

Romantic beliefs, styles, and relationships among young people from Chinese, Southern European, and Anglo-Australian backgrounds

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In this study, the romantic beliefs, styles of relating, sex-role traits, and social self-efficacy of 433 young people from three cultural groups were assessed and their links with relationship status and loneliness explored. A majority cultural group (Anglo-Australians) was compared with two minority groups (Chinese- and Southern European-background young people) within the same society. Chinese-background youth were less likely to be in a romantic relationship and more likely to be lonely than Anglo-Australian or Southern European-Australians. Greater loneliness was associated with non-secure relationship styles, lower social self-efficacy, and lower scores on psychosocial femininity and masculinity. Predictors of relationship status included romantic attitudes and relationship styles. Some evidence pointed to stronger social efficacy and more secure relationship styles being associated with greater acculturation but it was rather weak and inconsistent.

Introduction

Love, romance, and courtship are rites of passage for young people in western society; however, norms and preferred styles of romantic love may differ across cultures. The potential clashes between these norms and styles for minority and majority groups in any culture, and the relationships between social adjustment and the endorsement of minority norms, have been much discussed in literature and folklore, but little studied in any systematic way. In Australia, the presence of several minority ethnic and cultural groups that vary in the extent of their “Westernized” background, or the psychological distance between their culture of origin and the culture of mainstream Australian society, enables the exploration of these issues. Within the Australian context, one aim of this study is to compare romantic styles and beliefs of young people from Chinese backgrounds with two groups of young people from European-based cultures: Anglo-Australians (the cultural majority) and Southern European-Australians (a large cultural minority). A further aim is to assess the relationships between these styles and beliefs, and social adjustment, as operationalized by measures of loneliness and romantic relationship status. A third aim is to assess the relationship between acculturation and romantic styles and beliefs, which is possible because the two immigrant groups differ in terms of likely acculturation (Southern

European immigrants have been settled in Australia for around a generation longer than the majority of Chinese immigrants). Each of these aims will be discussed in turn.

Love and romance in Western society

Love and romance are viewed in Western society as providing the basis of long-lasting relationships (Erikson, 1968; Johnson, 1983). Ideas about what is actually meant by romantic love differ, but all seem to have in common some idea of emotional intensity as a prelude to commitment and fidelity (eg., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Pedersen & Shoemaker, 1993). As well as their importance in the development of long-term relationships, romantic relationships in adolescence and youth are considered by several Western developmental theorists to be important as learning experiences in the development of a sense of self, relationship skills, and intimacy (eg., Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1951). Erikson (1968) argues that adolescent falling in love is part of the quest for identity whereby the young person sees an idealized version of him- or herself reflected through the eyes of another. Falling in love is conceptualized as part of the process of growing up and discovering oneself and one's sexuality. It may happen several times before a relationship develops into the mutuality and sharing of intimacy – a “mature” relationship in Erikson's terms. The establishment of such a relationship, which is sexually based, intimate and committed, is viewed by Erikson as the essential task of young adulthood, a task that if unsuccessful will pave the way to potential social isolation and self-absorption. One role of romance may be to facilitate falling in love, by contributing to the courting process and thus the establishment of a relationship. Viewed in these terms, the understanding of social norms with respect to romance, and the interest in and ability to establish romantic relationships, are important steps developmentally.

Romantic relationships have been conceptualized from the point of view of attachment theory, which suggests that infants form bonds with their carers, and the quality of these bonds affects adult relationships, especially romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) describe these infant bonds as secure, anxious/resistant, avoidant, or disorganized/disoriented. All but the secure style are considered less than optimally adjusted, involving as they do fears or distortions concerning key relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) in their attempt to map childhood attachment styles to adult love/relationship styles, argued that discomfort with closeness among adults would be experienced by those with an avoidant attachment style. Discomfort with independence and the desire to “merge” with another would be the adult version of anxious/ambivalent (later renamed anxious/resistant) attachment. Secure adult romantic relationships, characterized by trust, comfort with closeness but without the desire to merge identity with another person, would be predicted by secure childhood attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) did not consider the disorganized/disoriented attachment style, which arises, according to Berk (1997), from a range of types of inadequate parenting, such as neglect or abuse, in which the child's attempts to attach are met with mixed and confusing signals. It would not be unreasonable to predict that this style could be manifest in adulthood either by lack of interest in relationships except at a superficial level, or confusion and ambivalence about what is wanted (and can be gained) from relationships.

