

Attachment and Conflict in Inter-Cultural Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT: This study explores factors that govern the emotional experience of inter-cultural romantic partners in the presence of cultural conflict. The results demonstrate that individuals who are more insecurely attached (both anxious and avoidant) show lower perceptions of cultural compatibility, experience more negative emotional reactions, and lower relationship satisfaction. Anxious attachment, in particular, appears to drive lower levels of trust. The results also demonstrate the dyadic effect of perceived partner openness in moderating negative outcomes among the insecurely attached. These findings are discussed in terms of the broader implications for the quality, satisfaction and stability of inter-cultural relationships.

METHOD: Sixty-two inter-cultural heterosexual dating couples were recruited from the psych student pool and local Toronto community.

Length of relationships: $M = 25.78$ months, $SD = 27.57$, ages of men $M = 21.18$ yrs, $SD = 3.69$ & women $M = 20.37$ yrs, $SD = 3.56$

Pre-Interaction Questionnaire

- Attachment
- Perceived Partner Openness
- Trust

Cultural Conflict Discussions

The study consisted of two videotaped discussions concerning issues of cultural conflict. Each partner was asked to initiate a conversation about a time or event in their relationship in which they felt that their culture and their partner's culture were different, inconsistent, or incompatible in some way. Each discussion lasted 8 minutes.

Post-Interaction Questionnaires

- Emotional Experience
- Perceived Cultural Compatibility
- Satisfaction

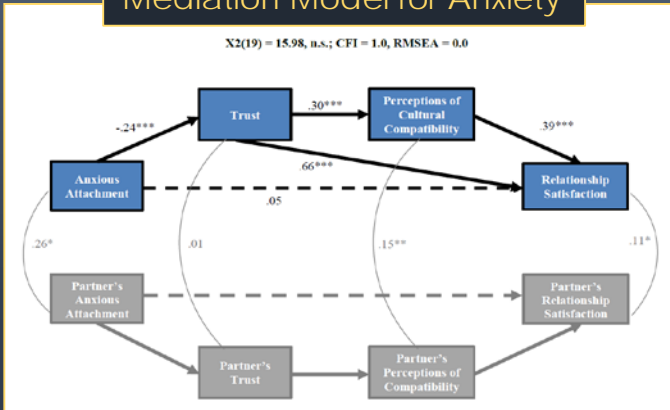
RESULTS: As predicted, we found that attachment anxiety is significantly associated with trust; trust predicts perceptions of cultural compatibility with the partner; and perceptions of cultural compatibility in turn predicts relationship satisfaction. Additionally, there is a direct effect of trust on relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that trust is a key factor that governs relationship satisfaction, particularly for anxiously attached individuals.

Interestingly, although the results for these pathways were similar, attachment avoidance maintained a significant direct effect on relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$. Additionally, moderation analyses demonstrate that perceived partner openness provided a buffering effect on relationship satisfaction for individuals high in avoidance.

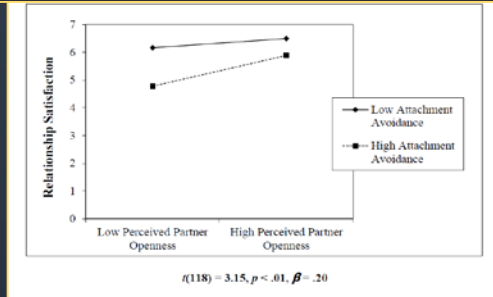
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Anxiety							
2. Avoidance							
3. Perceived Partner Openness							
4. Perceived Cultural Compatibility							
5. Negative Emotions							
6. Relationship Satisfaction							
7. Trust							

Correlations between all variables. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.1$

Mediation Model for Anxiety



Partner Moderation of Avoidance



CONCLUSION: The present research demonstrates mechanisms that differentiate anxious and avoidant attachment styles. In the context of intercultural relationships, the findings show that the association between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction is mediated by trust, whereas the link between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction is moderated by perceptions of partner openness. The present study helps us better understand mechanisms for coping with inter-cultural challenges.



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