



Research Articles

Love, Relationships and Couple Happiness: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Among Spanish Couples and Moroccan Couples in Southern Spain

Encarnación Soriano-Ayala*¹, Verónica C. Cala¹, Manuel Soriano Ferrer²,
Herenia García-Serrán³

[1] Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Almeria, Almeria, Spain. [2] Faculty of Education, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain.
[3] The Andalusian Health Service, Granada, Spain.

Abstract

Love and relationships are sociocultural constructions that, in recent times, have experienced great changes in terms of type of relationship, type of love and happiness of the couple. Few studies have analysed the love relationships immigrant population in Europe. This study aims to explore the differences and similarities in love styles between Spaniards and Moroccan immigrants, the country's largest foreign population, and analyse the relationship between these styles and level of couple happiness. This cross-sectional study disseminated a survey to young adults between the ages of 18 and 40 in southern Spain. Of those who received the survey, 574 young adults responded, of which 182 were of Moroccan origin and 392 were Spanish. The results indicated that there are sociocultural and gender differences in the types of relationships young adults maintain and in the agents that facilitate romantic socialisation. The Spaniards describe less stable relationships, more influenced by several agents, while the Moroccans demonstrated more stability in relationships, more influenced by family and religion. In accordance with Sternberg love components, different types of love were recognised. Spanish women are the group most value love in their lives, rated higher in couple happiness, and gave special importance to intimacy (but not to commitment and passion). Moroccan women followed models of love closer to Sternberg's romantic love, giving importance to commitment, intimacy and passion. Spanish men were similar to Moroccan men regarding their type of love, although they were the only ones that included commitment as a predictor of happiness. This study reveals that the importance of an intersectional approach to analyse love and couples.

Keywords: love, happiness, post-migration changes, Moroccan, Spanish

Interpersona, 2021, Vol. 15(1), 72–89, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.4177>

Received: 2020-08-06. Accepted: 2021-03-27. Published (VoR): 2021-06-30.

*Corresponding author at: Crtra. Sacramento, s/n, 04120, Almeria, Spain. E-mail: esoriano@ual.es



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Sociocultural Construction of Love Relationships: Differences Between Western and Arab Countries

Although love is a universal and cross-cultural phenomenon (Hatfield & Rapson, 2010), the meaning of love and the construction of affective-sexual and couple relationships are linked to a particular context, culture and era (Karandashev, 2017, 2019). Love is constructed according to the specific characteristics and needs of

each social and cultural system, and its expressions and social importance herefore change according to the time and place. The ideological, cultural and discursive production of romantic subjectivity involves factors as diverse as moral norms, taboos, beliefs, modes of socio-economic organisation, social institutions such as the family or marriage, gender or racial relations and power structures (Graham, 2011; Illouz, 1997).

Sociocultural studies of romantic love and couple relationships have identified elements that differentiate relationships in Western and Eastern countries (Herrera, 2010). Some of the most important differences are related to different social values and institutions. The evolution of romantic love in more individualistic societies and cultures—such as those in the West—has become detached from any religious influence and more closely linked to socioeconomic changes and, of late, to a discourse of freedom of choice. Historically, the Western conception of romantic love has been linked to marriage, sexuality and reproduction (Karandashev, 2017) although there has been a fluidisation and liberalisation of love, gender, couple and marriage relationships in recent decades. In turn, in Eastern societies, love relationships are marked by religion, which defines most normative prescriptions (Bauman, 2012). Islamic societies have traditionally conceived of love and eroticism as separate from marriage, coming to accept polygamy in some contexts and granting sexuality a pleasurable—and not merely reproductive—purpose (Kadri, Mchichi-Alami, & Berrada, 2010). Similarly, marriage relationships have not been as related to freedom of choice; it is more focused on the reproduction of social status and intrafamilial roles.

Just as some sociocultural differences have been identified in couple relationships, the degree of happiness associated with these relationships also varies (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). The enormous changes in affective-emotional relationships in Europe and the United States have been accompanied by decreased marital happiness and satisfaction within the couple (Fincham & Beach, 2010), particularly among groups with low socio-educational levels and minority ethnic groups, as reflected by findings that these groups have the lowest satisfaction scores (Glenn, 2005). Conversely, family, sexual and matrimonial forms in Arab countries have experienced transformations in affective relationships that are tempered by the role of religion, thus maintaining greater stability in family, marital and gender structures, although younger generations are beginning to demonstrate changes in that stability (Sabour-Esmaeili & Schoebi, 2017).

Couple Relationships in the Immigrant Population

A central question for sociocultural studies is “What happens to couples from non-western countries when they migrate to Western countries?” There have been few studies examining post-migratory changes in couple relationships, particularly when migrations occur from more collectivist cultures to more individualistic cultures (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013; Vera Cruz, 2017). Rohmann, Führer, and Bierhoff (2016) propose that the Turkish immigrant population in Europe is experiencing a romantic and relational hybridisation linked to maintaining their own cultural elements while adopting other cultural aspects from the receiving society. They also propose that greater or lesser romantic acculturation corresponds to the strategy of adapting to the receiving society in which it takes place. Along the same lines, Ngazimbi, Daire, Carlson, and Munyon (2017) note that there have been some changes in the affective and relational models of African couples in the USA with a shift towards more individualistic love and relational forms, such as abandoning polygamy in favour of forms of romantic love that are more monogamous, more centred on loyalty, and often more dependent. There are also a series of negative factors associated with migrations that affect the quality of affective relationships, such as isolation, cultural misunderstanding, discrimination, Islamophobia, racial pressure and

decreased social support from friends and family, leading to greater marital conflict and adversely affecting the functioning of and satisfaction with the relationship. Studies on the marital status and love relationships of Moroccan people who have migrated to Spain, who represent the country's largest foreign population, recognise a certain migratory pattern in which male economic migration is followed by subsequent family reunification with wives and children (Palós & Pérez, 2010). The institution of marriage remains very strong, and there is a low rate of mixed couplings, such that most migrants intermarry with members of their own cultural group or group of origin (Esteve & Bueno, 2012).

