

The representation of love among Brazilians, Russians and Central Africans: A comparative analysis

Tatiana S. Pilishvili*, Eugénie Koyanongo

Philology faculty People's Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia

* Corresponding author. E-mail: pilishvili_ts@pfur.ru

This paper is dedicated to the cultural specificities of three typical collective groups with respect to the representation of love. The research subject focuses on the cross-cultural similarities and differences in how love is conceptualized among highly educated citizens of Brazil (50), Russia (50), and Central Africa (50) (age range 21–60; $M = 34$). We used “The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing” questionnaire (I.A. Djidaryan, E.V. Belovol, & O.V. Maslova) and the “Directed associations with ‘love’ as the word-stimulus” technique (on the basis of C.G. Jung’s associative experiment and P. Vergès’s methodology).

The results show similarities and differences in how love is represented among the groups. The following similarities were found: Love is seen as all that is good and kind about a person, a way to become better. At the peripheral level, the social representation of love includes friendship, patience, and passion. At the point of cross-cultural differences, it was found that: a) The main emotion reflecting how love is represented for Brazilians is honesty, for Russians — suffering, for Central Africans — tenderness; b) Brazilians understand love as a sensual, personal moral choice; Russians perceive love as an obstacle, a problem in itself; Central Africans conceptualize love as God-given and ennobling of the person; c) love is conceptualized as something inherent and family-oriented among Russians, intrapersonal and intimate among Brazilians, and divine among Central Africans. The results mean that within peripheral confines, the notion of love among the groups matches to a certain extent R. Sternberg’s triangle of love, while its core zone is culturally specific.

Keywords: love representation; cross-cultural specificity; value-semantic aspect of love; love and culture

Introduction

Love is regarded as one of the fundamental aspects of life, yet for a long time there has been no concrete scientific method that allows for thorough research of this phenomenon. The main reason is that the topic of love goes beyond the theoretical

confines of science. In addition, people in the world of art, who focus on persuasion more than they do on the pursuit of truth, and particularly scientific truth, are usually the ones who study this topic. Another reason for the difficulty in studying the concept of love is the fact that it is so complicated!

In 1958 H. Harlow informed his colleagues that psychology does not realize the importance of the problem of love and paradoxically invests less time in studying this question than do ordinary people in their everyday life (cited in Fehr, Shaver, Simpson, & Dovidio, 2015). The stimulus towards psychological research on the question of love came from the development of positive psychology in the 1980s. This area in psychology focused mainly on positive changes in personality, rather than the problems and pathological issues on which classical psychology has focused its attention. From this point of view, love is an intrapersonal resource in which the acknowledgment of your existence by someone else grants you the opportunity of going beyond your own person.

Psychologists are aware that people experience love across the geographic spectrum. The classical theory, Sternberg's triangular theory of love, identifies three apexes: intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). His triangle shows both the strength and style of love. The triangle's apexes differ in distance and are positioned in different ways depending on the person. He outlined eight different concepts of love which can be altered at any time during the development of the individual. Sternberg's triangle is considered international in application and its uniqueness is defined by the distance, size, and changeability of its different aspects as time goes by.

Despite the universal characteristics of love and the universal symbols by which they are described, different cultures conceptualize love in very different ways. Society and culture dictate people's expectations of others, how people describe their experiences, and the ways in which they build their relationships. Communication is making our world smaller and smaller. People are meeting others from completely different ethnic backgrounds more and more often. The interaction among cultures is becoming more prevalent and intercultural marriages and families, once rare, are growing. However, with the prevalence of such marriages come frequent disappointments, worries, and misunderstandings. From a practical psychological point of view, the need for people from different cultures to understand love is an important task. Thus the study of how love is understood by different cultures is both interesting and relevant, not only from a scientific standpoint, but also to help people all over the world experience an improved quality of life.

