The Diversity of Love Journal

ISSN: 3070-3859

The Agape Style of Love: Understanding the Altruistic Path to Devotion

Article published on **July 24, 2026** by **Victor Karandashev**
Retrieved from: https://love-diversity.org/what-is-the-agape-love-style/

While modern discourse of love and relationship often centers on chemistry (*Eros*) or compatibility (*Pragma*), long-term relational stability frequently hinges on a far deeper psychological framework: *altruistic devotion*. In this article, I explore the multi-layered architecture of unconditional care in contemporary partnerships.

By integrating John Alan Lee's foundational color wheel model with recent cross-cultural empirical research—including a comprehensive review of the topic by Victor Karandashev (2019, 2022)—this article examines how the combination of Eros (passionate devotion) and

Storge (companionate loyalty) manifests across diverse cultures and demographics

Conceptual Foundations and Classification of the Lee's Love Styles

In the 1980s, the theory of six love styles became widely known among scholars of love. Numerous researchers investigated the love styles that Canadian sociologist John Alan Lee proposed and investigated in the 1970s (Lee, 1973, 1976). His theory and research substantially contributed to this field of study (Karandashev, 2022).

John Lee theoretically conceptualized and empirically identified six love styles. The original author's descriptions of the six love styles he proposed have been condensed and simplified over the years of love research and publication. These abbreviated characteristics have altered Lee's original meanings of the love styles.

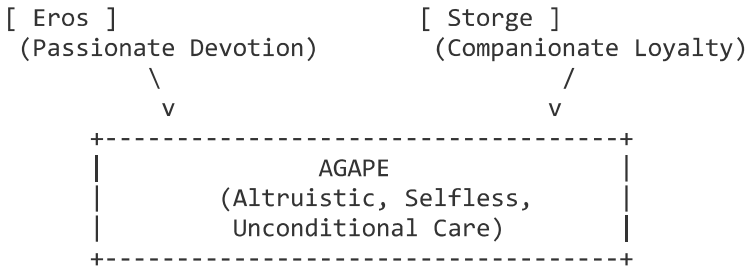
In John Lee's framework , love styles are categorized into primary and secondary colors:

- **Primary Styles**: *Eros* (passionate), *Storge* (friendship-based), and *Ludus* (game-playing).
- **Secondary Styles**: *Pragma* (Ludus + Storge), *Mania* (Eros + Ludus), and *Agape* (Eros + Storge).

I have provided a detailed description of each of these love styles in this and other articles, such as the **Pragma**, **Eros**, **Ludus**, **Storge**, and **Mania** love styles. Here are some excerpts from my books in which I elaborate on the *Agape love style*.

The Architecture of Agape Love Style: Conceptual Roots and Classification

The agape love style is a secondary type in John Alan Lee's color wheel theory of love. While *Eros* contributes deep emotional warmth and commitment, *Storge* supplies patience, endurance, and stable affection. The resulting combination, *Agape*, transcends self-interest, viewing love as a duty of care and an act of unconditional giving.



Lee's Theoretical Description of the Agape Love Style

> *"Individuals with the* Agape *love style feel it is their duty to love another with no expectation of reciprocity. Reasons, rather than emotions, guide their feelings and actions. They are caring, altruistic, and gentle."*
>
> (EXCERPT FROM KARANDASHEV, 2022, P. 78).

This Is What the Agape Love Style Looks Like Based on the Lee's Method

Using the **"love story card sort"** method, in-depth interviews with 120 people yielded approximately 100,000 data points. The factor analysis discovered 32 distinct factors that distinguished the six love styles. Lee used this analysis to portray the major features of the *Agape love style*:

> *"Participants with an* agape style *feel love as a sense of duty. Their emotional will and commitment, rather than attraction and feelings, govern their love. Lovers with*

> *the Agape style are generally more emotionally mature than individuals with other styles. In its best form, this love style is an ideal of selflessness in affiliative connections. It is an ideal aspiration to do good to another person. The lovers of* Agape style *believe that anyone is worthy of love. They love not because of the appearance, qualities, or merits of the other person, but because they are due their love for that person. To be loved, a person should not earn or deserve it. Love is the gift of a lover to a loved one. This love is the ability of a loving person to love. "*
>
> (EXCERPT FROM KARANDASHEV, 2022, 2022, P. 81).