On the basis of attachment theory and the work of Hazan and Shaver described above, Hatfield and Rapson (1995) proposed that people's love schemas or relationship styles depend on how comfortable they are with closeness and/or independence, and how eager

they are to be involved in a romantic relationship. They categorized those interested in romantic (love) relationships into four groups: secure (comfortable with closeness and independence); clingy (comfortable with closeness but not independence), skittish (fearful of too much closeness, secure about independence); and fickle (uncomfortable with both closeness and independence). Those relatively uninterested in romantic relationships were classified as either casual (interested only if relationships were virtually problem-free) or uninterested.

As in the case of childhood attachment styles, only the secure love style is considered as evidence of optimum adjustment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; McCarthy & Taylor, 1999). Hatfield and Rapson point out however that love styles may change and progress through various developmental stages, eventually becoming secure. It is likely that many young people would be working through such developmental stages, although some may retain immature love styles for longer, depending on early experiences, social learning, and environmental constraints against relationship development.

Romantic love in Chinese culture

While choosing a partner and marrying for love is regarded as a vital component of romantic love in the West, for a Chinese person in a collectivist society, romance and love are seen as subordinate to the needs of the group (typically the family), and such activities must be bound by the appropriate and accepted social rules of the group (Moore, 1998). Love and romance are considered in the light of responsibility toward parents. Spontaneous expression of love, especially in terms of sexual activities outside marriage, are not regarded as appropriate (Ho, 1986; Hsu, 1953). The encouragement of conservatism and restraint in the expression of sexuality may shape attitudes toward romantic love, and behaviors associated with the expression of love.

Ho's views of Chinese sexual restrictiveness are supported by research findings. In comparison to their American counterparts, Chinese adolescents held more conservative sexual attitudes on the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (Chen & Yang, 1986; Turner & Mo, 1984). A study by Wu (1981) of Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong found that the majority of those interviewed could not accept one-night stands although they would accept sexual activities with a close partner. While this pattern may be changing somewhat (Mackay, 2000), Rosenthal, Moore, and Brumen (1990) showed that among first-year university students in Australia (aged 17 to 19 years), Anglo-Australians were much more likely to be non-virgins than Chinese-Australians. Huang and Uba (1992) also found that the number of Chinese-American students who admitted to the experience of premarital sex was much lower than that of Caucasian students. At a broader level, Dion and Dion (1993) demonstrated that Asian students in America endorsed companionate/friendship and altruistic views of love to a greater extent than did their Caucasian counterparts. This emphasis on companionship and self-other relationships is consistent with a collectivist framework.

On the basis of the above discussion, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the romantic attitudes and beliefs held by Chinese background young people would be different from those of young people from a Westernized background. The proposed greater "romantic conservatism" along with a more collectivist orientation of young Chinese background students may manifest itself in different attitudes toward romance (for example, less positive), and/or through different romance styles (for example, less interest in romantic

relationships), or a preponderance of styles reflecting concerns about the expression of individuality in relationships (clingy and fickle styles). One aim of this study is to explore these differences in greater detail.

Gender role issues and romance

In Western culture, traditional masculine sex roles emphasize agentic or instrumental values such as independence and achievement, while traditional feminine roles tend to endorse affiliative and communication values (Bem, 1974). Thus it might be expected that young men might find it easier to achieve independence than intimacy, with the reverse for young women. With respect to the relationship styles, young men may be more likely to endorse skittish and young women clingy love styles. Interestingly, Singelis, Choo, and Hatfield (1995) did not find clear patterns of gender differences in love schemas or relationship styles, although they did find that men were more casual about relationships than women.

Concepts of masculinity and femininity in Chinese culture appear to be somewhat different. Ward and Sethi (1986) and Keyes (1984) found that many of the stereotypical Western feminine expressive characteristics and stereotypic masculine agentic characteristics were regarded as desirable for both sexes, or as neutral, for Asians. Cheung (1996) reported that although Chinese boys scored higher on masculinity than girls, and girls higher on femininity than boys, Chinese boys also endorsed expressive characteristics, which are regarded as feminine in Western culture. It seems that in Chinese culture, masculinity consists of both agentic and some expressive traits. It is predicted that there will be sex differences in romantic attitudes and styles for each cultural group, but that these differences may be weaker among Chinese background than among Western background young people.

