love predicted lower levels of zero-sum thinking ( $B = -3.62, p < .001$ ), and framing both social and material resources as renewable causally reduced these beliefs (Study 2). These findings provide key insights into the origins of zero-sum thinking and underscore resource renewability as a crucial factor in mitigating zero-sum beliefs, with important implications for fostering cooperation and reducing competition.

## **Dating after trauma from childhood abuse: How survivors navigate romantic relationships**

*by Gabriele Rosato from Pontifical Gregorian University, Italy*

**Research Background.** Childhood trauma, particularly sexual abuse, has far-reaching consequences on survivors' emotional and relational lives, shaping their ability to engage with intimacy, trust, and self-worth. These effects often manifest in adulthood, making dating and romantic relationships uniquely challenging. Survivors frequently experience heightened fear, shame, guilt, and difficulty trusting others, which complicate their pursuit of healthy relationships. At the same time, online dating platforms introduced new opportunities for survivors to explore connections within controlled environments, enabling them to set boundaries and reclaim agency over their emotional and physical experiences.

Despite the growing relevance of online dating in contemporary romantic practices, little research has examined how survivors of childhood abuse navigate these platforms or approach dating in general. This study addresses this gap by exploring how early trauma shapes survivors' perceptions of romantic spaces and their experiences in both physical and digital dating contexts.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This study aims to:

1. Examine how adult survivors of childhood abuse navigate dating and physical attraction that could potentially lead to long-term intimate relationships;
2. Explore how trauma shapes survivors' interactions with potential partners, focusing on both in-person and online dating contexts.
3. Highlight strategies survivors use to establish trust, set boundaries, and reclaim agency in romantic spaces.

The research employs an ethnographic approach, combining qualitative interviews with visual ethnography to capture the lived experiences of survivors. A key methodological innovation is the use of 'verbal maps' as a tool for autoethnographic exploration, enabling participants to describe and map their experiences in both physical and virtual dating spaces.

The mixed-methods design integrates survivors' narratives with visual and spatial data, offering a holistic understanding of their romantic journeys. Visual ethnography, including sketch maps and participant-generated visuals, offers additional depth by exploring how survivors conceptualize and interact with dating spaces. **Summary of the results and conclusions.** The findings reveal the profound impact of trauma on survivors' approaches to dating, with several recurring themes:

1. Survivors often face difficulty trusting others but use dating as a space to negotiate boundaries and re-establish autonomy.
2. Participants highlighted the dual role of dating apps as both a source of anxiety and a tool for empowerment.
3. Survivors use dating as an opportunity to reclaim control over their bodies and identities.
4. Both physical and digital dating spaces are deeply influenced by survivors' trauma histories.

This study contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of the



intersection between trauma, love, and intimacy. It emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed approaches in both digital and physical dating environments, advocating for the design of platforms and spaces that prioritize safety, inclusivity, and emotional well-being for survivors. By centering the voices of survivors, this research offers valuable insights for love studies and broader discussions on the role of space and technology in fostering meaningful human connections.

## **Love is in the airwaves: Are romantic and sexual desires signaled via different vocal attractiveness strategies?**

*by Míša Hejná from Aarhus University, Denmark*

**Research Background.** Vocal attractiveness research is concerned with which voices we perceive as attractive and how we alter our voices to signal that we feel attracted or that we want to attract. This study focuses on sexual and romantic types of vocal attractiveness. Sexual and romantic vocal attractiveness plays an important role in communication across cultures. Yet, it has been predominantly studied on white, cis-gendered, heterosexual native speakers of English in their twenties with a focus on perceived attractiveness (i.e., not on how we alter our speech in order to signal attraction and desire). More importantly, because most of the work on romantic and sexual vocal attractiveness has been done in the areas of evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology, the lens through which vocal attractiveness has been typically approached is that of sexual selection theory. As a result, it has been primarily sexual attractiveness that has been represented in the relevant research, with little space dedicated to love (and affection more generally) and the intricate overlaps and intersectionalities between different types of love and desire.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This study aims to explore whether different vocal cues are used to communicate romantic as opposed to sexual desire(s).

Five films were analyzed: *Friends with Benefits* (2011), *No Strings Attached* (2011), and *Fifty Shades of Gray* (2015-2018). The films were chosen because of (1) their popularity, (2) their focus on different aspects of desire, and (3) the main characters' desires develop and change as the narratives unfold. In all cases analyzed, romantic love variably overlaps with sexual desire. However, the films also offer instances where sexual desire is communicated in the absence of romantic love.

I analyzed the films in terms of the types of love and desire represented as the plots unfold. The linguistic analysis centered on vocal variation. I conducted an auditory analysis on all film material, with a focus on specific vocal features established as important in vocal attractiveness research as well as those that research on the vocal of emotions would predict to be important when communicating non-sexual aspects of desire. Then, the most relevant scenes were selected and subject to acoustic analyses as well.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** The results suggest that vocal cues can differentiate between romantic love and sexual desire. The same vocal cues can communicate both types of desire. However, the magnitude of the difference from the speakers' 'neutral' vocal settings is larger when a person communicates sexual desire. In particular, both male and female speakers lower their pitch and pitch dynamism and increase their breathiness (vocal 'softness'). Just like some types of love may overlap with different aspects of sexual intimacy in different ways, vocal cues too can be utilized in intricate ways to communicate such overlaps.