Couple Relationships in Morocco

Studies about couple relationships in Morocco are particularly conditioned by core values such as family stability and honour (Phạm, 2013) traditional gender relationships and religion. However, changes in Morocco have begun to define new forms of couple and love relationships (Fioule, 2020). The modernisation process that the country is undergoing has been reflected in legislative measures such as the “*Moudawana*” family code, which allows divorce, sets a minimum legal age for marriage and punishes sexual harassment (Benlabbah, 2008), as well as the emergence of a liberal romantic subjectivity that understands marriage as a choice, an endeavour, and the fruit of love and considers that it involves new forms of intimacy, despite the survival of Islamic elements such as predestination (Elliot, 2016) and although these changes tend to encounter resistance in the traditional family institution (Menin, 2015). For Luque-Morales and Castien-Maestro (2014), this has led to an ambivalent and contradictory modernity in which one part of the population experiences a liberalisation of lifestyles, associated with more Westernised sexual and social patterns, and another is marked by a conservative re-Islamisation, associated with puritanism and conservatism in gender and sexual relations. Conversely, for Fortier, Kreil, and Maffi (2016), readings that speak about a Moroccan sexual and democratic revolution suffer from a certain Western ethnocentrism and explain the changes that have occurred as the result of a progressive step forward for the family, romanticism and intimacy, and too many studies have focused on more folk and traditional ways of life, giving rise to rigid stereotypes about sentimental relationships in Arab and Muslim couples.

Moroccans are the most numerous group of foreign nationals registered in Spain (INE, 2020). Through this study, we intend to 1) understand the differences and similarities between Spanish couples and immigrant Moroccan couples in their couple relationships (relational structure), 2) compare the sociocultural and gender differences in the factors involved in the sociocultural construction of love and in the main love components, and 3) analyse the ability of these components to predict subjective happiness.

Method

Participants

The participants were 574 adults, of whom 182 were of Moroccan origin -1st generation- (52.7% women and 47.3% men) and 392 were Spanish (27% men and 73% women). The average age of the Moroccan participants was 28.62 years, with a minimum age of 19 years and a maximum of 40. They had lived in Spain for an average of 7.6 years. The average age of the Spanish participants was 24.60 years, with a minimum age of 18 years and a maximum of 40 years. A total of 86.7% of the Spanish participants and 37.4% of the

Moroccan participants were students. The rest of the participants, 13.3% of the Spanish and 62.6% of the Moroccans, were employed.

A total of 59.7% (5.1% married) of the Spanish and 67% (48.3% married) of the Moroccan participants had a partner, and there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups ($\chi^2 = 2.84, p > .05$). The average number of previous romantic partners before the current partner in the Spanish participants was 2.20, while it was 1.26 in the Moroccan participants; the number of previous partners was thus greater in the Spanish population ($t = 4.80, p < .001$). The two groups differed in the nationality of their current partners: 95.2% of the Spanish population had partners of Spanish origin, 4% had partners from the European Union, and 0.8% had Moroccan partners. In turn, 83% of the Moroccan participants had partners who were Moroccan, but there were also mixed Moroccan-Spanish (11.3%) and Moroccan-European Union (5.7%) couples; the difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 273.22, p < .001$).

Instruments

Personal and Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Used to collect information about the age, gender, nationality, time of residence in Spain (for Moroccans), sexual orientation, length of relationship with the partner, marital status, number of previous partners and nationality of the current partner.

Questionnaire About Influences on the Perception of Love

Consists of seven items and collects information about the influence of family, friends, education, cinema, romantic literature, social networks and religion on the perception of love.

Subjective Perception of Time Spent With the Partner

Consists of a single item evaluating the time spent with the partner on a scale from 1 to 5.

Subjective Happiness Scale

To determine the feeling of happiness with the partner, a 3-item scale was developed to assess the degree of satisfaction with the partner, the degree of personal enrichment obtained with the partner, and perceived happiness. The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .838$.

Love Components

To measure the perception of love, [Sternberg's \(1986\)](#) triangular theory of love was used. It identifies three fundamental components of love: intimacy (emotional connection, mutual understanding, warmth), passion (sexual arousal, euphoria, pain) and commitment (medium- and long-term plans for the future) ([Beall & Sternberg, 1995](#); [Sternberg, 2000](#)). The scale was cross-culturally validated into Spanish by [Serrano and Carreño \(1993\)](#) and [Carreño and Serrano \(1995\)](#). These authors conclude that it is adequate to measure the construct of love, not only because of its factorial structure and because of its internal consistency, but also because the elements it includes are those with the greatest explanatory power of the love feeling. The scale has been validated for this research through an exploratory factor analysis (extraction by the principal components method and promax rotation). The result of the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($\chi^2 = 21798.9, p < .001$) and the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test indicated adequacy of the sample (.96). The factor analysis identifies three factors that explain 57.79% of the variance. The scale consists of 45 items with 15 in each

of the three components and is scored using a Likert-type format (ranging from 1 to 9). The reliability of the total scale is $\alpha = .983$. For the intimacy subscale, it is $\alpha = .956$, while the passion subscale is $\alpha = .883$ and the commitment subscale is $\alpha = .925$.

Procedure

This was a descriptive and predictive cross-sectional study using non-probability convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were: 1) being a man or woman older than 18 years-old, 2) having Spanish or Moroccan nationality, and 3) residing in the Spanish southeast. Two interviewers were trained to apply the instruments to Spanish people and people of Moroccan origin. One of the interviewers was Spanish, and the other was an intercultural mediator of Moroccan origin, which helped to translate and fill in the questionnaire. To ensure a varied sample, the scales and questionnaire were applied in different locations: entertainment venues, common meeting spaces, a university campus, bus and train stations, bazaars and health centres.