Fehr & Russel (1991) conducted several prototypical analyses of love in six studies. They focused on the natural language concept of love, which is not the same as the classical categories of love that various researchers have described. Their research method made it possible to study the topic more meticulously, while allowing for a less stringent categorization of the different concepts of love: a) in relation to the subject (a mother's love, a father's love, a brother's love, romantic love, etc.); b) in relation to the ways of experiencing love. This approach, in which the differences in love languages are outlined by the participants themselves, is juxtaposed to a firm descriptive scientific analysis of love; based upon everyday contact among people, it gives an unscientific picture of how ordinary people perceive love. Fehr (2006) noted that the advantages afforded by an atypical analysis of love, in

comparison with a descriptive analysis, are such that opportunities are offered to investigate both cultural and individual perceptions of the topic.

Research on the cultural perception of love is based on the theory of social representations (Moskovici, 1998). The social representation structure includes the core zone and the periphery (Abric, 2001). The core zone is the constant and main part of the social representation, which systematizes the social representation, giving it meaning. The core zone is always equal and constant. Destructions in the core element bring to changes in the social representation itself. It is related to the collective memory, its values, standards, and the history of the group. The core zone provides stable development, defense from destruction, and maintains the connection between social representations and objective reality. In describing the structure of social representations, we applied P. Vergès's methodology, which is useful because with it the core zones of social representations are composed of concepts associated with stimuli from a large number of respondents. In other words, they have low ranks and high frequency.

The cultural differences in how love is perceived have become quite a popular topic for research, especially within and between the so-called individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Church (2016) specifies that modern psychology is revising the problem of consistency that relates to early personality traits from a specific cross-cultural point of view. Companionate love is being studied intensively. This type of love includes feelings of affection, compassion, caring, and tenderness (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). It is contrasted with passionate love, which is defined as "a wildly emotional state characterized by emotional extremes, physiological arousal, and sexual attraction" (Fehr et al., 2015, p. 496). One can assume that compassionate love is typical among representatives of collective cultures, love which a person accepts within his family and other referential groups that conform to his way of life.

Russian psychologists have done research on happiness, with samples from 34 countries. It was found that love comprises an important part of the social representation of happiness among both optimists and pessimists in all the cultures that were studied. Kokurina and Solina (2014) underline that love is "presented as an independent value, primarily associated with striking emotional experiences, which has aspects of psychological addiction" (p. 93).

The connection between self-determination and openness towards love relationships as a resource state for wellbeing is the mutual consolidation of happiness among interpersonal relationships. This increases the impact of one's own position in life, not depending on another person, according to Knee, Hadden, Porter, and Rodriguez (2013).

Research by Soloski, Pavkov, Sweeney, and Wetchler (2013) shows that love became an integral part of marriages in western countries in the mid 1900s. They note the importance of intergenerational connections in love relationships, writing that high interparental conflict generates a low level of love, while maintenance of the relations even though separated from parents is connected to a higher quality of love. This study emphasizes the link between the way people experience love within the family system on the horizontal scale (intrafamily communication as a small social system) and on the vertical scale (intergenerational connections). The levels are fundamentally different within individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

In individualistic cultures, it seems that love is understood as personal experiences that are not acquired from the family nor from a group, but in a couple relationship and more intensive interpersonal groups (Fehr et al., 2015). However, the representation of love among Chinese young people (as representatives of a typical collective culture) showed no differences between them and their American counterparts (who are representatives of a typical individualistic culture). The two groups shared similar ideas of love, which included “altruism,” “intrusive thinking,” “self-actualization,” “emotional fulfillment,” “sexual attraction, biology” (Jankowiak, Shen, Yao, Wang, & Volsche, 2015). The adaptation of the questionnaire “The passionate love scale” used by Yildirm, Hablemitoglu, and Barnett (2014) with Turkish students, also revealed that love is understood by the Turkish students in the same way as in an individualistic culture. Suffice it to say that according to Espín (2013), the psychotherapist is presented with a very serious question in working with bilingual and multilingual clients who categorize love differently than does the mainstream national culture. Therefore, this issue must be on the table for discussion by specialists.

We have pointed out a few similarities and differences in how society perceives love within individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Presumably, most individualistic and collectivist cultures have similarities and differences in their conceptualization of love based on value-semantic coding, gender, age, educational level, etc. Moreover, the research suggests that there are different concepts of love within collectivistic cultures, but with unified features such as valuing others and a sense of belonging to established groups. It seems that within peripheral confines, the notion of love among the groups matches R. Sternberg’s triangle of love (intimacy, passion, commitment), while its inner content is culturally specific (Sternberg, 1986).

