

Love, Family and Friendship

Love, Family and Friendship:
A Latin American Perspective

Edited by

Agnaldo Garcia

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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BRAZILIAN YOUNG, MATURE AND OLDER ADULTS AND LOVE

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For adolescents, psychosocial crisis is characterized by opposite feelings of intimacy versus isolation. A young man or woman wants to be in a relationship, he/she does not want to remain isolated, is eager to share his/her intimacy; however, he/she is afraid of not being able to establish a deep relationship. To the extent to which one develops a solution to this conflict, love may arise. The young adult no longer has the same mood swings and frequent conflicts characteristic of adolescents. Around the age of twenty, the young person begins the separation from their families of origin and prepares for life in the academic, professional and social dimensions (Erikson, 1998).

Between the third and fifth decades of life, people strive mainly to consolidate their career choices. Also, they take care of their nuclear and origin families, and experience the birth, growth and attempts of their own children to gain independence (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006) and face the difficulties of life (Arnett, 2000). Middle age is also characterized by declining vigor, strength, youth, unrealistic dreams and aspirations.

The physiological changes that occur during adulthood suggest that older adults report lower levels of passion than younger ones. Most studies show that passion becomes less prominent; however, this decrease in passion is small (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010). The elderly often may suffer from chronic illnesses, death of spouses and friends or social isolation (Rokach & Neto, 2005), but they may continue to have satisfying romantic relationships. Neto (2012) showed that even erotic passion can be

experienced with intensity by the elderly. This suggests that it may be present in the full cycle of adulthood.

In old age, the last crisis is experienced, involving integrity versus despair. Integrity, based on reflection about life, is the ability to preserve oneself in all respects; not perceiving oneself as finished, confused and helpless. It is necessary to evaluate, review and accept things. Wisdom means to accept what was lived without regrets and that others deserve to be loved, even with their limitations (Erikson, 1998).

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in life expectancy in Brazil. Projections indicate that Brazilians will live an average of 80 years in 2041 and 81.2 years in 2060. The reduction in birth rate and the evolution of medicine are some of the factors contributing to the increase in the number of the elderly, which is expected to reach 26.7% of the Brazilian population in 2060 (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE, 2010). Consequently, knowledge about love and aging is now more important than ever.

Although love is important for people of all ages, researchers usually have investigated university students in their studies (Acker & Davis, 1992; Neto, 2001). If love can change over the course of the relationship, the evidence about this needs to come from respondents representing the whole range of ages and time durations of relationships. This is one of the questions that this investigation has explored.

Sternberg (1986) developed the Triangular Love Theory and argued that love is mainly composed of intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. These can be understood using the metaphor of a triangle in which each component occupies a vertex. Each lover has a love triangle resulting from the combination of these components. There are several kinds of love, but not all kinds include all components or require equal weight to them.

Intimacy refers to feelings of closeness, the bond that unites lovers in common dedication and affection. The signs of intimacy are: the desire to promote the well-being of the object of love; to experience happiness with him/her; to have the highest regard for him/her; to count on the loved one in times of need; mutual understanding; dividing both his/her person and possessions with the object of his/her love; to receive emotional support from him/her; to communicate closely with the object of love; and grant him/her an important value. Intimacy is defined as a foundation of love that develops slowly and results in strong connections between people, which can maintain relationships (Sternberg, 1986).

Passion is a state of strong desire for union with another and may be considered the “hot” component with the most intense feelings. The sexual need can be conducive to passion in various romantic relationships, but it

is not the only one; other needs can take part in passion, such as those related to self-esteem, affiliation, dominance/submission and self-actualization (Sternberg, 1986).

The decision/commitment component consists of two aspects: the decision to love another person, which is short term, and the commitment to keep this love, which is long term. These do not necessarily go together; the decision to love someone may not imply a commitment to that love. Commitment is the most premeditated component of love (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg (1986) suggested that each component of love takes a different course along the duration of the relationship. Levels of intimacy, passion and commitment can change over time, resulting in change in the relationship.

At the beginning of the relationship, intimacy increases continuously, then this growth slows down and stabilizes. In the beginning, loving partners do not know each other; there is much to discover. At each new discovery the union can grow and, with time, lovers can become more predictable to one another and realize a decrease in mutual feelings. This may indicate that they are moving away from each other, but it can also mean that the relationship is becoming more solid. However, due to relationship stability, the partners may no longer notice the interdependence (Sternberg, 1989).

