

Adult Attachment, Love Styles, Relationship Experiences and Subjective Well-Being: Cross-Cultural and Gender Comparison between Americans, Portuguese, and Mozambicans

Iolanda Costa Galinha · Shigehiro Oishi · Cicero Roberto Pereira ·
Derrick Wirtz · Francisco Esteves

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Abstract Attachment security, love styles, and romantic relationship experiences are closely associated with subjective well-being (SWB). A few studies have empirically observed significant relations between these variables. However, no studies have included all of these predictors to analyze the unique contribution of each to SWB, and no cross-cultural studies have analyzed these variables simultaneously. This article examined (a) the relations between attachment security, love styles, romantic relationship experiences and subjective well-being, (b) the unique contribution of each to predict SWB, and (c) cross-cultural and gender differences in the predictors of SWB across three samples of 1,574 university students: 497 from North Carolina (US), 544 from Maputo (Mozambique), and 533 from Lisbon (Portugal). We found cross-cultural differences in the three samples. The main predictor of SWB was attachment security in the US and Portuguese samples, while in the Mozambican it was eros love style. Storge love style positively predicted SWB in the US and Portuguese samples, but not in the Mozambican. In contrast, mania love style predicted the SWB of Mozambicans but not that of Americans or Portuguese. We found

I. C. Galinha (✉)
Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Rua Cruz de Sta. Apolónia, 64, 3º Dto, 1100-188 Lisbon, Portugal
e-mail: iolandag@yahoo.com

I. C. Galinha · F. Esteves
CIS-Centre for Psychological Research and Social Intervention, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa,
Lisbon, Portugal

S. Oishi
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

C. R. Pereira
Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

D. Wirtz
East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA

F. Esteves
Mid Sweden University, Lisbon, Portugal

gender similarities and differences: the association between attachment security and SWB was not gender-specific; the associations between love styles, relationship experiences and SWB were gender-specific.

Keywords Adult attachment · Love styles · Relationship experiences · Subjective well-being · Cross-cultural · Gender

1 Introduction

Close relationships are central to humankind and have a great impact on individuals' lives and overall subjective well-being (SWB; Diener and Biswas-Diener 2008). There are studies that significantly associate attachment styles, love styles (e. g. Levy and Davis 1988; Remshard 1999), or relationship experiences with SWB (e. g. Frazier and Esterly 1990; Kim and Hatfield 2004). However, there are important gaps in the literature about the relations between these variables and an absence of studies that analyze how all of these variables conjointly affect SWB. It is important to have a deeper knowledge of the relations between these variables and their precise role in predicting SWB. Attachment (an early trait variable), love styles (conceptual/attitudinal variables), and relationship experiences (objective conditions and satisfaction with relationships) are different categories of variables that may affect SWB differently. Further, understanding these relations may allow us to know how—and at what level—to better intervene in order to promote relationship quality and human well-being. It is also important to investigate possible gender and cultural differences. Few studies have focused on how attachment, love styles and relationship experiences contribute to SWB in samples other than European or North American, and none include cross-cultural comparisons.

The pertinence of this study is, therefore, to address some of these gaps in the scientific literature, such as: what type and how strong are the associations between attachment style, love styles, and romantic relationship experiences? How do these variables predict SWB in three different cultures? Are these relations universal or culture-specific? In particular, the contribution of this study relies on the cross-cultural analysis and comparison of the predictors of SWB in three different cultures: North American, Eastern African and South European. We examined the structural relations among love styles, attachment styles, relationship experiences, and SWB among Americans, Portuguese, and Mozambicans. The US is largely accepted as an individualistic country; Mozambique is probably a collectivistic society (Triandis 1989). Portugal is also considered a collectivistic society, although probably in between the American and the Mozambican in the continuum of individualism-collectivism (Hofstede 1980; House et al. 2004). We start our literature review by defining attachment security, love styles, relationship experiences, and SWB before presenting the empirical results available in the scientific literature about the association between these variables.

1.1 Attachment Security

The concept of attachment was first studied in children by Bowlby (1969), followed by Ainsworth (1989). These authors developed the theory of attachment based on empirical studies. Briefly, the theory states that according to relationship experiences during infancy,