Data Analysis

The data was found to follow a normal distribution, based on skewness and kurtosis that are below the values recommended by Bollen and Long (1993), and Carretero-Diaz and Pérez (2005). Next, we performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and the t statistic to determine the influence of the independent variables cultural group and gender, on dependent variables subjective happiness and the components of love. Finally, a correlational study and hierarchical regressions were carried out, considering subjective happiness as a dependent variable, and time spent with the partner and love components as predictives. Percentages and the Chi-square statistic are carried out for nominal data. The level of significance was established at $\alpha = .05$. The calculations were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS for Windows [Version 23.0]).

Ethical Aspects

The participants received information about the research objective and the academic institution responsible for the study. They were informed that participation was voluntary, that the questionnaire was completely anonymous and confidential and that the data received would be used only by those responsible for the research and would be used exclusively for scientific purposes. The participants were reminded that they had the right to terminate their participation at any time. To answer the questionnaire, they had to be 18 years old and have had a couple relationship.

Results

Influence of Socialisation Agents on the Understanding of Love

The socialising elements that influence the perception of love differed significantly between the Spanish and Moroccan participants. The Spanish participants reported being more influenced by family and friends, although they also placed importance on education, cinema and social networks, while denying that religion or literature had any effect on them. In turn, the romantic and relational constructions of the Moroccans was strongly

marked by family, education and religion, and they denied that cinema or social networks had any influence (Table 1).

Table 1

Influences of Socialisation Agents on Love for Spanish and Moroccan Participants

Socialisation agent	Spanish, %					Moroccans, %					χ^2	<i>p</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
Family	14.6	6.2	25.0	25.5	28.6	10.0	-	1.2	-	88.8	176.06	.000**
Friends	12.2	11.6	21.7	26.5	28.0	78.5	-	-	-	21.5	250.76	.000**
Education	7.9	12.7	27.5	24.9	27.0	7.1	1.2	-	-	91.2	200.41	.000**
Cinema	37.1	18.5	18.5	16.3	9.6	94.9	-	-	-	5.1	153.79	.000**
Literature	41.8	22.6	13.6	12.4	9.6	58.2	-	-	1.3	40.5	133.06	.000**
Social networks	35.0	27.9	15.8	12.6	8.7	87.2	-	-	-	12.8	148.57	.000**
Religion	61.7	9.7	11.4	8.0	9.1	8.8	-	-	1.2	90.0	318.65	.000**

Note. 1 = none; 2 = a little; 3 = some; 4 = quite a bit; 5 = a lot.

** $p < .001$.

There were statistically significant differences between the Spanish and Moroccan participants with regard to the role played by all the conditioning factors of love, particularly family, friends and religion.

Time Spent With the Partner

The Spanish group felt they spent more time with their partners than the Moroccan group did. A total of 29.2% of the Spanish participants and 31.8% of the Moroccan participants reported that they spent very little time with their partners; 32.2% of the Spanish group and 45.9% of the Moroccan group said they spent some time with their partners; and 43.7% of the Spanish group and 22.42% of the Moroccan group said they spent a great deal of time with their partners ($\chi^2 = 45.29$, $p < .001$).

Love Components and Happiness With the Partner According to Gender and Origin

To analyse the love components and happiness within the couple, a MANOVA was carried out. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences based on gender (Pillai's trace = .027, $F = 3.357$, $p = .01$), cultural group of origin (Pillai's trace = .265, $F = 43.526$, $p < .001$) and the interaction between gender and the two cultural groups of origin (Pillai's trace = .040, $F = 5.002$, $p = .001$). Tests of between-subjects effects revealed that there were no differences by gender in intimacy ($F = .097$, $p = .756$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$), commitment ($F = 3.330$, $p = .069$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$), and passion ($F = .013$, $p = .909$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$), nor in subjective happiness ($F = 1.630$, $p = .202$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$). Tests of between-subjects effects did reveal differences according to the cultural group of origin (Spanish and Moroccan) in the intimacy ($F = 132.373$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .214$), commitment ($F = 42.752$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .081$) and passion ($F = 58.760$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .108$) components and in subjective happiness ($F = 117.656$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .195$). There were also significant differences in the interaction between gender and cultural group of origin for the intimacy ($F = 19.289$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .038$), commitment ($F = 15.477$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$) and passion ($F = 13.068$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .026$) components and in subjective happiness ($F = 13.450$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .027$).

To examine the differences in greater depth, the *t*-test for independent samples was performed. The Spanish participants showed statistically significant differences in the subjective happiness, intimacy, passion and commitment variables, with the women obtaining a higher mean score than the men. However, no significant differences were observed in the scores obtained by the Moroccan men and women in the four variables studied (Table 2).

Table 2

t-Test for Subjective Happiness, Intimacy, Passion and Commitment Between Genders for Each of the Cultural Groups (Spanish and Moroccan)

Love component	Spanish						Moroccan					
	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Happiness	12.14	2.45	13.2	1.65	-3.91	.000**	10.59	2.65	10.07	2.55	1.25	.213
Intimacy	7.08	1.30	7.54	1.13	-3.44	.001**	6.23	1.35	5.93	1.58	1.33	.173
Passion	6.38	1.54	6.87	1.3	-2.92	.004**	5.84	1.57	5.47	1.48	1.62	.106
Commitment	6.56	1.59	7.23	1.37	-3.85	.000**	6.29	1.49	6.17	1.46	0.52	.600

***p* < .001.

When we compared the scores obtained by participants of the same gender according to the cultural group of origin, we observed statistically significant differences in the men's subjective happiness, intimacy and passion, with higher scores for the Spanish men. No differences were observed in the commitment variable. Differences were observed between the Spanish and Moroccan women in the four variables studied, with the Moroccan women scoring lowest (see Table 3).

