

# Preface

The word *love* can mean various things so that it is often unclear what a speaker is talking about while using it. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the context of communication to better understand the content of the love notion. This might be love for God, parental love for a child, or love of a child for parents, etc. Love also is often used as a synonym for sex. So at a certain point in history, people invented the word *romantic love* to denote a special host of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors. They thought that was *true love*. Were they right?

People over the centuries and over their personal lives have been striving to search for an answer to the question of *what the true and authentic love is*. Ordinary people look for the true love; the characters of the film *Frozen*, including my favorite snowman Olaf, are among them. Scholars from various disciplines try to define love too and argue with each other.

Because *love* can mean many diverse things, people often conventionally add the word *romantic* to distinguish the type of love that includes a sexual component from all other types of love. The notion of *romantic love* has had multifaceted meanings throughout human history and in modern cultures around the world. The purpose of this book is to disentangle its multiple connotations and depict the diverse romantic elements in various cultural contexts. The word *romantic love* is generally used to denote heterosexual love between men and women distinguishing it from other types of love: conjugal, maternal, friendship, and other types of close relationship feelings. In this sense, a romantic relationship is just the relationship between a man and a woman implying sexual interest and attraction.

Apart from this simply indicative function, the term *romantic love* has had long historical tradition describing a special emotion and the host of *romantic* feelings between men and women. In this meaning, *romantic love* is distinguished from *sex* and *sexual love*, while still being remotely related to basic sexual motivation. Generally speaking, the word *romantic* has rather a specific meaning of an idealized and sublimed view of reality. In this regard, *romantic* means a perception of life events and feelings as in a fairy tale, a song, a novel, or a movie, that is, something not routine. *Romantic* means something uplifting from a mundane

and ordinary way of living, as opposite to anything down to earth. In this regard, *romantic love* does not necessarily mean passionate; this might be just affectionate. The degree of passion, or affection, may depend on temperament of a lover rather than on the object of attraction. Nonetheless, *romantic love* is definitely an erotic and emotional attraction and attachment to a person of the opposite sex characterized by idealization and admiration of this person and relationship. This means *love* as in romance, romantic novel, poem, or any other idealized image of aspiration. It is an uplifting passionate or affectionate feeling of sexual attraction mediated by various actions, feelings, and cognitions displaying its sublime nature. The concept of *romantic love* in this book will be considered in this more specific meaning, not just as a passionate love. I believe that degree of passion does not constitute romantic love, but is just a condition of temperamental lovers. Being widely depicted in novels and movies, they became an iconic symbol of romantic love. However, a calm affectionate lover might be no less romantic, although less energetic than hot passionate lovers. To make it clear upfront, when I say *romantic love* in the context of this book, I really mean *romantic love*, in terms of its idealized and valorized meaning.

Love has been a basic aspect of human history, in many human cultures and civilizations. For centuries, romantic love has been explored by writers, philosophers, artists, and musicians who have described its various aspects and revealed multiple emotions, feelings, and behaviors related to this type of love. Many philosophers, historians, novelists, poets, journalists, anthropologists, and other authors have written about love from antiquity to the modern era.

The systematic efforts of social scientists to comprehend the concept of romantic love began in the twentieth century. In the 1950s–1990s, scholars from many countries started to delve into the concept of love from evolutionary and cultural perspectives. Many publications shed light on our understanding of romantic love as a cultural phenomenon; the researchers in history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, and psychology substantially expanded the picture of the cross-cultural variation of love across the globe. The theme has become an especially popular topic of scholarly work and scientific research in recent decades. Scholars from various disciplines—historians and philosophers, novelists and literary scholars, anthropologists and sociologists of twentieth century—have advanced greatly our understanding of love and described its typical displays, rituals, and feelings. Accordingly, this book comprehensively describes how cultures affect societal mores, norms, and traditions and the connection between love, sex, and marriage, as well as people’s experience and expression of love. The research findings presented in the following chapters suggest that love is a universal emotion experienced by a majority of people, in various historical eras, and in all the world’s major cultures. However, love displays itself in different ways because culture has a substantial impact on people’s conceptions of love and the ways they feel, think, and behave in romantic relationships.

What is romantic love, and is it different from or similar to other kinds of love? The word *romantic love* is often used to distinguish from *conjugal love*, *parental love*, *friendship love*, and other types of close relationships. In this meaning,

*romantic love* often assumes just heterosexual, passionate, and erotic love. Another meaning of the term *romantic love* differentiates it from other types of heterosexual love, the love between a man and a woman—*realistic love*, *sexual love*, etc. The key feature of romantic love in this sense is in accord with the true meaning of the word *romantic*, which is characterized by an idealized view of life—in this case, of love life. It is opposite to realistic, pragmatic love. *Romantic love* should not be contrasted with companionate love (as non-romantic) because the latter can also be romantic if represented in idealized form and manner. The concept of romantic love is defined and described in Chap. 1 to set a common background and present the possible manifestations of romance and romantic love in various cultural contexts. The chapter will present thorough analysis of *romantic love* as a complex and multifaceted concept. That definition and descriptive characteristics will guide the following review of romantic love elements in historical and modern cultures.