Sternberg's ideas (1989) on the time course of intimacy were based on Berscheid's General Theory of Emotions (1983), which was inspired by Mandler's General Theory of Emotions (1975). According to these theories, emotions in intimate relationships are experienced as a result of the interruption of stereotypical interactions between partners. An expected action of a partner will not cause any emotion in the other partner, but certainly an unexpected action will make the other feel some emotion. When two people meet, they gradually develop a series of scripts or stereotyped behaviors. At first, there is uncertainty; one cannot predict the behavior of the partner. Inevitably, frequent interruptions and disruptions will be produced in the relationship until the two know each other better. Over time, interruptions decrease in frequency; partners become more predictable and more dependent on each other. Berscheid (1983) explained that, as interruptions decrease, emotions will also decrease, until they will no longer be felt by partners. In this respect, love can be understood as a process of reducing uncertainty.

The decrease of intimacy in a loving relationship has positive and negative aspects. As a positive aspect, the decrease in intimacy is a result of increased interpersonal binding, when the couple gets closer. The

partners are so interconnected that one no longer recognizes the other's presence. This kind of relationship possesses a large amount of hidden or latent intimacy. The negative aspect is that the apparent lack of intimacy can make it difficult to discriminate between an intimate relationship and one with a lack of intimacy. The most effective way to distinguish a successful from a failed relationship is by causing some disruption. A change in routine or one half of the couple being away for some time can be useful for assessing the degree of intimacy. Sometimes, only with extreme interventions can we get to know the real existing intimacy. Often, couples who appear to be in crisis because they argue and fight may have a large degree of intimacy. Many couples who separate are unaware of the degree of intimacy invested in the relationship and can later regret the decision. Small disruptions can be positive to promote awareness of the degree of latent intimacy before the effective dissolution of love (Sternberg, 1989).

Typically, passion is stronger in the beginning of a relationship; with time and regular sex, it settles to a less urgent level. The urgency may reappear at certain times, for example, when the couple is separated for a long time, but the lack of urgency does not mean that there is no passion. To understand the temporal course of passion, Sternberg (1986) appealed to Solomon's Opponent-Process Theory of Acquired Motivation (1980), which posits that the desire for a person is a function of two underlying positive and negative processes. The physical and psychological attraction to another person can lead to the emergence of passion, which grows rapidly, but also quickly reaches maximum expression. When it reaches this peak, a negative force begins to act and effectively opposes the passion, which begins to decrease, and gradually a state of habituation is established; positive and negative forces reach equilibrium. If the beloved person is lost, there would be a return to a baseline or absence of passion, but it is likely that depression and uneasiness would predominate due to the loss of positive passionate force (the desired person is gone) and the presence of negative force (the feeling of the effects of absence persists). Yela (1996, 2006), using Factor Analysis extracted a modified model of Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986), in which passion has been subdivided into erotic and romantic.

Sternberg (1989) says that the influence of time on commitment intensity depends on the relationship's success. The level is zero when both lovers meet. Generally commitment begins gradually and then its growth accelerates. If the relationship continues for a long time, the feeling of commitment gets firmer, becoming stable. If the relationship

fails, its level declines and it may return to zero or become another kind of commitment.

Several empirical studies using Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (1988) have tested Triangular Theory predictions in regard to the temporal evolution of its components. Acker and Davis (1992) conducted a survey with 204 participants ranging from 18 to 68 years old. The mean duration of the relationships was 9.5 years ($SD = 10.0$). The participants were divided into three groups based on the duration of the relationship: up to 3 years, 3-10 years and over 10 years. Overall, the results offered partial support for theory. Older respondents reported lower levels of passion. Using the variable type of relationship (or stage of relationship) as a measure of the time course, the increase in reported commitment emerged very clearly and more serious relationships were associated with greater intimacy. However, the reported intimacy failed to show decline throughout the relationship duration. The predicted decline in reported passion throughout the duration of the relationship was observed only in women; however, there was a decline of passion behaviors for both sexes in longer relationships.

The Triangular Theory of Love by Sternberg (1986) was also evaluated by Serrano and Carreño (1993) in an investigation involving 114 couples with an average relationship duration of seven years and four months, and the mean age of partners was 29 years ($SD = 6.92$). Regarding intimacy, results indicated modifications related to the relationship duration, with a reduction seen in both members of the couples. Similarly, passion decreased for both partners, but commitment increased and, after some time, had stabilized.

Yela (1997) investigated 412 students with a mean age of 22.9 years who were involved in loving relationships of various types for a median of 2.9 years ($SD = 2.94$). Most respondents were single and did not live with partners. Respondents were classified into seven groups according to the relationship duration time, ranging from less than two months to more than seven years. In the results, commitment was less important at first and gradually increased in intensity, at a rate faster than expected, until it stabilized at a level of remarkable magnitude, in the fourth year, approximately. The temporal evolution of intimacy was also quite similar to that predicted in Sternberg's theory. There was a first stage of continued rapid growth (up to four years or so) and a second one of slightly growth and stabilization. The time curve of romantic passion that was found also confirmed the theoretical prediction. In principle, romantic passion grew gradually and continued to increase gradually until a long time after erotic passion reached its maximum. Over time, decrease of romantic passion did

not reach values as low as those of erotic passion. Interestingly, erotic passion decreased more among men than among women.