Table 3

t-Test for Subjective Happiness, Intimacy, Passion and Commitment for Women and Men According to Cultural Group (Spanish and Moroccan)

Love component	Men						Women					
	Spanish		Moroccan		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Spanish		Moroccan		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Happiness	12.14	2.45	10.5	2.65	4.07	.000**	13.21	1.65	10.07	2.55	10.03	.000**
Intimacy	7.08	1.3	6.23	1.35	4.37	.000**	7.54	1.13	5.93	1.58	9.15	.000**
Passion	6.38	1.54	5.84	1.57	2.39	.018*	6.87	1.30	5.47	1.48	8.81	.000**
Commitment	6.56	1.59	6.29	1.49	1.20	.231	7.23	1.37	6.17	1.46	6.40	.000**

p* < .05. *p* < .001.

Regarding the subjective happiness expressed by the Spanish and Moroccan participants, the mean score of the Spanish participants was 12.90, while that of the Moroccan participants was 10.35. The comparison of means showed significant differences ($t = 10.94$ and $p < .001$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.85$, $r = .39$), indicating that the Spanish perceived greater happiness with their couple relationship than the Moroccans did.

Ability of Love Components and Time Spent With the Partner to Predict Happiness

To examine the predictive power of time spent with the partner, intimacy, passion and commitment for subjective happiness (dependent variable), several hierarchical regression models were performed.

Table 4 presents four hierarchical regression models using subjective happiness as a criterion and intimacy, time spent with the partner, passion and commitment as predictors for Spanish and Moroccan women. In the first model, the intimacy variable was introduced to the regression equation as a predictor for both groups (Spanish and Moroccan women). In the second model, time spent with the partner was not entered into the equation for the Spanish women because it was not identified a strong predictor of happiness ($p > .05$), but it was added for the Moroccan women. In the third model, neither time spent with the partner nor passion were included as predictors for the Spanish women but were for the Moroccan women, and greater importance was placed on passion ($\beta = .403$, $p < .05$) than on intimacy ($\beta = .395$, $p < .05$). In the fourth model, neither time spent with the partner nor passion nor commitment were included as predictors for the Spanish women. However, as was the case in Model 3 for the Moroccan women, intimacy, time spent with the partner and passion were significant, although commitment was not considered as a predictor of subjective happiness for the women of Moroccan origin ($\beta = -.189$, $p > .05$).

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression of Subjective Happiness for the Women of the Two Cultural Groups (Spanish and Moroccan)

Model	Spanish women				Moroccan women			
	R^2	β	t	p	R^2	β	t	p
Model 1	.535				.651			
Intimacy		.732	16.34	.000**		.807	11.74	.000**
Model 2	.536				.688			
Intimacy		.728	16.10	.000**		.776	11.72	.000**
Time		.023	0.501	.617		.196	2.96	.004*
Model 3	.542				.708			
Intimacy		.799	13.28	.000**		.395	2.14	.035*
Time		.024	0.525	.600		.223	3.4	.001**
Passion		-.106	-1.773	.078		.403	2.20	.030*
Model 4	.542				.713			
Intimacy		.817	11.30	.000		.516	2.43	.018*
Time		.022	0.494	.622		.214	3.24	.002*
Passion		-.092	-1.369	.172		.460	2.43	.017
Commitment		-.035	-0.453	.651		-.189	-1.14	.257

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

In the case of the men (Table 5), the intimacy variable was a significant predictor for both the Spanish and Moroccan groups but had greater importance for the Moroccans ($\beta = .739$). In the second model, time spent with the partner also became predictive for both cultural groups but had greater importance for the Spanish men ($\beta = .400$). In the third model, intimacy and time were included in the regression equation, but passion was not a predictor for either group ($\beta = -.032$, $p > .05$ and $\beta = .103$, $p > .05$ for Spanish and Moroccan men, respectively). In the fourth model, intimacy, time spent with the partner and commitment were predictors of

subjective happiness for the Spanish men, while for the Moroccan men, only intimacy and time spent with the partner were predictors.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression for the Men in the Two Cultural Groups

Model	Spanish men				Moroccan men			
	R^2	β	t	p	R^2	β	t	p
Model 1	.358				.546			
Intimacy		.599	7.24	.000**		.739	9.93	.000**
Model 2	.480				.604			
Intimacy		.403	4.69	.000**		.621	7.97	.000**
Time		.400	4.67	.000**		.268	3.44	.001**
Model 3	.481				.606			
Intimacy		.433	2.69	.008*		.528	3.026	.003*
Time		.393	4.29	.000**		.265	3.377	.001**
Passion		-.032	-0.223	.824		.103	0.593	.555
Model 4	.511				.616			
Intimacy		.329	2.017	.047*		.414	2.16	.033*
Time		.426	4.71	.000**		.248	3.15	.002*
Passion		-.393	-1.88	.062		.025	0.14	.889
Commitment		.475	2.36	.020*		.220	1.43	.154

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Relational Structure of Spanish and Moroccan Couples

The present study shows differences between Moroccan and Spanish men and women in terms of how they form couples and relate affectively, concurring with studies that show cross-cultural differences in love (Karandashev, 2017). The data show that the Spanish participants of both sexes have a greater number of partners, with a shorter relationship duration and less predisposition to marriage, while the Moroccan immigrants have more lasting, stable relationships in which marriage plays a more important role. In the case of the Spanish men and women, this relational pattern reinforces the consolidation of new, discontinuous couple forms consistent with a weakening of human ties in Western societies and governed by more fluid forms of love (Bauman, 2012). In contrast, the higher marriage rates among the Moroccan couples residing in Spain suggest that marriage continues to have a civil and social status that is highly valued by immigrant Islamic communities (Llorent-Bedmar, 2011; Luque-Morales & Castien Maestro, 2014), although other factors may also have an influence: for example, the existence of migratory plans for family reunification, through which marriage facilitates family migration (Esteve & Bueno, 2012), or other factors such as marriageable age (as marriage has become more delayed in Spain) or early entry into the labour market, which is often linked to more stable coupling patterns (de Valk & Billari, 2007).