Romantic beliefs, styles and social adjustment

An important aspect of this study was to explore the combined contribution of sex roles, relationship styles and romantic attitudes in predicting both social adjustment as operationalized by measures of loneliness, and relationship status as operationalized by current participation in a romantic relationship. An individual may hold strong beliefs in the value of romance, and feel ready to enter a mature relationship, but these beliefs will not necessarily be manifest in a satisfactory romantic relationship. The individual needs to possess the necessary social traits and skills which allow him or her to access opportunities for romantic relationships and maintain those relationships. Both masculine (assertive, confident) and feminine (warm, nurturant) traits would seem of value here (Bem, 1975). In addition, social self-efficacy, or the belief that one has the social skills to deal confidently with others, is also likely to play a role. According to Bandura (1999), self-efficacy is the most pervasive and central mechanism through which human agency is exercised. Unless people believe in their abilities to produce desired outcomes through their own actions, they are unlikely to persevere in the face of difficulties. In the case of romantic love relationships, young people who believe they possess the social skills to access and maintain such relationships are more likely to be successful in doing so, and to avoid feelings of social isolation and loneliness. This study will assess the extent to which a set of variables, including romantic attitudes, relationship styles, masculinity, femininity, and social self-

efficacy predicts both relationship status and perceived loneliness. The prediction is that social adjustment and relationships status among adolescence/youth in Australia is likely to be associated with high belief in romance and mature/secure relationship styles, combined with social skills operationalized by positive sex-role traits and social self-efficacy.

Acculturation issues

Yang (1986) argued that Chinese cultural norms and values are subject to social change, with the direction of change from socially oriented to individually oriented characteristics. Such changes are likely to be more evident among Chinese who have migrated to Western countries. With the change in cultural environment as a result of migration, immigrants may have to accept new sets of cultural values and behavior in order to deal successfully with the new environment (Cheung, 1996). For example, Rosenthal and Feldman (1996) found that Chinese adolescents living in Western countries placed less value on tradition in comparison to their Hong Kong counterparts. In terms of attitudes toward sexuality, marriage, love, and romance, Huang and Uba (1992) found that among Chinese-American students, acculturation was positively related to sexual permissiveness, and experience of premarital sexual intercourse. These changes are likely to be associated with length of residence in the host country, and there is some evidence that this is the case among Asian migrants in Australia (Fan & Karnilowicz, 1997).

The above studies of immigrant adolescents are based on young people who have migrated with their parents. However, a sizeable number of Chinese adolescents come to Australia as overseas students, leaving their families behind. Research on overseas students shows that they report lower levels of psychological functioning, in comparison to the majority group and immigrant students (Zheng & Berry, 1991). Students living on their own often reported feelings of loneliness, depression, isolation, lack of social support, and adjustment problems (Luckey & Jupp, 1990). Being in a romantic relationship might alleviate the sense of loneliness and the romantic partner can be a source of social support.

Southern European immigrants to Australia were by and large a post-World War Two phenomenon, so that young Australians from Southern European backgrounds are likely to be born in Australia, unlike young Chinese in Australia, who tend to be first-wave immigrants or visiting students on temporary visas (Castles, 1993). Among those of Southern European background, beliefs about love and romance may be different from those of Anglo-Australians. For example, sex roles may be more traditional, and there may be greater emphasis on premarital chastity on the part of females (Storer, 1985). However, for at least two reasons, Southern European young people are likely to hold more similar views to Anglo-Australians than young Chinese. First, both Anglo-Australians and Southern European-Australians have cultures stemming from a Western tradition, which glamorizes romance. Second, young Southern European-Australians are likely to have been in Australia for longer than young Chinese, so have experienced the effects of acculturation to a greater extent. The inclusion of this second immigrant group in the study enables the possibility of teasing out whether group differences relate to immigration status or cultural differences. It is predicted that among non-majority cultural groups within a society, more acculturated individuals are more likely to share majority beliefs about romance and romantic relationship styles.

Method

Participants

There were 433 tertiary student participants in the sample (147 males; 286 females). Of these, 212 (75 males, 137 females) were Anglo-Australians (born in Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom, from English-speaking backgrounds), 106 were of Chinese background (35 Chinese-Australians, 71 Chinese students studying in Australia) (49 males, 57 females), and 115 were of Southern European background (23 males, 92 females). About half ($n = 17$) of the Chinese-Australians were born in Hong Kong or China, with seven born in Australia. The majority of the Chinese overseas students were born either in Hong Kong ($n = 21$) or Malaysia ($n = 21$). Chinese was defined by language spoken at home (any Chinese dialects). Country of origin was not used as a criterion for defining Chinese as Chinese people come from many different countries (Kee, 1988). The majority of the Southern European sample were born in Australia ($N = 107$, 93%) of Italian, Macedonian, Maltese, or Greek parents. The remainder were born in Italy, Macedonia, Malta, or Greece. The age range of the total sample was 17 to 30 years, with a mean age of 20.19 ($sd = 2.8$). Mean ages of the groups in the study were as follows: Anglo-Australians, 19.8 years ($sd = 2.8$); Chinese migrants, 21.2 years ($sd = 2.5$); Chinese overseas students, 22.0 years ($sd = 2.4$); Southern European-Australians, 19.4 years ($sd = 2.3$). Because the Chinese groups were significantly older than the other two groups, age was included as a variable in relevant data analyses.