Rocha and Hernandez (2002) compared the scores of a group of 42 young adults (18-25 years old) and a group of 18 elderly adults (over 60 years) who experienced stable love relationships. The results showed statistically significant differences between groups only in commitment, which was higher for the elderly. Men presented significantly higher levels of passion than women among the elderly.

In a study by Villar, Villamizar and López-Chivral (2005), 144 elderly people above 65 years of age ($M = 73$, $SD = 4.29$) and a mean relationship duration of more than 30 years ($M = 46.6$, $SD = 6.73$) responded to Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (1988). The love experience reported by the elderly was similar to those in young adults, but not identical. Commitment levels were more elevated than those of passion. Women showed lower levels of passion in comparison with men.

Ahmetoglu, Swami and Chamorro-Premuzic (2010) analyzed the scores of 16,030 participants, from 20 to 70 years old who responded online to the Triangular Love Scale in a reduced version adapted by Lemieux and Hale (1999). The results of structural equation modeling revealed the participants' age negatively associated with passion and positively associated with intimacy and commitment. Also, the relationship duration was negatively associated with passion and positively associated with commitment.

Toba (2010) investigated whether the romantic relationships of 84 college students (66 women and eighteen men) were as vulnerable to the effects of time as relationships that occur later in life. The mean age of participants was 21.96 years ($SD = 2.8$) and the mean relationship duration was 23.97 months ($SD = 21.50$ months). The results showed that scores of commitment, intimacy and passion significantly correlated with the relationship duration. Contrary to the expected result, passion did not diminish with time.

Sumter, Valkenburg and Peter (2013) investigated perceptions of love across the course of life using Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986). The researchers found differences in age and gender on the components of love in a sample of 12 to 88 years old ($n = 2791$) divided into age groups. Teens (12-17 years) reported lower levels on all components, compared to young adults (18-30 years). Adults who were older than 50 years reported the lowest levels of passion and intimacy but similar levels of commitment compared to young adults (18-30 years) and mature adults (30-50 years).

In the present study, a quantitative cross-sectional, correlational investigation was conducted, comparing groups of different ages (young, mature and older adults). Thus, the possible modifications of love over a large part of the adult life span were investigated.

Method

Participants

171 participants in this study were female and 54 male. The age ($n = 225$) ranged from 17 to 86 years ($M = 38.3$, $SD = 19.67$). The duration of the relationships of respondents ranged from one to 63 years ($M = 13.5$, $SD = 14.5$). The participants were classified into groups: young adults (17 to 30 years old), mature adults (31 to 50), and older than 50 years, and were distributed in various types of romantic relationships (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of relationship type by age

Age	Kind of relationship					total
	dating	engagement	Marriage	stable union	other	
(17-30 y.o.)	87 (90.6%)	8 (100%)	12 (13.7%)	4 (14.8%)	3 (42.9%)	114 (50.6%)
(31-50 y.o.)	4 (4.2%)	0	33 (37.9%)	9 (33.3%)	3 (42.9%)	63 (28.0%)
(≥ 51 y.o.)	5 (5.2%)	0	42 (48.3%)	14 (51.9%)	1 (14.3%)	48 (21.3%)
Total	96 (42.7%)	8 (3.6%)	87 (38.7%)	27 (12.0%)	7 (3.1%)	225 (100%)

Instruments

The researchers used Hernandez's (1999) adaptation of Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (1997, 1998). This instrument consists of 45 items, divided equally between three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. To respond to items, a Likert scale of five points was used. Participants also provided the following information: age, sex, type, and relationship duration.

Data Collection

Data collection was performed at the main campus of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) with students from various courses. Most of the elderly participants were students at the University of the Third Age (UnATI – UERJ). However, some of the data were obtained from groups of friends, medical clinics, gyms, parks and squares. Data

were collected in both forms, in groups and individually. This study was approved by the CAAE – UERJ No. 129,870 of 14/11/2012 and all procedures relating to the ethics of human research have been observed.

Data Analysis

The software SPSS version 20 was used for data typing and analysis, using descriptive statistical techniques, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, Multiple Regression Analysis and Analysis of Variance.

Results

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient did not show statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) between the age of participants and the average scores of love components (commitment, intimacy and passion). As expected, the age of participants showed a strong direct correlation with relationship duration. No significant correlations between relationship duration and the scores for intimacy and passion were found.