Regarding time spent with the partner, the Spanish group reported spending a greater amount of time with their partners than their Moroccan counterparts. In the West, the importance of and time spent on body care,

individual health and love have increased as a result of the disappearance of other pillars of social support and organisations that give meaning to life, such as religion or the family (García-Haro, García-Pascual, & González, 2018). Love is configured as a space of refuge from the ontological vacuum of the Western post-modern subject. In the case of European women, this is coupled with the role that was traditionally attributed to love as a central element of their construction as a woman. In the West, couple relationships have been prioritised over other types of relationships; they are brief but intense. This is not true for Moroccan men and women, in whom the maintenance of other institutions and social relations, such as family or religious practice, displaces the importance placed on couple relationships. The decreased amount of time and importance that Muslim women place on love and couplehood coincides with other studies that assert that couple relationships for Muslim women are based more on a socio-economic materiality than on intangible sentimentality (Killawi et al., 2018). Morini (2016) explains that for Moroccan women who immigrated to Italy, love does not occupy the central space in their lives that is socially attributed to them; instead, they establish strong affective bonds and ties with other women, far from the stereotype of the submissive woman on her knees.

Diversity in the Factors Involved in the Sociocultural Construction of Love

The analyses of the main agents of romantic socialisation allow us to assess the different weights of certain institutions in the discursive, subjective and relational development of the cultural groups. In our study, the romantic socialisation of the Spanish women and men, as they perceive it, is explained by a greater number of factors, among which three are given particular emphasis: family, friendships and education; however, they also recognised some secondary influence from social networks, cinema and literature. In turn, the Moroccans reported only three main agents that configure their perception of love: family, education and religion were indicated by almost all the respondents, who denied the influence of any other factors.

According to the data obtained, the family continues to be the primary space for affective learning for all the groups, and is recognised as the primary space for acquiring and forming affective and relational patterns (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). Familism is a characteristic of collectivist societies such as Morocco (Dammacco, 2005), where, despite migration, families maintain a very active role in the courtship process and marriage in the first and second Muslim generations (Killawi et al., 2018). Familism is also characteristic of Spain, which has been identified as the most family-centred country in the European Union. Despite this, only one-third of the Spanish reported that family had a strong influence (compared to more than 90% of the Moroccans), which reflects the loss of importance of this institution among the Spanish. The erosion of the Spanish family is part of a crisis in traditional social institutions (Berger, Luckmann, & Estruch, 1997). Another area of socialisation on which the Spanish and Moroccans agree is education—the school institution—as an important space influencing the construction of love; it remained the second most relevant factor in romantic socialisation.

Despite migration, religion remained the most important socialisation factor for the Moroccan population. These findings contradict studies that claim that religiosity has decreased in the Muslim population that has migrated to Western countries (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2013) and support those that recognise a low degree of assimilation by Moroccan migrants in Spain compared with other groups (Navas, López-Rodríguez, & Cuadrado, 2013). There is a strong maintenance of the country of origin's cultural identity, which is closely linked to the maintenance of the Muslim tradition and specifically to institutions such as the family and marriage. In contrast,

among the Spanish, there is a clear process by which secularisation is influencing the traditional sexual and romantic paradigm in the West (Ayuso & García-Faroldi, 2014).

Sociocultural Differences in the Components of Love and the Degree of Associated Happiness: The Postmodern Western and Traditional Eastern Romantic Paradigms

The results showed significant sociocultural and gender differences in love styles and in happiness within the couple (Pilishvili & Koyanongo, 2016). In terms of scores, the Spanish women had the highest scores for love and happiness in their relationship, followed by the Spanish men, then the Moroccan men (who differed minimally from the Spanish men) and, finally, the Moroccan women placed the lowest value on love and their relationships. The Spanish thus expressed more happiness and reported greater passion, intimacy and commitment, contradicting studies that point to a deterioration of relationships in the West (Fincham & Beach, 2010). In fact, this greater satisfaction within the couple has been associated with more individualistic societies, insofar as members of these societies more strongly pursue activities related to personal stimulation and pleasure that satisfy hedonic needs (Bilbao, Techio, & Páez, 2007) but experience greater isolation and loneliness. As we suggested, in modern European culture, love and couple relationships have become sources of meaning, identity construction and organisation of the meaning of life, particularly among Western women, who have historically regarded love as a central aspect of femininity (Friedan, 2017). This explains why the Spanish women's results were significantly higher than those of the men for subjective happiness and for the three love components (Zubieta, Muratori, & Fernández, 2012). In turn, the Moroccans—both men and women—scored significantly lower on all the love dimensions and in happiness, a finding that may be explained by sociocultural elements that place less importance on love but also by structural aspects inherent to the migrant condition in Europe, which is related to decreased romantic desire due to isolation, cultural misunderstanding, discrimination, Islamophobia, unwanted migration under the umbrella of family reunification and tensions between Western lifestyles and traditional patterns, which often lead to discontent within couples.

Regarding gender differences, significant differences between men and women were observed for all the love components and for happiness; the Spanish women were much happier and more satisfied, although this was not true of the Moroccans. Thus, there was romantic subjectivity by gender that was more differentiated by roles in the Spanish group. This unequal distribution of roles is consistent with the “feminine mystique” that represents women as emotional beings who are responsible for giving and expressing love to men. Finally, the greatest differences were observed when the Spanish and Moroccan women were compared. The women showed the most extreme and differentiated scores regarding love—due to either its excess or absence—which prompts us to assert that gender prescriptions in romantic cultural systems affect women to a greater extent than men.