A student population was chosen for this study because in educational institutions, students have a good deal of opportunity to interact socially and romantically with one another. The older adolescent ages were chosen to ensure a greater range of behaviors and attitudes than is likely in a younger sample.

Materials

The materials consisted of a questionnaire with six parts.

The UCLA loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) consists of twenty statements measuring feelings of loneliness and satisfaction with relationships. Participants rate the items on a 4-point scale, from 1 = never through to 4 = often. The score range is 20 to 80, with high scores representing higher loneliness. The alpha reliabilities of the scale for the total sample – Anglo-Australians, Chinese migrant students, Chinese overseas students, and Southern Europeans – were .90, .92, .90, .87, and .89 respectively.

The Love Schemas Scale (Singelis *et al.*, 1995) is a six-item self-report measure in which respondents are asked to rate to what extent each of six schemas represent their own feelings and experiences. Ratings are made on a 5-point scale from 1 = never true of me to 5 = always true of me. The scale is based on the adult attachment scale of Shaver and Hazan (1993), and incorporates self-assessment of perceived desires with respect to independence, closeness, and interest in romantic relationships. It is designed to assess degree of acceptance of each of the love styles postulated by Hatfield and Rapson (1995). These are secure, clingy, skittish, and fickle, casual and uninterested. Examples of the descriptions for the secure and clingy style respectively are as follows (full details are available in Hatfield & Rapson, 1995):

1. I am comfortable with closeness and/or independence; I find it easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

2. I need a great deal of closeness; I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person and this desire sometimes scares people away.

As each love style is assessed through a one-item measure, it is not possible to calculate internal reliability for the scales. Some evidence for cultural equivalence comes from data on the standard error of the mean and skewness data for these items across the cultural groups. Standard error of the mean is 0.2 or less for each item in each group, and skewness does not exceed 1.0 in any case.

The Love Ways Inventory (Hecht, Marston, & Larkey, 1994) consists of seventeen items which measure beliefs about aspects of romantic love, including intuitive, companionate, secure, traditional romantic, and committed love. Participants rated the degree to which they thought the items described an ideal love relationship on a 7-point scale, from 1 = does not describe through to 7 = describes very well. High scores on the scale represent positive/approving attitudes toward romantic love. The score range is 17 to 119. The alpha reliabilities of the scale for the total sample and subsamples of Anglo-Australians, Chinese migrant students, Chinese overseas students and Southern Europeans – were .92, .93, .84, .91, and .93 respectively.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) consists of sixty self-descriptive adjectives designed to measure psychological masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions. All adjectives are positively toned, or socially desirable. Twenty items assess masculinity, twenty assess femininity; the others are neutral. Each adjective is ranked on a scale where 1 = never or almost never true and 7 = always or almost always true. The score ranges for both masculinity and femininity scales are 20 to 140. The alpha reliabilities of the masculinity scale for the total sample and subsamples of Anglo-Australians, Chinese migrant students, Chinese overseas students, and Southern Europeans – were .86, .87, .91, .86, and .86 respectively. The alpha reliabilities of the femininity scale for the total sample and subsamples of Anglo-Australians, Chinese migrant students, Chinese overseas students, and Southern Europeans – were .80, .81, .88, .70, and .77 respectively.

The Social Self-Efficacy Scale for Students (SSESS) (Fan & Mak, 1998) consists of twenty items measuring confidence in dealing with various social and academic situations. Participants indicate their degree of agreement with each item on a 7-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. High scores indicate higher social self-efficacy. The score range is 20 to 140. The Social Self-Efficacy Scale for Students was especially developed for use with migrant students, with items designed through focus group interviews with Chinese students in Australia. Construct and criterion validity of the scale has been demonstrated (Fan & Mak, 1998). The alpha reliabilities of the scale for the total sample and subsamples of Anglo-Australians, Chinese migrant students, Chinese overseas students, and Southern Europeans – were .88, .90, .88, .86, and .85 respectively.

Acculturation was assessed through (a) length of residence in Australia; (b) strength and perceived importance of one's identity as an Australian or an ethnic group member. The latter variables were assessed on 5-point scales ranging from not at all to very much. Participants were also requested to provide demographic information on age, sex, country of birth of participants and their parents, residential status, language(s) spoken at home, and whether they were currently in a romantic relationship.