However, regarding commitment, multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise manner) revealed relationship duration (4%) and gender (2%) as their predictors, and together accounted for 6% of the variance in the dependent variable. For male participants, as relationship duration increased, commitment levels grew.

Considering the ages of participants classified into age groups (young adults, mature and over 50 years), Analysis of Variance of love components revealed statistically significant differences between means of intimacy, $F(2, 224) = 6.750$, $p < 0.001$, and passion, $F(2, 224) = 4.697$, $p < 0.01$.

The Scheffé post hoc test identified that these differences in intimacy stood among young adults ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.42$) and mature adults ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.74$), and among those over 50 years ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.58$) and mature adults. Levels of intimacy for young adults and those older than 50 were higher than those of mature adults. Regarding passion, the Scheffé post hoc test identified that differences existed between young adults ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.59$) and mature adults ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.84$), and between those over 50 years ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.85$) and mature adults. Levels of passion for young adults and those older than 50 were higher than those of mature adults. No other statistically significant differences (Figure 1) were found.

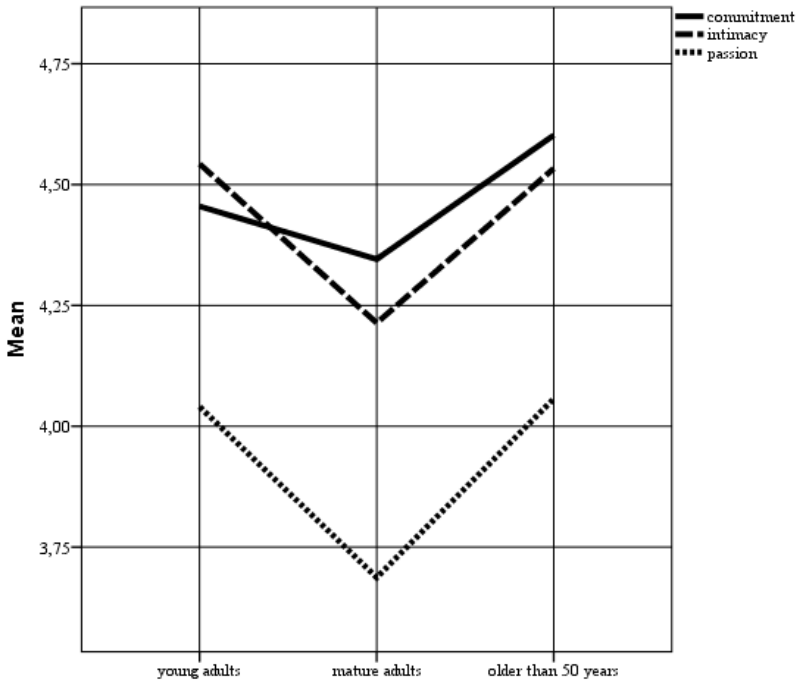


Figure 1. Mean values of love components by age

Although some relationship types (engagement and stable union) had a reduced number of participants (Table 1), they were divided into two groups according to the developmental stages of a love relationship: one compound of dating and engagement ($n = 104$) and another compound of marriage and stable union ($n = 114$). Participants who reported other relationship types were excluded from this procedure due to the difficulty of classifying them. Analysis of Variance of the factor relationship types for components of love found marginal statistical difference ($p = 0.06$) between the mean scores of groups in committed relationships, suggesting that the average of the dating-engagement group may be lower than the stable union-marriage group.

Analysis of Variance of the gender factor of participants to love components found statistically significant differences, $F(1, 223) = 5.515$, $p = 0.02$, between the mean values of women and men. Mean levels of passion declared by men ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.63$) were higher than those reported by women ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.76$).

Discussion of Results

In this study, no statistically significant correlations between participants' age and their mean scores on commitment, intimacy and passion were found. Acker and Davis (1992) found lower levels of passion in older respondents and Ahmetoglu et al. (2010) found participants' age negatively associated with passion and positively with intimacy and commitment.

Studies have found wider evidence (Ahmetoglu, Swami & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Carreño & Serrano, 1993; Yela, 1997) and partial evidence (Acker & Davis, 1992) about the effects of relationship duration over the course of love components. In the current study, significant and positive relationships between relationship duration, gender of participants and commitment were found, supporting Sternberg's theory which states that in order for a relationship to be sustainable, the development of commitment is essential (Sternberg, 1998). In the literature, the results of gender differences related to commitment have been inconsistent. Some studies do not report differences (Gao, 2001) and other investigations, like the present study, found that men report more commitment (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010) or that women report more commitment (Lemieux & Hale, 1999).

However, when people indicate that they are at a more advanced stage of a relationship (marriage or stable union), by definition, they will report higher levels of commitment, according to Acker and Davis (1992).