Although many scholars uphold romantic love as a cultural universal, according to a social constructionist perspective, the definition of love is culturally determined. To be comprehensive, the definition of romantic love should reflect its time period and place and, in particular, the functions that romantic love serves there. In cross-cultural research, instead of one restrictive and unified definition of love, it is worthwhile to take into account various cultural contexts in which love evolves. The dimensional approach to the search of romantic love in historical and modern cultures would be more beneficial than a categorical one. Chapter 2 will discuss the criteria for exploration of universality and cultural specificity of romantic love and various realities in which the elements of romanticism can be found. Among those are ideas, institutions, social interactions, and individuals. Romantic love may appear in all or in some of these four spheres, as a norm or deviation, in descriptive, injunctive, or personal norms.

In Chap. 2, I also argue for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of romantic love. Philosophers, literary scholars, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and communication scholars, all contribute their valuable information and methodology in the study of romantic love from different, yet overlapping perspectives. They might complement each other in their cultural and cross-cultural investigations.

Is romantic love a universal emotion across various historical periods of humankind? What aspects of love are limited to certain historical eras or to specific cultures? Several chapters of Part II trace the origins and the following evolution of romantic ideas, norms, deviations, rituals, and traditions in various historical periods and in different cultural areas of the world, from Ancient Africa, China, Greece, and Rome (Chap. 3), to Medieval South Asia, China, Japan, the Perso-Arabic world, European culture, and Slavic society (Chap. 4), and further to Eastern, Middle Eastern, South Asian, Polynesian, Australian, European, and American cultures of the sixteenth–nineteenth centuries (Chap. 5), and finally to the cultures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in China, Japan, Russia, America, Europe, Latin America (Chap. 6).

Is romantic love a universal emotion among contemporary cultures across the globe? What aspects of romantic love are universal and what are culturally specific? Several chapters of the Part III present the revolutionary expansion of romantic love ideas and practices in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in various parts of the world and review the development of romantic love as a cultural idol of the modern cultures. These chapters describe romantic love in North America and Western Europe (Chap. 7), the Arab World (Chap. 8), South Asia (Chap. 9), Latin America (Chap. 10), Australia, Polynesia, and Southeast Asia (Chap. 11), Africa (Chap. 12), in China and Japan (Chap. 13).

Cross-cultural exploration is a good way to expand the horizons of one's mind and overcome natural ego- and ethnocentrism of a human. We should honestly acknowledge that people are basically egocentric and ethnocentric by nature: We assume that other people should think, feel, and behave the same way as we do. Why? Because it makes sense to us and it is the only sensible way to be. In the case of child development, Swiss psychologist J. Piaget demonstrated this very conclusively.

Do all children when becoming adults grow out of their ego- and ethnocentrism? It seems that not all adults comprehensively overcome their mind egocentrism in some areas of their thinking. Many adults still tend to attribute their views to other people. Ethnocentrism is a social version of egocentrism. People have difficulty seeing the life from another culture's view, especially when they know little about that culture. People tend to attribute their view to the people of another culture.

Two opposite standpoints are possible in debates on the question of whether another culture holds romantic love ideas and practices or not. As the first standpoint posits, Western scholars with romantic minds, living in a society that generally accepts the romantic view of love, may think that other people in other cultures would view it the same way. Such an attribution of Western cultural norms of romantic love to other cultures seems likely. This is the natural way how it should be. As the second standpoint claims, when it turned out that another culture's mores and norms do not meet Western expectations and standards of romantic love, scholars tend to deny the existence of romantic love in that other culture. Is such an opposition adequate?

I believe that the more productive position in these debates is to talk not about the presence or absence of romantic love in other cultures, but rather about the extent and qualitative characteristics of love and how they meet the cultural standards of that culture. An *emic*, rather than an *etic* approach, will be employed in this book. The *emic* approach means that the concept of love is described in terms of its cultural aspects and functioning, rather than in terms of any theoretical and comparative scheme, as in an *etic* approach.

We will look at the problem of romantic love from the perspective of the culture under review, rather than from the perspective of an outsider. I hope that a comprehensive review of love ideas around the world, across the ages, and across disciplines, presented in this book, will help us to understand the love of men and women from other cultures better.