Evidence for the cultural equivalence of scales used came from the scale alpha reliabilities, which were calculated separately for each of the four acculturating groups. For

all groups and for each scale, these reliabilities were greater than .7. In addition, all the participants have been living in a Western society for some time and were exposed to Western culture in their everyday lives. The concepts and the constructs measured in the scales were not likely to be entirely unfamiliar to them.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through universities and other relevant institutions such as church groups. Participants either completed the questionnaires in class or at home and then returned them to the researchers later.

Results

Group comparisons

There was a significant difference between cultural groups in terms of percentage being in a relationship and not being in a relationship, $\chi^2_{(2)} = 11.62, p < .01$. The percentages of the groups not currently in a relationship were: Anglo-Australian, 39%; Chinese 62%; Southern European-Australian, 50%. There was a significant sex difference in relationship status ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 8.71, p < 0.01$), with females more likely to be in a relationship than males (59% versus 43%). A sex by group analysis of variance with LSD *post hoc* tests showed males were lonelier than females and Chinese students lonelier than either Anglo-Australians or Southern European background young people (see Table 1). There was no significant interaction between sex and group on loneliness.

To examine differences in the set of variables comprising romantic attitudes, love/relationship styles, masculinity, femininity and social self-efficacy, a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed. The independent variables were acculturating group with three levels (Anglo-Australians, Chinese background students, and Southern European-Australians) and sex. The two Chinese groups were combined for this analysis because of the small numbers in each group (later analyses compared these groups). Age was used as a covariate. The dependent variables were romantic attitudes, relationship styles (secure, clingy, skittish, fickle, casual, uninterested), social self-efficacy, masculinity, and femininity.

Results indicated significant ethnic group differences ($F_{20,738} = 2.36, p < .001$), and gender differences ($F_{10,368} = 6.80, p < .001$) but no significant interaction effect. Mean scores for group by sex and associated univariate F tests are shown in Table 1. They show females had stronger romantic attitudes, were more feminine and less masculine than males. In terms of relationship styles, they were less skittish, less casual, and less likely to be uninterested in relationships. There were significant cultural group differences on three of the relationship styles (secure, clingy, and fickle), social self-efficacy, and masculinity. LSD *post-hoc* tests indicated that Anglo-Australians were more secure in their relationship styles than Southern-European-Australians. This was the only significant difference between these two groups, and the Chinese young people were somewhere in between. All the other group differences were between Chinese young people and the two Western background samples (Anglo-Australians and Southern European-Australians). Chinese youth showed lower levels of social self-efficacy and masculinity, and were more clingy and fickle in their relationship styles.

Table 1 Mean scores and F values for sex and group differences on relationship style, romantic attitudes, and social skill variables (N = 384)

	Anglo-Australians		Chinese		S. European-Australians		F sex	F group
	Male N = 72	Female N = 128	Male N = 40	Female N = 46	Male N = 18	Female N = 80		
Relationship styles								
Secure (aa > se)	3.40	3.62	3.53	3.33	3.00	3.29	0.68	3.14*
Clingy (c > aa, se)	2.36	2.24	2.88	2.35	2.11	2.08	3.20	5.34**
Skittish (m > f)	2.69	2.23	2.73	2.54	2.67	2.26	7.37**	1.21
Fickle (c > aa)	2.69	2.48	3.00	2.74	2.50	2.76	.48	3.28*
Casual (m > f)	2.71	2.22	2.43	2.39	2.67	2.34	4.55*	0.17
Uninterested (m > f)	1.96	1.52	1.67	1.78	2.00	1.54	4.75**	0.94
Other variables								
Romantic attitudes (f > m)	78.79	89.68	86.74	86.90	78.60	87.90	13.6***	1.48
Social efficacy (aa, se > c)	94.42	96.96	88.43	86.61	99.33	98.67	0.00	6.89***
Masculinity (m > f; aa, se > c)	93.14	89.51	87.49	78.63	97.20	89.70	11.0***	6.54**
Femininity (f > m)	85.15	95.59	87.05	92.46	89.28	96.48	27.3***	1.09
Loneliness (c > aa, se; m > f)	40.51	36.30	43.42	42.11	36.90	36.05	3.67*	10.50***