This article analyzes the concept of love and provides a thorough analysis of the characteristics in the value-semantic aspect of love in three cultural groups: Brazilians, Russians, and Central Africans. These groups were chosen based on their geographical, linguistic, and ethno-cultural differences. However, in ethno-psychology they are all considered collectivist. This is where their similarities converge. The similarity is seen as evidence of the universal value of love within collectivist cultures, whereas their differences involve the meaningful relationships with others who are apart of a specific society that is considered primary for them (soft and friendly in Brazil; compassionate and understanding in Russia; and genuinely vital in the Central African Republic).

Method

Participants

150 participants were involved in the empirical research, which consisted of 25 men and 25 women in each cultural group. Their ages ranged from 21 to 60 in each of the three groups, ($M = 34$). We randomly selected the participants from the University of Brasília (Brasília), People’s Friendship University of Russia (Moscow), and the University of Bangui (Bangui). The following demographic characteristics were noted: age, gender, level of education, affiliation to or membership in the culture in question. To establish parity in gender, age, and the extent to which one is affiliated to a specific culture, we chose participants who are highly educated and

currently living in the capital of their respective countries. We did not collect any additional information on the participants that could have been valuable in studying the different representations of love; however, these factors are important and merit future study.

Materials

The following diagnostic materials were provided: “The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing” questionnaire (Djidaryan, Belovol, & Maslova, 2014) and “Directed associations with ‘love’ as the word-stimulus” (on the basis of C.G. Jung’s associative experiment).

“Directed associations with ‘love’ as the word-stimulus” is based on the theory of social representations (Moskovič, 1998). This scale of measuring a person’s conscious understanding of love was chosen because it lends itself to an effective system for valuing the social representations of love that are unique to a specific group, with relevance to its core and peripheral zone concepts. The core zone concepts are those associated with the first-place stimulus in the largest number of respondents; they have a low rank and high frequency.

To determine how love is represented among the three cultural groups, “The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing” (Djidaryan et al., 2014) was used. This questionnaire was designed to measure the value-semantic aspects of love. It consists of 26 aphorisms about love, taken from different epochs within prominent nations around the world (Shakespeare, Tolstoy, A. de Saint-Exupéry, Balzac, Voltaire, and others). The participants were instructed to compare their perception of love with these classical ideas. The options provided in the questionnaire are “totally agree,” “agree,” “difficult to answer,” “do not agree,” and “strongly disagree.” The questionnaire has three (3) indicators and each statement has a sub-scale, ranging from one to five (1-5): love as a burden; love as devotion; love as an ennobling power. We have chosen this type of questionnaire because it focuses mainly on the value-semantic aspects of love as an interpersonal and intrapersonal resource within the social context of the topic currently in question, as opposed to measuring emotional and behavioral aspects of love. This questionnaire affords us the opportunity to measure the phenomenon of “love” for people from the point of view of their social representations in the three groups that have been studied.

Procedure

An examiner conducted an interview at her office with each participant individually, lasting 30 minutes on average. In the first stages of the research, we used the “Directed associations with ‘love’ as the word-stimulus” prototypical analysis with the objective of finding the participants’ most natural association with “love.” The examiner told each participant to name the first three words that come to mind when hearing the word “love.” All sessions were taped so the data could later be analyzed.

In the second stage of the research, we asked the participants to complete the questionnaire “The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing.”

The respondents from the Central African Republic and Brazil completed both procedures in their native language (French and Portuguese, respectively). Lan-

guage experts of each cultural group translated both questionnaires from Russian into the respondents' native language and back into Russian for analysis. To ensure accuracy, experts both from the source languages (French and Portuguese) and the target language (Russian) evaluated the translation. The process began with one of the experts translating a word from the source language into the target language; then another expert translated that word or phrase from Russian back into French and Portuguese. When uncertainty arose as to the accuracy of a particular word or phrase, an opinion was sought from a third expert; however, this was very rarely required.