Considering the age of participants classified into age groups, the present study found higher levels of intimacy for young adults (17-30 years) than for mature adults (31-50 years). This decline in intimacy between the young adults and mature adults groups could be explained by Berscheid's General Theory of Emotions (1983). That is, the decrease (Figure 1) would be a reduction in reported intimacy (perceived), but not in latent intimacy (not perceived). A marginal statistical difference was revealed for passion, with scores for young adults (17-30 years) higher than those for mature adults (31-50 years). This result corroborates Sternberg's theoretical prediction (1986), based on Solomon's Opponent Process Theory of Acquired Motivation (1980). Passion, which quickly reaches its maximum expression, would gradually decrease until the settlement into the habituation state. That is a result of the function of opposing processes underlying passion. Now, the resumption of passion to higher levels, in mature adults and in those older than 50 years, could be understood by the model proposed by Yela (1996). If erotic passion declines for older participants, this can recover through growth of

romantic passion (Figure 1). On Sternberg's scale, along with elements of passion linked to sexual, erotic motivation, there are also others which are more romantic, such as idealization of the partner and belief in the omnipotence of love, which could raise passion to significant levels among older lovers. Gouveia, Carvalho, Santos and Almeida (2013) found no differences between men and women on ratings of erotic passion, but levels of romantic passion were higher in women.

In the present study, men presented higher levels of passion than women, a result also found by Ahmetoglu et al. (2010). Some studies have found no differences between men and women in the measures of love components (Ahmetoglu et al, 2010; Carreño & Serrano, 1993; Sternberg, 1997), while others have found differences (Acker & Davis, 1992; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Rock & Hernandez, 2002; Sumter, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2013; Villar, Villamizar, & López-Chivral, 2005). These contrasting findings seem to support the idea that conventional approaches to love and sex differences have received only limited research support in the social and behavioral sciences.

In recent studies, sex differences in the perception of love seem less robust than before (Gao, 2001; Ha, Overbeek, de Greef, Scholte, & Engels, 2010). Some researchers have advocated the idea that the experience of love depends more on gender orientation than on the sex of participants (Coleman & Ganong, 1985) and that differences in love among the sexes are greater than between the sexes (Sumter et al., 2013). Small and inconsistent evidence for sex differences found in investigations about love may reflect the gradual decline of overall sex differences in society today.

Conclusions

The present study had as its central objective an aim to understand the evolution of love by comparing different stages of human development: young adults, mature adults and the elderly. Correlations between love components (commitment, intimacy and passion) with age, age groups, length of relationships, sex, and relationship types or stages of the participants were also investigated. In the results, there was only partial support for the development of the temporal course of love components as predicted in the Triangular Theory of Love.

Although some previous studies have provided evidence supporting the theory, in others this has not occurred. The fact that the size and especially the characteristics of the samples (age of participants and relationship

duration) and procedures sometimes differed between studies could explain these disparate results.

A sample restricted to a particular region, of moderate size and non-probabilistic, as used in this study, could skew the results and do not reflect theoretical predictions. It is suggested that further investigations should be made with broader samples and the use of a longitudinal strategy, which would be more consistent to investigate the effects of time on love. It is also suggested to include a gender orientation variable, besides the sex of participants, in future research on romantic relationships.

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BRAZILIAN WOMEN DATING MEN FROM OTHER COUNTRIES: THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Intercultural romantic relationships involve people from different cultures, which may include different national origin, race and religion. Intercultural romantic relationships have been considered more complex than those between partners belonging to the same culture (Troy, Lewis-Smith & Laurenceau, 2006).

The international literature on intercultural dating and early romantic relationship is restricted in comparison to the literature on intercultural marriages. Early romantic relationships have been investigated between people from different races and ethnicities. Harris and Kalbfeisch (2000) investigated the racial implications at the beginning of a romantic interracial relationship. Other authors such as Knox, Zusman, Buffington and Hemphill (2000) studied the attitudes among college students regarding interracial dating and tolerance for racial diversity, in which most informed that they would date someone of another race and would be tolerant to this form of relationship. Levin, Taylor and Caudle (2007) also investigated inter-ethnic and inter-racial dating among college students. The characteristics of those who date someone racially different were studied by Yancey (2002). A few studies have examined early romantic relationships between individuals from different national origins, as in the study about dating patterns among Russian immigrants at a university in Israel (Remennick, 2005).