Core Traits and Psychological Dynamics of Agape Love Style

1. Selflessness and Altruistic Care

The defining hallmark of an Agapic lover is the voluntary prioritization of their partner's needs and happiness over their own. They view caregiving not as a transaction requiring reciprocity, but as an innate responsibility.

- **Non-Reciprocal Expectation**: Agapic lovers give freely without keeping tally of rewards or expecting equal returns.
- **Sacrificial Tendencies**: They are willing to endure personal discomfort or sacrifice individual preferences if it promotes the partner's well-being or fulfillment.

2. Unconditional Acceptance and Empathy

Agapic love is guided more by deliberate choice and moral commitment than by fluctuating emotions or romantic idealization.

- **High Empathy**: Partners exhibit deep perspective-taking and emotional responsiveness.
- **Forgiveness and Patience**: Conflicts or partner mistakes are met with patience, understanding, and grace rather than resentment or punitive withdrawal.

3. Freedom and Non-Possessiveness
Despite high commitment, Agapic lovers display low possessiveness. Because their primary motivation is the partner's ultimate good, an Agapic individual is even willing to release the relationship if they believe the partner would be genuinely happier elsewhere.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives and Empirical Research on Agape Love Style

The comprehensive review and synthesis of empirical research across diverse cultural groups details the prevalence, social perception, and gender/relational nuances of the *Agape* love style (Karandashev, 2019):

1. Cultural Prevalence and Collectivist Alignment

- **Collectivist Dynamics**: Cross-cultural research highlights that while *Agape* is found globally, its endorsement is significantly stronger in collectivist and interdependent cultures (e.g., East Asian and Latin American populations) compared to individualist Western cultures. In collectivist settings, self-sacrifice, duty to others, and prioritizing social harmony align naturally with cultural norms, making Agapic attitudes a socially normative expression of devotion.

- **Gift-Giving and Benevolence**: Across many non-Western traditions, Agapic care is deeply tied to cultural practices of practical benevolence, sacrificial duty, and relational obligation rather than purely individual emotional feeling.

2. Gender and Sociodemographic Variations

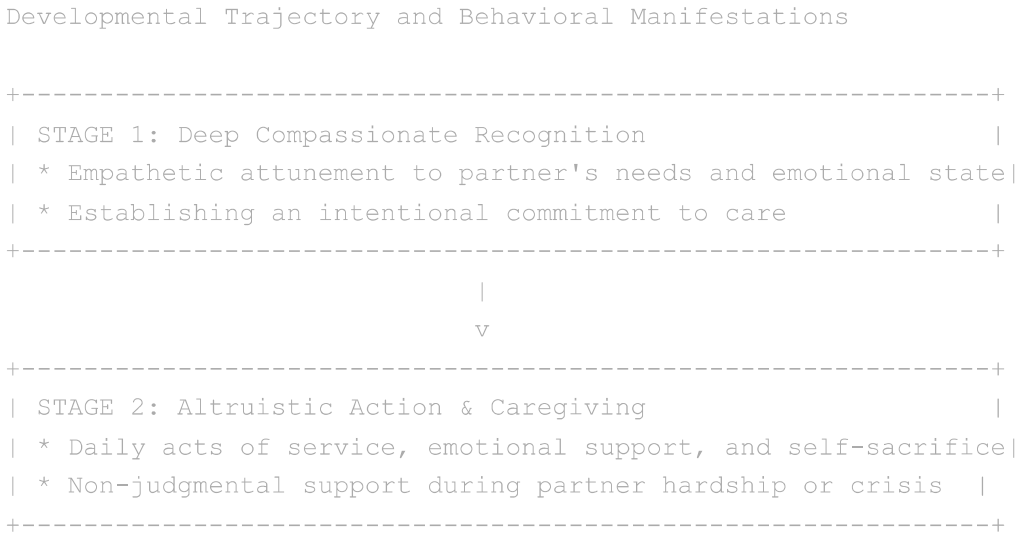
- **Gender Neutrality in Endorsement**: Empirical cross-cultural studies reviewed show that men and women score surprisingly similarly on Agapic measures, challenging stereotypes that altruistic love is exclusively feminine.
- **Age and Maturity Correlation**: Cross-cultural data consistently indicate that Agapic love tends to increase with age and relationship duration. As individuals mature and navigate long-term partnerships, the motivation to care for a partner unconditionally often supersedes initial passionate surges (*Eros*) or strategic play (*Ludus*).