During the prototypical analysis there were 450 associations from which a list was compiled that contains a minimum frequency of 4, which includes 15 concepts for Brazilians, 16 for Russians, and 18 for Central Africans. The core zone of love representation consists of those aforementioned concepts that are associated with the greatest number of respondents from each of the three samples. They have a low rank and high frequency. The concepts held by the group were determined by Vergès's methodology (1992). The separation of the concepts in each group was performed by calculating the mean and the median rank of the frequent occurrences.

To arrive at more reliable results based on the questionnaire "The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing" among the three cultural groups, we utilized Tucker's phi coefficient to answer the questions regarding a connection between the scales that are being studied and the participants' affiliation to one of the three cultures. The values obtained were ($X^2 = 50.03$, $p = 0.02$; $\phi = 0.578$, $p = 0.02$ for the "love as an encumbrance" scale; $X^2 = 44.32$, $p = 0.05$; $\phi = 0.544$, $p = 0.05$ for the "love as devotion" scale; $X^2 = 44.64$, $p = 0.01$; $\phi = 0.546$, $p = 0.01$ for the "love as an enobling power" scale). These allowed us to conclude that there is the existence of a moderate positive association between cultural belonging and the scales of the questionnaire. The analogous process in relation to gender did not reveal any statistically significant association between gender and the three love scales. However, we cannot completely exclude the influence of gender and the usefulness of research in that area. So as to test for possible gender differences in the research sample based on the method's scales, we used an additional Mann-Whitney U test. Our H1 hypothesis, concerning the differences between men and women on the specific scales, was rejected ($U = 2577.5$, $p = 0.38$ for the "love as an encumbrance" scale; $U = 2425.0$, $p = 0.14$ for the "love as devotion" scale; $U = 2769.5$, $p = 0.87$ for the "love as an enobling power" scale).

The inter-correlation of the scales in the questionnaire did not verify statistically significant connections among the scales for the three samples. The rating for the test based on internal unity is adequately high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.809$ for Brazilians; 0.872 for Russians; 0.821 for Central Africans). Nevertheless, the method we used was not adapted for other cultural samples and is still being tested for reliability with other cultural samples, for conformity of the questionnaire's translation and scales' equivalence. Principle component analysis showed that within all the groups of participants, we can outline three factors (which correlate with the three scales of the questionnaire). Among Brazilians, Russians, and Central Africans, the first factor shows 53.03%; 47.94%; and 51.68%, respectively, of variance (factor weights 0.968; 0.998; and 0.996, respectively); the second factor – 30.93%;

34.37%; 31.59% of variance (weights 0.996; 0.973; 0.962); the third factor – 16.04%; 17.69%; 16.73% of variance (weights 0.960; 0.972; 0.963). This data allowed us to make the questionnaire more reliable and ensure that the scales are equivalent. The calculations were done using the SPSS 22.0 computer program.

Results

“The Classical ideas of love: acceptance and distancing” questionnaire (Djidaryan et al, 2014) was conducted using the Kruskal–Wallis test, which showed the similarities and differences in how love is represented in each of the three cultural groups. The test reveals that on the scale “love as an encumbrance,” there are significant differences in response to the following statements: “Love is an obstacle in people’s lives” ($X^2 = 11.697$ $p = 0.003$); “love is just a nasty joke that nature plays to ensure the continuation of the human race” ($X^2 = 6.16$ $p = 0.04$); “love is the triumph of imagination over reason” ($X^2 = 16.608$ $p = 0.000$); and “love is blind; one can fall in love with anyone, even a billy goat” ($X^2 = 8.051$ $p = 0.018$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Cross-cultural differences and similarities for love as an encumbrance among Brazilians (N=50), Russians (N=50), and Central Africans (N=50)