Love Factors and Happiness Within the Couple

Intimacy is the love dimension that best predicted happiness in the couple for all the groups studied: Moroccan and Spanish, men and women. This means that the emotional bond, communication, trust and understanding are fundamental for the construction of the couple (García, Fuentes, & Sánchez, 2016; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In fact, for the Spanish women, intimacy was the only dimension that predicted happiness within the couple. In this sense, the love model adopted by the Spanish women values affection and emotional attention, omitting the sex-affective plane, time spent with the partner and the construction of long-term shared plans. These

results partially coincide with those identified by Vera Cruz (2017) who, when comparing the love models between French and Mozambican people, argued that intimacy became more important in the French, with a more individualistic society and commitment appears as a more marked feature in Mozambican.

The second most important predictor of happiness was time spent with the partner, which was significant in all the groups except for the Spanish women. The more time spent the couple spent together, the greater the satisfaction was. Time is a crucial factor for the development of experiences and emotions that contribute to the development of satisfactory relationships (Stolarski, Wojtkowska, & Kwiecińska, 2016). The absence of time as a predictor of happiness in the Spanish women suggests a specific relational mode in this group associated with high relational consumption (liberal love forms) without the need to spend time with their partner, a pattern that has been identified in association with the perception of female empowerment in Western societies; however, in contrast and contradictorily, emotional recognition and intimacy are the central pillar. These fluid relational characteristics with demands specific to romantic models may correspond to a love model in transition, straddling the previous romantic formulas and new neoliberal forms.

There are other dimensions of Sternberg's triangle that seem to be linked to happiness only in certain sociocultural groups, questioning the universal Sternberg's conception of ideal love, comprised of passion, intimacy and commitment (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Passion appeared as a predictor of happiness only among the Moroccan women. For them, intimacy, time spent with the partner and passion predicted happiness within the couple. In this sense, the Moroccan women's pattern was the closest to the romantic love models, in which intimacy and passion are central (Sternberg). This therefore refutes the ultraconservative image of the sexuality of Muslim women (Kadri et al., 2010).

Regarding the Spanish men, commitment as a component of satisfaction with the couple was specific and unique to them, in line with the results of Mazadiego and Garcés (2011) for Canadian and US men. The inclusion of commitment as a determinant of the happiness of Spanish men is another interesting finding of our study (García et al., 2016); it runs counter to a view of commitment as linked to women or cultures where marriage has a greater weight, as in Morocco. Although classically, commitment has been considered very linked, and even the most powerful and coherent predictor of satisfaction, particularly for longer and more stable relationships (Acker & Davis, 1992), in recent decades, more playful forms of love have been described by men, with less emotional involvement and no future expectations. These changes in love styles and happiness bring us closer to a reformulation of gender social relations in Western societies.

Couple Relationships in the Immigrant Population

The results of the study suggest that, after migration, couples develop processes of maintenance, accommodation and cultural assimilation in establishing their couple relationships (Accordini, Giuliani & Gennari, 2018). However, as the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) proposes, there is selective adaptation, according to which the private dimensions of life exhibit patterns of less acculturation than the dimensions more related to the public sphere (Pumares, Navas, Rojas, & Sánchez, 2002). The affective life as a couple is reportedly one of the dimensions of social life in which the greatest cultural maintenance seems to exist. In this case, the persistence of marked differences between groups does not coincide with studies in the US that show high cultural accommodation, assimilation and hybridisation in immigrant couples (Ngazimbi et al., 2017). Moroccans in Spain show significant differences in the conception of the couple, giving more importance to

marriage and stability (Esteve & Bueno, 2012), and in the influence of various agents on the couple and their love models.

As Glenn (2005) reported in its study, immigrants present levels of satisfaction in the couple relationship markedly lower than those of the natives. Thus, it is necessary to analyse aspects of a socio-structural, cultural or linguistic nature that may be operating at this level.

Biases and Limitations

Although the present study makes important contributions, there are a number of drawbacks that should be considered. The first, and likely most obvious, concerns the investigated sample. It was a modest sample with an unequal distribution of Spanish and Moroccan participants. Similarly, there was a difference in average age between the Spanish and Moroccans that may have influenced the results, although that difference was not significant.

A second limitation specific to cross-cultural studies lies in the difficulty of making fully cross-cultural adaptations of the measurement instruments, particularly for sensitive issues such as love and sexual-affective relationships. Thus, despite adaptation efforts, there may be cultural meanings and patterns that influence of group differences.

Regarding the study design, it involved a cross-sectional strategy that makes it impossible to assess predictors of happiness over time and at a cultural level, preventing a clear interpretation of acculturation processes linked to the love and sexual life of immigrants of Moroccan origin. Similarly, the variability of the Moroccan migratory process makes it impossible to generalise. The length of time that the individuals had been in their relationship and whether they lived together were not considered, insofar as cohabiting also increases commitment. This situation may have affected the overall results (García et al., 2016).

Conclusions

This study brings us closer to describing sociocultural differences in how love relationships are perceived and experienced in times of rapid social and migratory changes. The data analysed allowed us to define two differentiated love styles in Spanish people and first-generation Moroccan immigrants. Both love systems manifest different prescriptions based on gender and affect women with a particular intensity.

The Spanish love style appears as a transitional style between the romantic model of the twentieth century and new neo-liberal forms linked to love, sexual poly-consumption and female empowerment. There are no clear socialisation factors that wholly determine its construction; instead, it is more influenced by media and culture. In this style, marriage loses importance, and there are more discontinuous relationships. At the same time, there is a high value placed on love and happiness within the couple and particularly on intimacy. In men, commitment is an additional factor of stability and happiness in love.