3. Relationship Satisfaction and Perceived Idealism

- **High Partner Satisfaction**: Cross-cultural studies regularly link higher levels of Agapic love to elevated relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment in both partners. Receiving Agapic care acts as a strong protective buffer against relationship dissolution across varying cultural contexts.
- **Rarity of "Pure" Agape**: It is worth to note that despite its high social desirability across cultures, "pure" or absolute Agapic selflessness remains relatively rare as a primary, persistent romantic style. Across almost all studied populations, individuals usually balance Agapic motivations with needs for equity, companionate trust (*Storge*), and mutual affection.

Thus, we can see that by incorporating cross-cultural insights, Agape is best understood not merely as an isolated psychological disposition, but as a culturally modulated orientation. While individualist contexts often view Agapic sacrifice as an extraordinary personal virtue, collectivist frameworks frequently embed Agapic principles into standard relational duty, caregiving, and enduring commitment.

Developmental Trajectory and Behavioral Manifestations



- **Acts of Service**: Agape expresses itself through consistent, practical, and emotional support—ranging from caregiving during illness to fostering the partner's personal goals.
- **Emotional Stability**: Unlike *Mania* (obsessive and anxious) or *Eros* (intensely volatile), Agape provides a calm, steady emotional anchor in relationships.

Strengths, Risks, and Interpersonal Balance

Relational Strengths

- **High Trust and Security**: Partners of Agapic lovers often feel exceptionally valued, safe, and accepted.

- **Resilience in Crisis**: Relationships with Agapic components weather hardship, illness, and aging far better than those dependent purely on physical attraction or short-term rewards.

Potential Vulnerabilities

- **Risk of Exploitation**: Because Agapic lovers give unconditionally, they may become vulnerable to self-serving or abusive partners who take advantage of their selflessness.
- **Burnout and Self-Neglect**: Healthy Agape requires self-care; if an individual completely ignores their own physical or emotional needs, it can lead to emotional depletion.
- **Rarity in Pure Form**: Psychological studies indicate that pure, unadulterated Agape is rare in adult romantic relationships, as most long-term partnerships naturally require a degree of equity and reciprocal support to remain viable over decades.

The Agape Love Style is a Love Type rather than a Variable

This illustrative portrayal demonstrates that the *Agape love style* is a complex combination of attitudes and traits that men and women bring to relationships. These features make this love style stand out from other types of love. They represent people's core beliefs and attitudes regarding love, as well as their emotional experiences and expressions, actions, and relationships. The findings from the interviews show the abundantly distinctive characteristics of men and women with this love style. The way these traits are tied to one another demonstrates the typological structure of the Agape style. This structure evidently shows

that the Agape love style is not a variable, how it is measured with the **Love Attitude Scale** (Hendrick & Henrick, 1986, 1998), but rather a type of love.

Lee conceptualized, theoretically and empirically, six love styles. Through years of research and multiple publications, the original author's descriptions of the six love styles he proposed have been condensed and simplified. I believe that these shortened characteristics altered Lee's original interpretations of the love styles.

Conclusion

The *Agape* love style represents a mature, transcendent form of relational commitment defined by unconditional care and selfless altruism. By merging the passionate warmth of *Eros* with the enduring stability of *Storge*, Agapic lovers create relationships anchored in empathy, forgiveness, and moral commitment. While balance is required to ensure self-care and protect against unfair dynamics, Agape remains one of the most profound expressions of human connection.

References

- **Hendrick, C., & Hendrick, S. S.** (1986). A theory and method of love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(2), 392–402. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.50.2.392
- **Hendrick, C., Hendrick, S. S., & Dicke, A.** (1998). The Love Attitudes Scale: Short form. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(2), 147–159.
- **Karandashev, V.** (2019). *Cross-cultural perspectives on the experience and expression of love*. Springer Nature.

- **Karandashev, V.** (2022). *Cultural typologies of love*. Springer Nature
- **Lee, J. A.** (1973). *The colors of love: An exploration of the ways of loving*. New Press.
- **Lee, J. A.** (1977). A typology of styles of loving. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 3(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/014616727700300204

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Karandashev, V. (2026, July 24). The agape style of love: Understanding the altruistic path to devotion. *The Diversity of Love Journal*. https://love-diversity.org/what-is-the-agape-love-style/

See other articles on related topics in the rubrics of **how to love**, **love measures**, **love theories**, **What is it?**.