Scale	Statement	Mean rank Brazilians	Mean rank Russians	Mean rank Central Africans	Chi-Square	Asymp. sig.	Standard Dev.
Love as an encumbrance	1. Love is a game in which there is always cheating.	70.86	84.89	70.75	3.688	0.158	1.39
	2. Love is an obstacle in people’s lives.	68.88	91.81	65.81	11.679	0.003	1.11
	3. Love is just a nasty joke that nature plays to ensure the continuation of the human race.	69.52	87.46	69.54	6.160	0.040	1.25
	4. All that is fascinating about love is found in the changes of life.	80.70	66.62	79.18	3.351	0.187	1.19
	5. When it comes to love, the most noteworthy moments are getting together and breaking up; everything else is insignificant.	81.04	67.09	78.37	3.076	0.215	1.28
	6. Love is the triumph of imagination over reason.	66.01	95.22	65.27	16.608	0.000	1.11
	7. Love is blind; one can fall in love with anyone, even a billy goat.	66.74	89.10	70.66	8.051	0.018	1.23
	8. Love is the collection of gifts, wasted and, in the final analysis, worthless.	73.01	81.62	71.87	1.719	0.423	0.93
Love as an encumbrance Scale		68.91	89.22	68.37	7.524	0.023	14.69

Table 2. Cross-cultural differences and similarities of love as devotion among Brazilians (N = 50), Russians (N = 50), and Central Africans (N = 50)

Scale	Statement	Mean rank Brazilians	Mean rank Russians	Mean rank Central Africans	Chi-Square	Asymp. sig.	Standard Dev.
Love as devotion	1. To love deeply means to forget about yourself.	81.62	63.31	81.57	6.294	0.043	1.17
	2. To love is to live the life of the one you love.	91.66	43.18	91.69	44.765	0.000	1.19
	3. Love is not about gazing at each other, but about looking outward together in the same direction.	83.86	54.88	87.76	19.081	0.000	0.99
	4. Where there is love, there is God.	86.95	47.61	91.94	35.318	0.000	0.93
	5. All that I am and all in which I trust is found in love.	73.09	81.11	72.30	1.326	0.515	1.28
	6. Compassion is the height of love and, possibly, the very definition of love.	84.38	56.29	85.83	16.170	0.000	1.12
	7. Love is the only reasonable and satisfactory answer to the question regarding the meaning of human existence.	83.59	58.46	84.45	12.287	0.002	1.22
	8. In the eyes of the one who is in love, the entire universe merges in the person of the beloved.	77.77	70.96	77.89	0.889	0.641	1.21
	9. Love is the ability to bring gifts.	70.42	69.75	69.75	4.886	0.087	1.31
Love as devotion Scale		86.93	50.92	88.65	24.151	0.000	15.22

On the scale “love as devotion,” there are significant differences in response to the statements: “To love deeply means to forget about yourself” ($X^2=6.294$, $p=0.043$); “to love is to live the life of the one you love” ($X^2=44.765$, $p=0.000$); “love is not about gazing at each other, but about looking outward together in the same direction” ($X^2=19.081$, $p=0.000$); “where there is love, there is God” ($X^2=35.318$, $p=0.000$); “compassion is the height of love and, possibly, the very definition of love” ($X^2=16.170$, $p=0.000$); “love is the only reasonable and satisfactory answer to the question regarding the meaning of human existence” ($X^2=12.287$, $p=0.002$) (Table 2).

On the scale “love as an ennobling power” there are significant differences in response to the statements: “Love is the author of all that is kind, warm, illuminating, strong, and noble” ($X^2=9.112$, $p=0.011$); “of all the passions, love is the strongest because it simultaneously takes control of your mind, of your body, and of your heart” ($X^2=9.135$, $p=0.010$); “love is a mystical fire” ($X^2=6.779$, $p=0.034$); “difficulties, hardship, and obstacles strengthen love” ($X^2=14.700$, $p=0.001$); “things base

and vile, holding no quantity love can transpose to form and dignity” ($X^2 = 21.482$, $p = 0.000$); “love bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things, and thinks no evil” ($X^2 = 8.079$, $p = 0.018$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Cross-cultural differences and similarities for love as an ennobling power among Brazilians (N = 50), Russians (N = 50), and Central Africans (N = 50)