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

aa = Anglo-Australian; se = Southern European; c = Chinese; m = male; f = female

Acculturation issues

Among the Chinese background group, length of residence in Australia was 11.4 years for the Chinese migrants, compared to 3.0 years for the overseas students. A MANCOVA was conducted to compare Chinese migrants with Chinese overseas students on romantic attitudes, relationship styles, masculinity, femininity, self-efficacy, and loneliness, with acculturating group and sex as independent variables and age as a covariate. There was no overall significant group difference or sex by group interaction. Univariate ANOVAS also showed no differences between the two Chinese groups on any of the social variables, neither were there any correlations between number of years' residence in Australia and these variables. Sex differences among the Chinese groups (which did not emerge as interactions in the total group analysis; see Group differences section) indicated that Chinese males were more clingy ($F_{(1,81)} = 5.97$; $p < 0.05$), fickle ($F_{(1,81)} = 5.55$; $p < 0.05$) and masculine ($F_{(1,81)} = 6.70$; $p < 0.05$) than Chinese females, but against the trends in the total sample, they did not differ with respect to femininity, romantic attitudes, skittishness, or interest in relationships. For the Chinese background group as a whole, only one variable, social self-efficacy, was associated with how Australian they felt ($r = 0.26$, $p = 0.05$). Perceived importance of being Chinese was associated with higher femininity ($r = 0.27$; $p < 0.05$), and interestingly, with more romantic attitudes ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$).

For Southern European background young people, romance styles were weakly related to acculturation measures, with clingy and fickle styles associated with extent of ethnic identification (Clingy: $r = 0.25$, $p = 0.01$; Fickle: $r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, endorsement of skittish and fickle styles was correlated with perceived importance of identification with their ethnic group ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$; $r = 0.20$, $p = 0.05$). Most of this group (93%) was born in Australia, so correlations of the social variables with length of residence were not assessed.

Correlates and predictors of loneliness

The two outcome measures used in this study were related in that young people in a relationship were significantly less likely to be lonely than those not in a romantic relationship (Mean not in relationship = 40.78 ($N = 181$); Mean in relationship = 36.67 ($N = 212$); $t(392) = 4.26$, $p < 0.001$).

Correlates of loneliness for the total group and the ethnic subgroups are shown in Table 2. Patterns suggest that common variables associated with loneliness were low social self-efficacy, and a less secure relationship style along with stronger endorsement of clingy and fickle relationship styles.

The relative importance of relationship styles, romantic attitudes, sex-role traits, social self-efficacy, and age in predicting loneliness was assessed using a standard multiple regression. None of the potential predictor variables were correlated at greater than .5, so all were included in the analysis. Because of the small sizes of the cultural group subsamples, this analysis could only be carried out with the total group, not the ethnic subgroups separately (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Beta weights for the regression are shown in Table 3. The results were significant ($F_{11,371} = 36.32$, $p < .001$), accounting for 52% of the variance of loneliness. Addition of the dummy coded relationship status variable to the regression equation did not improve prediction. Lonely young people were less secure and less casual in their relationship style, and scored lower on both social self-efficacy and femininity than the less lonely. In addition, lonely people were older, and more clingy and/or fickle. By far the strongest predictor of loneliness was low social self-efficacy.

Table 2 Correlates of loneliness for total group and cultural subgroups

Correlates of loneliness	Total group	Anglo-Australians	Chinese background youth	Southern European background
Secure	-.32**	-.38**	-.31**	-.32**
Clingy	.28**	.24**	.25**	.29**
Skittish	.22**	.30**	.12	.08
Fickle	.38**	.37**	.42**	.34**
Casual	-.05	-.01	-.04	-.19*
Uninterested	.15**	.13	.23*	.06
Romantic attitudes	-.06	-.22**	.14	.03
Social self-efficacy	-.58**	-.56**	-.60**	-.51**
Masculinity	-.30**	-.30**	-.13	-.30**
Femininity	-.18**	-.24**	-.13	-.01
Age	.24**	.16*	.18	.11

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 Predictors of loneliness (regression results)

Predictors	Beta weights
Secure	-.18***
Clingy	.20***
Skittish	-.01
Fickle	.22***
Casual	-.14**
Uninterested	.07
Efficacy	-.40***
Masculinity	.03
Femininity	-.16***
Loveways	.01
Age	.11*
F	36.22***
dfs	11,371
R ²	.52

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Predictors of relationship status

A discriminant function analysis was performed to attempt to predict relationship status from age, femininity, masculinity, social self-efficacy, romantic attitudes, and relationship styles. The discriminant function was significant ($\chi^2_{11} = 82.23$, $p < .001$), with a canonical correlation of 0.48. Pooled within-group correlations showed that the strongest predictors of relationship status were fickle (.65), uninterested (.65), casual (.58), secure (–.50), romantic attitudes (–.31), skittish (.36), and femininity (–.32). In other words, those young people currently in a relationship were more likely to have secure relationship styles, more positive attitudes to romance, and express more positive psychologically feminine traits than those not in a relationship. They were less likely to be fickle, casual, uninterested or skittish in their relationship styles. The discriminant function successfully classified 71.9% of cases, including 72.2% of those in a relationship and 65.6% of those not in a relationship. These classification rates were judged as satisfactory, being at least 25% better than would have occurred by chance (Hare, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