The love model presented by the Moroccan people corresponds to the traditional forms of love. In immigrant couples, the liberalisation of love that is taking place in large Moroccan cities is not observed to any significant extent (Elliot, 2016; Luque-Morales & Castien-Maestro, 2014), nor have there been major processes of assimilation (Navas et al., 2013). Marriage and the family organise the relational structure. The love style of the women corresponds to time spent with the partner, passion and intimacy and best fits Sternberg's romantic love

triangle. The differences in happiness within the couple cannot be explained exclusively by cultural differences, although there are structural aspects of the migrant condition that may be closely related.

Implications of the Study

Educational and social research in multicultural and democratic societies must analyse in depth the dynamics and transformations that affect the people who live together in a territory, in order not only to increase their understanding and aspirations for a better society, but also to articulate policies and educational and social programmes that relate to and advance the existing diversity and favour social cohesion.

Specifically, this study seeks to contribute to the field of cross-cultural health education by encouraging the development of programmes to promote healthy affective relationships from a culturally sensitive perspective. The findings of this research have yielded some clues about the differences in the relational, love and satisfaction models of Spaniards and Moroccan immigrants in the Spanish southeast.

Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors have no additional (i.e., non-financial) support to report.

References

- Abdel-Khalek, A., & Lester, D. (2013). Mental health, subjective well-being, and religiosity: Significant associations in Kuwait and USA. *The Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 7(2), 63-76. <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.10381607.0007.204>
- Accordini, M., Giuliani, C., & Gennari, M. (2018). Migration as a challenge to couple relationships: The point of view of Muslim women. *Societies*, 8(4), Article 120. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8040120>
- Acker, M., & Davis, M. H. (1992). Intimacy, passion and commitment in adult romantic relationships: A test of the triangular theory of love. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 9(1), 21-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407592091002>
- Ayuso, L., & García-Faroldi, G. (2014). *Los españoles y la sexualidad en el siglo XXI* (281). Madrid, Spain: CIS-Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Bauman, Z. (2012). *Amor líquido: Acerca de la fragilidad de los vínculos humanos* [Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds]. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Beall, A. E., & Sternberg, R. J. (1995). The social construction of love. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12(3), 417-438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407595123006>
- Benlabbah, F. (2008). Islam and women's rights in Morocco. *Cadernos Pagu*, 1(30), 95-106. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-83332008000100008>

- Berger, P. L., Luckmann, T., & Estruch, J. (1997). *Modernidad, pluralismo y crisis de sentido* [Modernity, pluralism and the crisis of meaning: The orientation of modern man]. Barcelona, Spain: Paidós.
- Bilbao, M. Á., Techio, E. M., & Páez, D. (2007). Felicidad, cultura y valores personales: Estado de la cuestión y síntesis meta-analítica. *Revista de Psicología*, 25(2), 233-276. <https://doi.org/10.18800/psico.200702.005>
- Bollen, K. A., & Long, J. S. (1993). *Testing structural equation models*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Carreño, M., & Serrano, G. (1995). Análisis de instrumentos para la medida del amor. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 10(2), 131-148. <https://doi.org/10.1174/021347495763810938>
- Carretero-Díaz, H., & Pérez, C. (2005). Normas para el desarrollo y revisión de estudios instrumentales. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 5(3), 521-551.
- Dammacco, M. (2005). La peculiaridad de algunas comunidades de inmigrantes en Andalucía: Resultados de una investigación de campo. *Cuadernos geográficos de la Universidad de Granada*, 36(1), 153-168. <https://doi.org/10.30827/cuadgeo.v36i1.1712>
- de Valk, H. A., & Billari, F. C. (2007). Living arrangements of migrant and Dutch young adults: The family influence disentangled. *Population Studies*, 61(2), 201-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324720701340129>
- Dominguez-Folgueras, M., & Castro-Martin, T. (2013). Cohabitation in Spain: No longer a marginal path to family formation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 75(2), 422-437. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12013>
- Elliot, A. (2016). Paused subjects: Waiting for migration in North Africa. *Time & Society*, 25(1), 102-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15588090>
- Esteve, A., & Bueno, X. (2012). Marrying after migration: Assortative mating among Moroccans in Spain. *Genus*, 68(1), 41-63. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/genus.68.1.41>
- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2010). Marriage in the new millennium: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 72(3), 630-649. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00722.x>
- Fioole, A. (2020). Evidently married: Changing ambiguities in creating family ties in Morocco. *Hawwa*, 1(aop), 34-54. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341385>
- Fortier, C., Kreil, A., & Maffi, I. (2016). The trouble of love in the Arab world: Romance, marriage, and the shaping of intimate lives. *Arab Studies Journal*, 24(2), 96-115. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44742881>
- Friedan, B. (2017). *La mística de la feminidad*. Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra.
- García, F. E., Fuentes, R., & Sánchez, A. (2016). Amor, satisfacción en la pareja y resolución de conflictos en adultos jóvenes. *Ajayu Órgano de Difusión Científica del Departamento de Psicología UCBSA*, 14(2), 284-302.
- García-Haro, J. G., García-Pascual, H. G., & González, M. G. (2018). Cuando se deja de hacer pie. Notas sobre cultura moderna, crisis de sentido vital y psicopatología. *Revista de Psicoterapia*, 29(109), 147-167. <https://doi.org/10.33898/rdp.v29i109.229>
- Glenn, N. D. (2005). *With this ring: A national survey on marriage in America*. Retrieved from <http://www.fatherhood.org/with-this-ring-survey>