This study primarily contributes to the area of VA rather than that of love studies directly. However, not being a love studies scholar myself, I would love to attend the conference to discover if and how this type of research can be useful to love studies scholars. The study also aims to bridge the gaps between traditional sociolinguistics and love studies.

## **Parasocial Sex and Romance: The Promotion Strategies of Japanese Audio Erotica Streamers and Their Listener Gratifications**

by *Lucy Glasspool from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Japan*

**Research Background.** The use of online media and communication tools to address relationship needs, including romantic and sexual ones, has become a routine part of life for many people in Japan. The impact of digital encounters on dating and marriage has been explored globally in scholarly and journalistic writing, and studies of how these encounters influence a more general “wellness” have also emerged, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when opportunities for physical connection were limited. One digitally mediated relationship type that has come under scrutiny is the ‘parasocial’ relationship, or connection with a media persona. Though these are often critiqued in the press as being inauthentic and one-sided, an increasing number of people in Japan seek them out, often through the practice of oshikatsu, fannish support for a celebrity or character. Not all parasocial relationships have sexual or romantic components. However, through the relatively new genre of streaming audio erotica, users address various needs, including sexual and emotional needs. Audio erotica has not been extensively explored in academia, especially in its streaming form, but its Japanese development situates it within wider discourses of

digitally mediated love and sex, the commercialization of romance in a 'loneliness epidemic,' and the relationships of fans with media personas.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This study aims to elucidate the strategies used by Japanese erotic audio streamers on the apps YouTube and Twitcast to elicit contributions of energy, time, and money from their listeners, as well as to explore the gratifications those listeners derive from engaging with this content. The main method used is a thematic analysis of several videos by popular streamers: their channel content, audio narratives, characters (including voices and visual representations), their focus on the technology of sound, and interaction with listeners. Thematic analysis is further used to ascertain areas of gratification articulated by listeners in synchronous and asynchronous comments on the videos.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** Results indicate that streamers use a number of strategies to gain followers and financial contributions: these include the utilization of anime-style visuals and music, the provision of a variety of content, not only erotic and romantic, and some reciprocal engagement with listeners. Listeners are aware of the fantasy nature of the streams but profess a sense of 'authentic' physical and/or emotional connection, relaxation, and satisfaction. Audio erotica could therefore be considered part of an increasingly commercialized 'wellness culture,' in this case selling sex and romance as a tool for broader well-being.

# **Kyoto School Philosophy on the Nature of Love: Being Conscious ‘With’ You, ‘Of’ You, and ‘Through the Eyes of’ You**

*by Takanobu Watabe from University of Oxford, UK, and Kyoto University, Japan*

**Research Background.** The philosophy of love proposes four answers to the question, “What is love?” Emotion theories identify love with certain kinds of mental attitudes towards the beloved one, involving evaluation and motivation. Valuing theory identifies love with the act of valuing, which is either to acknowledge the value of the beloved or to project a value onto the beloved. Robust concern theory identifies love with certain kinds of desires, such as the desire to stay with the beloved or the desire to contribute to the interest of the beloved. Union theory identifies love with the formation of “we,” such as the fusion of identity or benefits between agents.

Although these conceptual analyses are useful for understanding love, most of the research has been done in English or Western culture and has ignored intuitions from other cultures or languages.

**The aims of the study and its method.** This presentation broadens the philosophical conception of love by shedding light on the inquiries into love in Kyoto School philosophy, a school of thought that emerged in 20th-century Japan under the influence of both Western philosophy and Eastern Asian religions, especially Zen Buddhism.

This presentation examines what Kyoto School philosophers explicitly or implicitly write about love. I especially spotlight the works of Kitaro Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto School, and two Zen Buddhist philosophers, Shin’ichi Hisamatsu and Keiji Nishitani. From the

literature, I form two theories of love, elaborate on the relationship between the two theories, and locate them in the philosophy of love.

**Summary of the results and conclusions.** The first theory states that (1) to love you (the beloved) is to share the same content of conscious experience “with” you, without the sense of self (or “I”). For example, Alice loves Bob if she looks at the moon with him without thinking of herself (like “I am looking at the moon” or “I want to stay with Bob”). The second theory states that (2) to love you is to be fully conscious “of” you, without the sense of self (“I”) and any attitude (including emotion, valuing, and desire). For example, Ceola loves Daniel if she listens to his talk without any emotions and thoughts as well as thinking of herself. It is highlighted that our daily distinction between subject and object disappears in both kinds of loving experience.

Then, I demonstrate that these two kinds of love are, in fact, the two dimensions of one form of love. This is because (1) being conscious “with” you and (2) being conscious “of” you have the same corollary of (3) being conscious “through the eyes of” you, which means the state of affairs that I look at things in the way you look at them. Lastly, this account of love will be categorized as a new variant of union theory in the philosophy of love.

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See other articles on related topics in the rubrics of [how to love](#), [love theories](#), [modern love studies](#), [parasocial love](#), [sexual attractiveness](#).