Perlman (2008) notes that most studies imply early relationship when addressing other issues such as romantic attraction, falling in love, partner selection, nonverbal communication, and speed dating. However, Perlman (2008) argues that the beginning of a love relationship should be approached as a specific area of study on romantic relationships, rather than being approached indirectly. Regarding what is considered as the

beginning of a relationship, there is no consensus among authors on the aspects that define this relationship stage. Barbee and Cunningham (2008) suggested investigating how people establish initial contacts at the beginning of a romantic relationship, including verbal and non-verbal behavior. Authors examining speed-dating (e.g. Eastwick & Finkel, 2008) deal with rapid interactions (three to eight minutes) to address early romantic relationship events. In other cases (e.g. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2008), the beginning is considered the first months of a relationship, and others (e.g. Hazan & Zeifman, 1994) may consider that the period in which all the functions of attachment occur and are linked to the new partner lasts for years, in this case, around two years.

Different theoretical approaches may be observed in the analysis of the beginning of a relationship, such as the evolutionary perspective of partner selection (e.g. Buss, 1989). In this case, the main attributes valued in the selection, listed by women in search of male partners for lasting relationship, include providing good company, honesty, a good social position, affection and understanding, reliability, intelligence, fidelity and a good sense of humor. Men value younger women with good physical appearance, which would be related to fertility.

In the case of intercultural affective-sexual relationships, cultural differences between partners have been considered as attraction factors (Perel, 2000). However, according to this author, intercultural conflict may occur when partners take opposing positions on the differences that earlier in the relationship were perceived as attractive. Thus, cultural differences that are attractive at the beginning of the relationship may give rise to difficulties later on in the relationship.

Knox et al. (2000) cite both similarity and complementarity as important factors in intercultural romantic attraction. Partners of different racial or ethnic backgrounds may be, however, very similar in educational level or in personality characteristics (Rushton, 1989). Two opposing theoretical tendencies were presented by Falicov (1995) to explain the choice of a partner from another nationality or culture: the attraction between partners occurs because of perceived similarities between them (similarity), and others argue that the attraction is due to the perception of differences, which may be complementary between partners (complementarity).

The self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1996) is another possibility in order to understand the formation and maintenance of intercultural relationships, based on the fundamental motivation to enlarge the concept of self. The individual would be looking for opportunities to acquire new identities, to develop new prospects, improve his/her skills and participate

in new experiences. Thus relationships are the primary means of satisfying this need for self-expansion in intercultural relationships.

The main reason for women to initiate a romantic relationship, until a few decades ago, was related largely to spouse search for formal marriage (Zordan, Falcke, & Wagner, 2009). Currently, the reasons for beginning a relationship may include, for example, recreation or companionship, with no plans for marriage or union. Thus, the attributes and values considered in the selection of partners change according to what the individual seeks in an affective-sexual relationship (Fletcher et al., 2008). Buston and Emlen (2003) showed that for a long-term relationship, people look for a partner similar to themselves.

Method

The investigation conducted was a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory, multiple case study. The participants were eight adult Brazilian women dating a foreign man over the past two years. In all cases, the couple spoke different languages. The study was approved by the Committee on Ethics in Research of the Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded, with the prior consent of participants. The average length of the interviews was one hour and thirty minutes. Interviews were conducted with Brazilian women who lived in Brazil at that period or with Brazilian women who were on vacation in Brazil during the period of data collection.

The responses were subject to thematic content analysis (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2008). Thus the material was coded and categorized. Continuous comparisons and reviews enabled the thematic organization of the material.

Results and Discussion

1. The Participants and the Meeting Context

The age of respondents ranged from 19 to 45 years. With respect to education, six interviewees had completed a college course, and the other two had not completed a college course. With regard to men, the age ranged between 19 and 50, and all had finished high school or university. The participants and their boyfriends belonged to the middle class and lived in an urban context. So age, educational levels and socioeconomic aspects were similar. The literature confirms the high frequency of intercultural couples composed of similar people based on race, education,

age, and socioeconomic status (Remennick, 2005). All of the women worked in different jobs. The duration of relationships also varied greatly among women, ranging from three months to seven years. Two interviewees (Ingrid and Helena) were no longer dating a foreign man at the time of the interview. Participants established the first contact with the boyfriend in different contexts, in Brazil (Amanda) or abroad (Alana, Helena, Perla and Anita). Angelica, Anna and France met their boyfriends on the internet.

2. Cultural Differences and Dating

As factors of attraction, the women mentioned: physical attractiveness, sociability (kindness/thoughtfulness), personality, intelligence, commitment/seriousness, and cultural background. In the following paragraphs, the attraction factors attributed to the fact that the partner was from another country and culture are described and discussed.

2.1 Cultural Background as an Attraction Factor – Participants stated that the cultural background of their foreign partner was an important factor of attraction. The cultural background refers to the domain of other languages, the knowledge of other cultures and the partner's travel experience. The interest in a partner from another country was justified by intrapersonal development promoted by the exchange of experiences: "He has traveled a lot and he speaks five languages. These things are amazing (...) the conversation is different" (Alana).