- Graham, J. M. (2011). Measuring love in romantic relationships: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28*(6), 748-771. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510389126>
- Hatfield, E., & Rapson, R. (2010). Culture, attachment style, and romantic relationships. In P. Erdman (Ed.), *Attachment: Expanding the cultural connections* (pp. 227–242). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Herrera, C. (2010). *La construcción sociocultural del amor romántico*. Editorial Fundamentos.
- Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the romantic utopia: Love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism*. Berkeley, CA, USA: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520917996>
- INE. (2020). *Cifras de Población (CP) a 1 de enero de 2020 Estadística de Migraciones (EM)*. León, Spain: Instituto Nacional de Estadística.
- Kadri, N., Mchichi-Alami, K., & Berrada, S. (2010). La sexualité au Maroc: Point de vue de sexologues femmes. *Sexologies, 19*(1), 53-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sexol.2009.03.004>
- Karandashev, V. (2017). *Romantic love in cultural contexts*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42683-9>
- Karandashev, V. (2019). *Cross-cultural perspectives on the experience and expression of love*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15020-4>
- Killawi, A., Fathi, E., Dadras, I., Daneshpour, M., Elmi, A., & Altalib, H. (2018). Perceptions and experiences of marriage preparation among US Muslims: Multiple voices from the community. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 44*(1), 90-106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12233>
- Kim, J., & Hatfield, E. (2004). Love types and subjective well-being: A cross-cultural study. *Social Behavior and Personality, 32*(2), 173-182. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2004.32.2.173>
- Llorent-Bedmar, V. (2011). Mujer e islam: Implicaciones educativas. In *Ideales de formación en la historia de la educación* (pp. 721–732). Madrid, Spain: Dykinson.
- Luque-Morales, L., & Castien-Maestro, J. I. (2014). Apuntes sobre la vivencia de la sexualidad entre la juventud marroquí. Investigaciones en Marruecos y en España. *Prisma Social, 13*, 492-541.
- Mazadiego, T. J., & Garcés, J. (2011). El amor medido por la escala triangular de Sternberg. *Psicolatina, 22*, 1-10.
- Menin, L. (2015). The impasse of modernity: Personal agency, divine destiny, and the unpredictability of intimate relationships in Morocco. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 21*(4), 892-910. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12293>
- Morini, C. (2016). *Mapping love. Ethnography of migrant women squatters in Florence, Italy*. Granada, Spain: Universidad de Granada.
- Morris, A. S., Silk, J. S., Steinberg, L., Myers, S., & Robinson, L. (2007). The role of the family context in the development of emotion regulation. *Social Development, 16*(2), 361-388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00389.x>

- Navas, M. S., López-Rodríguez, L., & Cuadrado, I. (2013). Mantenimiento y adaptación cultural de diferentes grupos inmigrantes: Variables predictoras. *L'Année Psychologique*, *29*(1), 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.29.1.135491>
- Ngazimbi, E., Daire, A., Carlson, R., & Munyon, M. (2017). Analysis of marital expectations in African immigrant and United States-born married couples. *Qualitative Report*, *22*(3), 831-848. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss3/10>
- Palós, A. E., & Pérez, E. (2010). La formación de la pareja entre marroquíes en España. *Migraciones. Publicación del Instituto Universitario de Estudios sobre. Migraciones*, *1*(27), 83-110.
- Phạm, Q. N. (2013). Enduring bonds: Politics and life outside freedom as autonomy. *Alternatives*, *38*(1), 29-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375412465676>
- Pilishvili, T., & Koyanongo, E. (2016). The representation of love among Brazilians, Russians and Central Africans: A comparative analysis. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Arts*, *9*(1), 84-97. <https://doi.org/10.11621/pir.2016.0106>
- Pumares, P., Navas, M., Rojas, M. S., & Sánchez, J. (2002). El Modelo Ampliado de Aculturación Relativa (MAAR): Un modelo para el estudio de las estrategias de aculturación de la población inmigrante. In F. J. García Castaño & C. Muriel (Eds.), *La inmigración en España. Contextos y alternativas* (pp. 159–167). Granada, Spain: Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales de la Universidad de Granada.
- Reis, H., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In *Handbook of personal relationships*. (pp. 367–389). New York, NY, USA: Wiley.
- Rohmann, E., Führer, A., & Bierhoff, H. (2016). Relationship satisfaction across European cultures: The role of love styles. *Cross-Cultural Research*, *50*(2), 178-211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397116630950>
- Sabour-Esmaeili, N., & Schoebi, D. (2017). Research on correlates of marital quality and stability in Muslim countries: A review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *9*(1), 69-92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12181>
- Serrano, G., & Carreño, M. (1993). La teoría del amor de Sternberg sobre el amor. Análisis empírico. *Psicothema*, *5*(1), 151-167.
- Sprecher, S., & Toro-Morn, M. (2002). A study of men and women from different sides of earth to determine if men are from Mars and women are from Venus in their beliefs about love and romantic relationships. *Sex Roles*, *46*(5/6), 131-147. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1019780801500>
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, *93*(2), 119-135. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119>
- Sternberg, R. J. (2000). *La experiencia del amor: La evolución de la relación amorosa a lo largo del tiempo*. Barcelona, Spain: Paidós.
- Stolarski, M., Wojtkowska, K., & Kwiecińska, M. (2016). Time for love: Partners' time perspectives predict relationship satisfaction in romantic heterosexual couples. *Time & Society*, *25*(3), 552-574. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15596703>

- Vera Cruz, G. (2017). Love in cross-cultural perspective: Mozambique-France comparison. *Psychology in Africa*, 27(4), 334-337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2017.1347754>
- Zubieta, E., Muratori, M., & Fernández, O. (2012). Bienestar subjetivo y psicosocial: Explorando diferencias de género. *Salud y Sociedad*, 3(1), 66-76. <https://doi.org/10.22199/S07187475.2012.0001.00005>