As the subject number requirements for discriminant function analysis are less stringent than those for regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996), it was possible to conduct separate analyses for the ethnic groups, to determine whether the patterns of predictors were different between them. For the Anglo-Australians, the discriminant function was significant, ($\chi^2_{11} = 46.75$, $p < .001$). The strongest predictors of being in a relationship were fickle (–.67), casual (–.60), uninterested (–.55), secure (.53), romantic attitude (.42), skittish (–.33), masculinity (.32), and femininity (.33). Altogether, 71.0% of the cases were classified correctly. The discriminant function for the combined Chinese groups approached but did not reach significance, with romantic attitudes (.61), age (–.46), and femininity (.45) the strongest predictors of being in a relationship. For Southern Europeans, the discriminant function was significant, ($\chi^2_{11} = 33.93$, $p = .001$). Those in a relationship were less likely to be uninterested (–.76), fickle (–.51), casual (–.51), or skittish (–.33) and more likely to be secure (.41). The discriminant function correctly classified 73.4% of cases.

Discussion

Although endorsement of romantic attitudes has been described as a phenomenon of Western nations, in this sample of young people positive attitudes to romance were as strongly endorsed by Chinese youth as by Anglo-Australians and Southern European youth. In fact, among Chinese youth there was even a weak relationship between strength of romantic attitudes and Chinese identification, while there was no such relationship for either immigrant group with strength of Australian identification. Ideal love was seen by each of these groups to involve warmth, commitment, togetherness, security, future planning, emotional well-being, and expressions of tenderness.

Despite this, subtleties of cultural difference did emerge in the extent to which Chinese young people endorsed more clingy and fickle relationship styles. In other words, they were more likely than Anglo-Australian or Southern European students to agree that at times they felt uncomfortable with independence, or closeness coupled with independence, in relationships. Chinese students were more likely to agree that they needed a great deal of closeness in relationships, to the detriment of independence expression, as in the “clingy” style. This finding is consistent with relationship norms which might be characteristic of a more collectivist society, where group needs and interconnections are more important than individual concerns. The well being of the individuals in such societies is more tied to group/relationship harmony and group goals than personal expression of needs or the development of personal goals. This is in direct contrast to Erikson’s (Westernized) notions of intimacy in relationships, which he argued could not meaningfully occur without the adequate development of a sense of personal identity. Chinese students also admitted to more problems with combining closeness and independence, as in the “fickle” style, where the person is not really sure what they need, and can oscillate between approach and avoidance of mature relationships. This could reflect some internal conflict between the individualistic norms of the majority Western culture and the collectivist norms of the minority Chinese group.

As Hatfield and Rapson (1995) point out however, while adult love schemas or relationship styles may be a highly stable outcome of socialization, they also have the capacity to change and develop through experience, self-reflection and all the various influences which move individuals through developmental stages. Among young people, such developmental change is likely to be in progress, so that current endorsement of less mature love styles may not indicate a permanent, stable state. Immigrant young people may be exhibiting slower developmental pathways in the area of social relationships, as they grapple with issues of acculturation and study. The less secure relationship style of Southern European young people in comparison with Anglo-Australians could be further evidence for this. Thus we need to keep in mind that the love style differences between Anglo-Australian, Southern European and Chinese students may reflect cultural patterns, developmental differences, consequences of the acculturation process, or a combination of these processes.

Chinese, Southern European and Anglo-Australian background young people differed not only in terms of relationship styles, but in terms of the instrumental and expressive social skills which enable romantic attitudes to be played out. Chinese young people showed lower levels of psychosocial masculinity (which includes traits like assertiveness, confidence, risk-taking, individualism, and independence) although they did not differ from the other two groups on femininity (which includes relationship skills like warmth, loyalty, and sensitivity to the needs of others). The masculinity traits may be particularly important in establishing relationships (making the first move, joining social groups, etc.), while the feminine

qualities may relate more to maintaining already established relationships. The large difference between Chinese students and the Western groups on social self-efficacy supports the idea that these Chinese young people lack confidence in establishing supportive social relationships in the Australian cultural setting. They appear to be finding difficulties not just in romantic relationships, but in making friends, joining in conversations, expressing opinions, taking the initiative, and feeling comfortable in social situations in this Westernised milieu. Thus while the three cultural groups dream of an "ideal" love relationship in romantic terms, Chinese youth express more difficulties in bringing this dream to fruition in the cultural setting in which they currently find themselves. These difficulties are perceived as arising both from internalized concerns about readiness and capacity for relationships (the love style variables), and reduced confidence in the social and cultural skills needed to initiate such relationships (masculinity and social efficacy).