How has romantic love been related to sex in human history and across contemporary cultures? These relations have been traditionally very close; the ultimate

and valorized sexual motivation has been a distinctive feature of romantic love, even though the connections between love and sex have been frequently confused and highly debated. In the chapters of Parts II and III of this book, I have made special subheadings to describe and discuss the various interpretations of relations between sex and love in historical and modern cultures. There has been a variety of cultural opinions and a diversity of views. Over recent decades, however, the word *love* often began to be used as synonymous to *sex*, and the same goes with the words *sexy* and *beautiful*. Sexualization of love and romantic relationships has been a noticeable tendency among the modern generation of Western people. At the same time, love became a less idealized and more practically and sexually oriented experience of love affairs. I want to make it clear in the context of this book, when I say *love* I really mean *love*, not *sex*.

How has romantic love been related to marriage in human history and across contemporary cultures? Again, in the chapters of Parts II and III of this book, I have made separate sections to depict and talk on how people in various historical and modern cultures thought of love in connection or disconnection with marriage. Despite the earlier historical discordances, love has finally conquered marriage. Over recent decades, however, love became an independent value, which no longer expects marriage as final destination, at least among the modern youth generation of Western people.

What are romantic ideas, feelings, and expressions of love across cultures? Do some cultural practices work better than others? Will certain cultural norms dominate and lead us to the new universal cultural reality of love? Or are traditional cultural practices more persistent and therefore resistant to this sort of deep transformation? These are some questions addressed in the book.

The crucial question is whether romantic love is only a Western cultural construct, or given its remote origins in ancient China, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, and the Islamic world, whether it is a universal in human societies. The basic conclusion has been so far that love is a universal emotion experienced by a majority of people, in various historical eras, and in all of the world's cultures. However, some methodological issues and specific questions remain on how love manifests itself in different cultural ways and how love functions in various cultural contexts. We will see in this book how culture impacts people's conceptions of love and the way they feel, think, and behave in romantic relationships.

This book summarizes classical knowledge on romantic love and culture with a major focus on recent studies and cutting-edge research that has advanced the field. I believe that such a comprehensive review will set up the background and perspectives for further scholastic exploration of romantic love in cultural contexts. Adding a cultural dimension enlightens the diverse concept of romantic love.

This book is intentionally descriptive with a primary attempt to describe the diversity of heterosexual love and compare the version of romantic love with other types of heterosexual love. The compilation of a diversity of love expressions and romantic love manifestations in various cultural contexts tries to be interpretive and non-judgmental.

I make every attempt to not compare the culturally specific versions of love in various societies with the “normal” Western type of romantic love, using the *emic* approach and describing the concept of love in terms of its cultural aspects and functioning, rather than in terms of Western romantic scheme. There is a need to understand its emic manifestations within a variety of cultural settings. So, the purpose is to demonstrate how cultures and cultural contexts, in historical as well as in modern societies, determine experiences, expressions, and practices of love.

In this book, I follow an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of romantic love and present the opportunities and possibilities, which a synthesis of various disciplines may offer in the study of love. I review the views and research findings about the nature and culture of romantic love that scholars from different fields can talk about across the specialized boundaries of their disciplines. This book has explored various sources and cultural perspectives on romantic love: philosophical, historical, literary, anthropological, and sociological. I am aware, however, that I have not been able to cover all sources on the theme available from those disciplines, due to page limitations. Because of volume limitations, I omitted many psychological studies, which are enormous in quantity and multiple in quality and coverage.

As for practical applications, the value of cross-cultural studies has increased over recent decades. People and cultures migrate around the globe much more frequently than ever before. They bring their ideas, cultural norms, beliefs, and cultural attitudes into their personal communication; they transform the ways they think, feel, and act in their intercultural relationships. Transnational cultural flows and global processes occur at an expedited pace and on a larger scale than ever before. Many scholars study political and economic forces and cultural discourses, observing how members of different cultural groups negotiate, accommodate, and communicate to each other on a macro-level. Apart from those studies, the topic of this book is on a micro-level that occurs in daily cultural encounters in close interpersonal relationships. We consider how people think, feel, and behave in personal relationships that we call *romantic love* and in relations to other types of love, sex, and marriage.

In a practical sense, such romantic exploration is vital in the era of extensive migration, when cross-cultural mingling of people living in certain locales and areas of the world takes an unprecedented pace. Cross-ethnic personal relationships, dating, mating, and love are growing in some regions and cities. Cross-cultural pollination takes place, and therefore, a better understanding of each other in terms of cultural beliefs regarding love is important. From this practical viewpoint, the better comprehension of cultural similarities and differences in love will help facilitate a better understanding within multicultural couples and families.

Romantic Love in Cultural Contexts

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