Angelica also perceived the cultural background as appealing: "So it was a diverse cultural experience. He had lived in several countries, so he knew a lot of things; we never remained without saying anything (...). I liked that contact with a different culture (...). They are more educated than we are (...)" (Angelica).

France also considered her partner's cultural background as attractive: "He is very educated, very fond of history and he has a very ethical concern with minorities. It delights me so much, this question of a foreign man to be concerned with people who are disadvantaged socially. I find it interesting. This is a very positive aspect about him" (France).

Different cultural perspectives between the partners were perceived positively by participants. As Alana said, "So, I am breaking some of his standards, paradigms, dogmas ... and he also breaks mine ... then this difference is culture shock ... this is not something that breaks our relationship, but I think it builds it; differences made our relationship more interesting". Ana worked as a teacher and translator of the German language, and she dated a man from Germany. She said: "I don't have

much interest in a Brazilian man, I do not know ... maybe because 70% of my day is devoted to Germany”.

In all these cases, different cultural backgrounds were regarded as a factor of attraction for a romantic relationship. The opportunity to date a man from another country and culture was seen as a gain in cultural terms.

2.2 Cultural Differences on the Evaluation of Physical Aspects of Women – Another point perceived positively as a cultural difference between men from other countries and Brazilian men was related to the evaluation of physical aspects of women considered for a romantic relationship. According to the women, foreign men had a different conception about women, compared to their experience with Brazilian men.

Angelica, Anna and France compared Brazilian and foreign men as romantic partners. All three highlighted the difficulty in establishing long-term loving relationships with a Brazilian partner. They believed that men from other countries attributed less importance to physical appearance and the age of women compared to Brazilian men, in the case of romantic relationships. According to Ana: “I cannot live with a Brazilian man; first, because I think I have not the physical profile of a girl who can date whoever she wants, and the Germans are always interested in what you are, and not so on what you seem to be, your physical appearance” (Ana).

According to Ana, the social pressure to have a “perfect body” in the Brazilian culture was one of the reasons for being interested in a German partner, since she does not have the standard body defended by media and desired by many Brazilian men. Goldemberg (2011) points out that the body is seen as “capital” in Brazilian culture, being perceived as related to opportunities to obtain social benefits. Ana says that “Brazilian men give more value to physical beauty than foreign men (...). In terms of culture, a regular common German man (...) his first thought about a woman is not that her body is wonderful, slim” (Ana).

Angelica also complains that “Brazilian men, especially now that I’m not so young ... they just want to enjoy life” (Angelica). France also believes that, in Brazil, there are “a lot of beautiful women, lots of interesting women ... So here, a single woman at my age has only one possibility: to relate to a younger man because men of our age range [are] already married ... when he separates, he seeks a young woman too. You will hardly meet a man in your age group who wants to start over with a woman in the same range of his age” (France). So, according to France, due to her age, she believes she would not find a Brazilian romantic partner.

These women perceive important cultural differences between how Brazilian and foreign men consider women as romantic partners. According to them, the physical aspects of women, including their age and physical appearance, are of paramount importance to Brazilian men. They believe that foreign men would provide affection and companionship for women like them while Brazilian men would be more focused on sexuality, looking for a young and perfect body. For them, foreign men would show more loyalty and commitment in romantic relationships. De Lima and Togni (2012) studied Brazilian immigrant women in Portugal and observed a similar pattern, as the women investigated also associated Brazilian men with sexuality and infidelity, while Portuguese men were associated with commitment and loyalty.

2.3 Cultural Differences in Body Contact – The women also mentioned cultural differences concerning body contact in the beginning of a romantic relationship between Brazilian and foreign men. Participants considered foreign boyfriends as “slow” to take initiative in physical proximity, different from Brazilian partners who sought physical contact in the first meeting: “They are quite slow, they do not do something like that (physical contact). Most of my Brazilian girlfriends say we (women) have to kiss them, we have to take the initiative to kiss because they do not kiss” (Ana). They describe the behavior of Brazilian men as quite different: “Brazilian men are objective on a date ... on the first night, they will try to kiss you ... He did not, it took several nights meeting” (Anita).

The delay for the couple to reach greater intimacy and sexual contact, despite meeting frequently, resulted in a positive perception about the partner, as they perceived this behavior as an indication that the partner’s interests were not only sexual and casual. Even so, the absence of physical contact in the beginning of a romantic relationship also produced anxiety and annoyance, because they (the women) were not sure whether the relationship was based on friendship or emotional-sexual interest.