An argument was made in the introduction that relationship styles, social skills, and even romantic attitudes are likely to be precursors to success in social adjustment through romantic relationships. In our study, we chose as outcome measures of success both objective and subjective indicators: current relationship status and perceived loneliness. Not surprisingly given the above group differences on relationship style and social skill variables, Chinese youth saw themselves as significantly more lonely than Anglo-Australian and Southern European youth. They were also less likely to be involved in a romantic relationship. In addition, as predicted regression and discriminant function analyses indicated that the relationship style, romance attitude, and social skill variables were strong predictors of either loneliness or relationship status (in some cases, both outcome variables). Loneliness was predicted by a combination of relationship style and social skill variables (but mainly by social efficacy). Relationship status related most strongly to the love schema (relationship style) variables and romantic attitudes, that is, was relatively independent of social skills. These patterns held true for the most part across the three cultural groups. Though the discriminant function was non-significant for the Chinese group, and romantic attitudes, rather than relationship style, was related to relationship status among this group, the construct of social skill was again unrelated to relationship status, as is the case with the other two groups.

By way of explanation, it is reasonable to assert that loneliness does not only (or always) occur because of absence of a romantic relationship. Other potential causes are perceived deficits in the number and quality of friendships, limited social contacts of a casual nature (such as may occur with fellow students or working colleagues), absence from family, or perceived lack of family support. Absent family is not necessarily the key predictor of loneliness among Chinese students, as the migrant Chinese were just as lonely as the temporary visitors. Confidence in social skills in the Australian setting was the single largest protective factor against loneliness, so that young Chinese who felt deficits in this domain were particularly disadvantaged. Romantic relationships, which could be seen as providing something of a buffer against loneliness, were not dependent on social self-efficacy. But again, young Chinese were less likely to be in such relationships and more likely to show relationship styles which worked against their establishment, either because of developmental timetable or cultural style issues.

Although the focus of interest of this article was not on sex differences, it is interesting to note that young men were more lonely, and less likely to be in a romantic relationship than young women; that is, they fared more poorly on our outcome measures. This tendency occurred across all groups. Overall, in comparison with young women, young men were less romantic, more skittish (uncomfortable with closeness), and less psychosocially feminine.

Of these three traits, only low femininity predicted loneliness, while high skittishness, low femininity, and low-level romantic attitudes were only moderate predictors of relationship status. The factors associated with loneliness in boys in general were not, apparently, poor social skills, conflicts about independence, or difficulties in initiating relationships. They appeared to be associated with difficulties with closeness. A most noticeable difference between males and females was that the young men said they were much more casual about relationships, or even uninterested in them. This choice may be a developmental one or a reflection of masculine stereotypes

The situation was somewhat different for the Chinese boys. The prediction that sex differences on some of the social variables would be weaker for the Chinese subsample was shown only as a non-significant interaction trend in the total group MANCOVA, but patterns did emerge more clearly when sex differences were analysed using only the Chinese sample. As predicted, young Chinese men were not less feminine or romantic than young Chinese women, and neither did they follow the pattern of the total male sample in being less interested in romantic relationships. Thus the factors associated with loneliness among Chinese young men appear to be somewhat different from the patterns associated with loneliness among young men in general. The Chinese patterns may be related to problems with independence and intercultural social skills, while the problems for boys in general may be more related to issues with closeness. These findings are tentative however and would need confirmation with larger samples.

Interestingly, acculturation measured in a range of ways did not relate very strongly to either the social, relationship, romance, or outcome variables. Some evidence pointed to stronger social self-efficacy and more secure relationship styles being associated with greater acculturation, but it was rather inconsistent. This may be because measures of acculturation were weak, or because relationship style (and behavior) variables are strongly ingrained and relatively resistant to acculturation.

There are some limitations to this study. While the reliabilities of the scales were adequate and all participants resided in Australia for some time (thus being exposed to Australian culture), reliability estimates only constitute weak evidence for the cultural equivalence of the scales used. Furthermore, it was not possible to fully evaluate whether differences between Anglo-Australian, Southern European, and Chinese adolescents were due to cultural factors or the immigrant status of the participants, as these variables were confounded. Further studies involving Southern European and Chinese migrant students and their counterparts in their homelands might provide clearer answers.

Within the above limitations, the study showed that Chinese young people, both visiting students and immigrants, experience loneliness, which may arise from intercultural social skill deficits. They exhibited different patterns of "love styles" and relationship outcomes from both Anglo-Australian young people and a more Westernized minority cultural group (Southern European youth), despite all groups valuing romance. These differences may impact negatively on the social adjustment of young Chinese in Australia. It would seem of value to explore the possibilities of developing interventions to address this situation.

Author note

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