Scale	Statement	Mean rank Brazilians	Mean rank Russians	Mean rank Central Africans	Chi-Square	Asymp. sig.	Standard Dev.
Love as an ennobling power	1. Love is the author of all that is kind, warm, illuminating, strong, and noble.	82.70	61.10	82.85	9.112	0.011	1.18
	2. Love is the desire to make someone else happy.	80.17	65.14	81.19	4.720	0.094	1.18
	3. Of all the passions, love is the strongest because it simultaneously takes control of your mind, of your body, and of your heart.	82.71	61.08	82.69	9.135	0.010	1.
	4. Love is a mystical fire.	81.78	62.94	81.80	6.779	0.034	1.17
	5. Love is a great teacher.	78.90	67.37	80.23	2.951	0.229	1.12
	6. Difficulties, hardship, and obstacles strengthen love.	85.23	57.45	83.82	14.700	0.001	1.12
	7. Things base and vile, holding no quantity love can transpose to form and dignity.	85.79	53.78	86.93	21.482	0.000	1.09
	8. Love is similar to everything and at the same time resembles nothing.	73.20	74.63	78.67	0.458	0.795	0.18
	9. Love bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things, and thinks no evil.	80.34	61.95	84.21	8.079	0.018	1.26
Love as an ennobling power Scale		83.81	56.79	85.90	14.020	0.001	17.07

The comparative analysis shows that there are significant differences in the three scales among Brazilians, Russians, and Central Africans, with significantly high scores on the scale “love as an encumbrance” for Russians and on the scales “love as devotion” and “love as an ennobling power” among Central Africans. The scores of the Brazilians on all the scales were closer to those of the Central Africans.

In order to analyze “associations connected with ‘love’ as a word-stimulus,” we applied the P. Vergès method. The core zone of “love” as a social representation among Brazilians ($F \geq 6.4$, average rank ≤ 1.78) is based on such value-semantic definitions as honesty ($F = 25$, average rank = 1.5); feelings ($F = 8$, average rank = 1.5); family ($F = 7$, average rank = 1.42); and morality ($F = 7$, average rank = 1.71). The periphery of “love” as a social representation among Brazilians includes passion ($F = 4$, average rank = 1.5); lack of conscience ($F = 4$, average rank = 1.25); loyalty

(F=3, average rank=1.5); friendship (F=2, average rank=1.5); patience (F=7, average rank=2.14); inner voice (F=6, average rank=2.5); sincerity (F=6, average rank=1.83); respect (F=5, average rank=1.8); unreasonableness (F=4, average rank=2.3); torment (F=4, average rank=2.25); understanding (F=4, average rank=2.14).

The core zone of “love” as a social representation among Russians ($F \geq 3.75$, average rank ≤ 1.73) includes confidence (F=9, average rank=1.44); family (F=7, average rank=1.42); hope (F=5, average rank=1.4); suffering (F=5, average rank=1); passion (F=4, average rank=1.5); self-sacrifice (F=4, average rank=1.5); friendship (F=4, average rank=1). The periphery of “love” as a social representation among Russians consists of understanding (F=3, average rank=1.66); patience (F=3, average rank=1.33); devotion (F=3, average rank=1); children (F=3; average rank=1); reciprocity (F=2, average rank=4); love itself (F=2, average rank=3); whiteness (F=2, average rank=2); responsibility (F=2, average rank=2); fairytale (F=2, average rank=2.5).

The core zone of “love” as a social representation among Central Africans ($F \geq 5.44$, average rank ≤ 1.84) is described by love itself (F=19, average rank=1.68); feelings (F=8, average rank=1.5); tenderness (F=7, average rank=1.71); ability to share (F=6, average rank=1.83); respect (F=6, average rank=1.66). The periphery of “love” as a social representation among Central Africans consists of patience (F=7, average rank=2.14); being attached to someone (F=7, average rank=2.28); forgiveness (F=7, average rank=1.85); heart (F=4, average rank=1.75); support (F=2, average rank=1.5); friendship (F=2, average rank=1.5); surrendering completely (F=3, average rank=2.66); serving others (F=4, average rank=2.5); God is love and love is God (F=4, average rank=2.25); passion (F=4, average rank=2); belief (F=2, average rank=2); fidelity (F=3, average rank=2); marriage (F=3, average rank=2).