This situation made it difficult to know exactly when a romantic relationship had started, considering the lack of physical contact. Alana reported that her romantic relationship is not marked by a specific date of celebration, since the interactions occurred for a period of time and not on a specific day as reported by Alana: “(...) I have not the faintest idea of the first day we started dating”. Ana also considered that the initiative was always hers, because “they never take the first step ... a German man will rarely make the first move because he thinks it’s a lack of respect for the woman” (Ana).

The absence of body contact was perceived with ambiguity. Although this was interpreted initially as an indication of commitment and

seriousness, they also reported anxiety and discomfort while waiting for a partner to manifest affective-sexual interest, feeling insecure about the nature of the relationship, whether it was dating or friendship. This behavior pattern, however, was not described by Perla, who dated a man originally from South America, although living in the US, which implied cultural similarities in the beginning of the dating relationship.

The importance of body contact had already been observed in Brazilian women in a different context. Piscitelli (2007) observed that women in the context of prostitution from the Northeastern region in Brazil sought primarily, in a relationship, a chance to get out of their poor living conditions, thus the concern regarding the affective-sexual relationship with their partner was smaller or nonexistent. Possibly, different educational and sociocultural differences may be responsible for these differences.

Another aspect observed in other investigations refers to the foreign man who is seen as a provider, which was not observed in this investigation. Rosa (2000) investigated Brazilian women with higher education, purposefully seeking to meet a foreign partner for a relationship with commitment. The author observed that those women expected that the partner would provide for the wife and the home.

In this study, the authors have observed that the participants expected a long-term relationship, as they were looking for emotional security (e.g., commitment, loyalty, and investment in the relationship). However, they did not indicate they were searching for financial security in their partners, which would be expected according to theories of mate selection.

2.4 Cultural Differences in Commitment and Companionship – Although some participants informed that expectations regarding romantic relationship with a foreign man or with a Brazilian partner would be similar, some differences perceived in their relationships were attributed to cultural differences. Amanda and Angelica declared that their expectations concerning romantic relationship were independent of the national or cultural origin of the partner, emphasizing that they expected a similar relationship with a Brazilian or a foreign partner. Amanda pointed out that the national origin of the boyfriend was not important and expectancies were the same "... my boyfriend is American. No, he is people, get it? ... There is no difference. It's all the same" (Amanda).

Angelica also stated that expectations regarding relationship with a foreign or a Brazilian partner were the same: "I hope the same thing, to be well treated in the first place (...) being Brazilian or foreign" (Angelica).

On the other hand, when these women described their romantic relationships with men from other countries, it was possible to note that

they did mention cultural differences, especially in commitment and companionship, identified earlier as important at the beginning of the relationship. Companionship and commitment were perceived in the foreign partner, what was not the case in Brazilian partners: “I had to import a man because here, men do not value women; there are a lot of women and they do not know how to value them. But not John, he is a super companion, he likes to do things with me” (Amanda).

Ana also highlights that German men are more faithful and committed: “I think that German men are also less unfaithful and more committed in dating, in a relationship, compared to Brazilian men” (Ana). Considering romantic love seriously and demonstrating affection were associated with a foreign partner: “I began to realize that he was different from guys from Brazil. He took me seriously, sending me messages every day, actually, all the time, wanting to introduce me to his family” (Helena).

These women also considered foreign men as more affectionate, more thoughtful, and better companions. Amanda highlighted another difference between Brazilian and foreign men. According to her, Brazilian men do not want their girlfriends to share their friendships: “Like, ‘today I have to hang out only with my friends (other guys)’. It is not so with us: we have fun together (...). (Brazilian) men have this need ... to have fun and you cannot see what they are doing; as if he was doing something wrong and has to hide it, but he (the foreign boyfriend) has no such need” (Amanda).

In general, companionship, kindness and thoughtfulness were attributed to foreign partners. Thus, women praised their foreign partners, at times, and criticized Brazilian men, which may suggest idealization of the partner from another country (Fletcher et al., 2008). However, perceptions of the partner and the relationship may be distorted in the initial stage of a loving relationship, as attention is focused on the partner’s positive aspects (Knee & Bush, 2008; Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000). Rosa (2000) interviewed women from the Northeast region of Brazil, who were seeking to meet foreign men for long term romantic relationships. According to the author, participants re-interpreted any negative aspect of the relationship to maintain the “fairy tale”.

2.5 Rationality and Cultural Differences – For some participants, rationality in thinking and relating was assigned to cultural belonging. Alana, for example, reported that the logical and pragmatic way of her German boyfriend contrasted with her Brazilian emotional and subjective way of thinking, which generated personal and cultural development. According to her, “They (Germans) require much more from you. You cannot only give your opinion, ‘Oh I think so’. (...) On what basis are you able to say this? ... They require a lot (...). For example, a