Discussion

The study confirmed the hypothesis of the existence of similarities and cross-cultural differences in the concept of love among Brazilians, Russians, and Central Africans as representatives of collectivist cultures. Confirming the results of earlier studies, in all the groups that we studied, love in directed association is often represented by compassionate love (Barsade & O’Neill, 2014; Fehr et al., 2015; Church, 2016). This finding attests to the significance of the group and the importance of how another person feels love as characteristics of collectivist culture. For most Brazilians, Russians, and Central Africans in this study, love is represented as a source of all that is joyful, the manifestation of all that is unique and good in people. This concretizes the ideas of an understanding of love as a personal resource (Kokurina & Solina, 2014) and seeking well-being with self-determination (Knee et al., 2013).

In the present study, there are noted similarities of love representation at the peripheral level: passion, friendship, and patience. Continuing to use the metaphor of Sternberg’s love triangle (1986), we obtained similar characteristics which can be compared in a certain way with Sternberg’s triangular vertices. So, the notion of love as “passion” among the studied groups coincides with Sternberg’s theory, while

“patience” can be roughly comparable to the “decision / commitment” in Sternberg’s triangle, as well as “friendship,” implying “intimacy” as a close relationship. Despite that, the core zone characteristics of love are culture-specific. This correlates with the viewpoint of Fehr (2006) on her culturally defined prototypical love construct. In other words, love differs among cultures, with characteristics pertaining to other historical, ethno-cultural, and socio-psychological specifiers.

This data is all the more encouraging in light of extant data that suggests that the core zone of “love” as a social representation among Brazilians, Russians, and persons from Central Africa is not identical (Moscovici, 1998; Abric, 2001; & Fehr, 2006). For Brazilians, the core zone of love consists of honesty, feelings, family, and morality. It confirms the sensual and ethical character of love in the family context among Brazilians. The main representation of love for Brazilians is honesty. The periphery of “love” as a social representation by Brazilians consists of passion, lack of conscience, loyalty, friendship, patience, inner voice, sincerity, respect, unreasonableness, torment, and understanding. The periphery also strengthens the core zone’s conscientiousness, which connects to the moral aspect of love. Perhaps, for the participants from this cultural group, love proceeds from one’s internal voice, in situations where the feeling is reasonable and moral. Love comprises faithfulness and sincere respect; it reminds one to pay attention to one’s inner state.

The core zone of love for Russians consists of confidence, family, hope, suffering, passion, self-sacrifice, and friendship. Consequently, Russians most often connect the idea of love with family, serious relations (trust, self-sacrifice), hope, and emotions. But the emotions Russians associate with love are not the same as for Brazilians. The main feeling of love by Russians is suffering. This is also confirmed by the periphery of “love,” which includes understanding, patience, devotion, children, reciprocity, love itself, whiteness, responsibility, and fairytale. It is remarkable that for these participants, love is in the same value-semantic group as reciprocity, a fantastic, white wedding dress, family, children and, as mentioned above, sacrifice and patience. For Russians, the concept of love is concretized in the main element of a family: children. This stresses the significance of intergenerational connections and social representations of love within the culture (Soloski et al., 2013). Moreover, the idea of love is strongly expressed in the designation of important psychological qualities and conditions that promote strong family life – patience, understanding, responsibility, devotion, friendship, passion, and reciprocity. Love includes both a romantic vision as well as a temporary painful condition and problematic characteristics in relationships.

The core zone of love for persons from Central Africa includes love itself, feelings, tenderness, ability to share, and respect. The main feeling of love expressed by Central Africans is tenderness – softness and a light feeling. In this case love is conceptualized as a positive emotion, important in and of itself. The periphery of “love” as a social representation among Central Africans consists of patience, being tied to someone, forgiveness, heart, support, friendship, surrendering, completely serving others, God is love and love is God, passion, belief, fidelity, and marriage. Thus, the periphery of love for Central Africans is more characterized by actions than by concepts: to serve another, to support another, to be attached, to be given completely, to get married, to trust. These results coincide with the benefits of the

contradictory analyses of love in comparison to the descriptive representation of love, because the participants, in this case, had the opportunity to express love either by defining it or by taking different actions (Fehr & Russel, 1991). In the periphery of love for Central Africans, there is the statement “God is love and love is God,” which is connected with their religion. This statement expresses the pure and gentle feeling of love for another human being. Love is divine; people are the extension of God on Earth and therefore, exude pure and tender feelings to those around them.

In contrast to descriptive research into universal characteristics of love which does not identify differences between representatives of individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Yildirm et al., 2014; Jankowiak et al., 2015), in this study we view the distinctions in concepts of love as deeply implanted, quite similarly, in the roots of the collectivist cultures studied and serve as a distinguishable cultural code (Espín, 2013). The core zone of love for Brazilians is honesty, for Russians – suffering, and for Central Africans – tenderness. For Brazilians, the feeling of love is more passionate and conscientious, intuitive and honest. For Russians, love is understood as the continuation of family; it is romantic and fantastic at the same time, being both problematic and responsible in reality. For Central Africans, the feeling of love is more divine and ennobling, atmospheric, light, and joyful.

Evidently, Brazilians and to a greater extent, Central Africans, are generally stronger, more categorical, and emotional than Russians, since the former express their representation of love as devotion and as an ennobling power. The participants from Russia sometimes chose negative statements to convey their perception of love. They generally concurred with the statements that love can disturb life and that love can be evil. We can conclude that for Russians, love is not generally conceptualized as a call to overcome difficulties; on the contrary, it is represented as a complex and difficult issue, connected with the personal effort to overcome doubt as well as to make someone else happy. The data reveals that persons from Central Africa have the highest value of love, as something God-given. From this point of view, love exists in all good things and is connected with kindness and warmth. Brazilians understand love as “looking outward together in the same direction” and as a passion that takes hold of mind, body, and soul. Given the results, it could be concluded that Brazilians internalize love as a passionate feeling arising between two people, which definitely includes the sensual aspect of love.

Evidently, the role of culture in how love is conceptualized reflects a single value-semantic cultural code and shows the translation and decoding of love as the most important human relationship. Being collectivist, these cultures underscore the importance of the presence of others (children, a partner, God) in a relationship. It is noteworthy, however, that the specific notion of love in each of the cultures coheres with the general cultural values (sensuality in Brazil, compassion in Russia, vitality in Central Africa).

Some limitations of the study merit comment. The subjects were representatives from metropolitan universities, i.e., from specific social groups, which do not fully reflect the society of each of the three groups. A more in-depth comparative study of the capitals’ populace and other regions of the specific country would be beneficial, as would additional information concerning the participants, for exam-

ple, the differences between individual and cultural perceptions of love and how they correlate with each other. Culture can seem to take on feminine and masculine roles, as well as various types of love, all of which merit more in-depth study.

Future research efforts are needed to overcome these limitations, with the goal of recognizing the contribution of cultural and individual experiences in the representation and comprehension of the complex phenomena of love in collectivist as well as individualistic cultures. These groups may have not only different cultural perceptions of love, but different individual and cultural experiences, which serve as competitive parameters for each other. Evidently, interactions between the representatives of the above-mentioned groups can begin with a general understanding of love that can include, but not be limited to, commitment, equal relations, an inclination, and at the same time, tranquility in relation to another. It is necessary to move to a more culturally specific understanding of love, which will allow people from today's multicultural society to become better acquainted with representatives of other cultures.

Conclusion

The value-semantic aspect of love among the participants from Brazil, Russia, and the Central African Republic includes both similarities and cross-cultural specificity. The similarities (love as friendship, patience, passion; love as a way to make somebody happy; love as an uplifting feeling) demonstrate the similarities of the representation of love in different cultural societies. The differences among the three groups describe the cultural specificity of love, not only as a personal feeling, but also as a social representation with a core zone and peripheral levels that vary from culture to culture.

The findings are useful for ethnic, cross-cultural psychologists and for positive psychologists, because love is considered as an essential personal force. The results of this study are of particular interest for practicing psychologists, who can use the cross-cultural specificity of love representation in couple and family counseling, especially in multicultural marriages. It is also useful for diagnostics, formation, and correction of the value-semantic personal sphere, as love representation reflects psychological maturity, with a balance between acceptance and distancing.

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