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## Heterosexual Romantic Relationships and Mate Preference in College Students from the U.S. and China: Cross-Cultural and Gender Difference in Beliefs and Attitudes

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Heterosexual Romantic Relationships and Mate Preferences in College Students from the U.S.  
and China: Cross-Cultural and Gender Difference in Beliefs and Attitudes

AN HONORS THESIS

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Distinction

in the Department of Psychology

by

Feiran Chen

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PROJECT TITLE: Heterosexual Romantic Relationships and Mate Preferences in College Students from the U.S. and China: Cross-Cultural and Gender Difference in Beliefs and Attitudes

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## **Heterosexual Romantic Relationships and Mate Preferences in College Students from the U.S. and China: Cross-Cultural and Gender Difference in Beliefs and Attitudes**

Over the years, the role of culture has been investigated and examined more thoroughly in many areas, such as sociology and multicultural psychology, and researchers have found that there are both cultural variations and cultural stability. As globalization increases, it becomes increasingly important to understand the role of culture differences in attitudes and beliefs across cultures. As a result, psychologists and other social scientists are giving greater attention to intercultural differences.

One aspect of culture is certain, that is, no matter which country or region, there must be men and women. It is well known that men and women differ not only in physical characteristics, but also in psychological characteristics, such as emotional expression. Some popular writers have claimed that men and women are from two different planets, with different patterns of behaviors, feelings, and cognitions that affect relationships (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Knowing how men and women differ can help us understand the causes of distinct attitudes and beliefs that men and women hold toward heterosexual romantic relationships, and why men and women differ in their approach to the same relationship.

Although there is considerable knowledge about the romantic beliefs and the mate preference patterns in the United States, not enough comparative research exists that explores the romantic beliefs and mate preferences in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Yet, with the PRC's development as a world power, as well as significant changes in Chinese society and social consciousness, it is important that we begin examining cultural phenomena in the PRC. Romantic beliefs and mate preferences in the PRC are likely adapting to these changes in Chinese culture even now. Understanding how Americans and Chinese are different in their mate

preferences and their beliefs toward romantic relationships could help people who are in interracial romantic relationships. Moreover, knowing the gender differences in romantic relationships could help each individual be a better mate and understand their partner better.

### **Cultural Influences**

One possible way to think about culture is that “culture is to society what memory is to individuals” (Triandis & Suh, 2002). This includes the history of a society (or “memory”) that can be transmitted to future generations. More specifically, culture includes enduring behaviors, ideas, attitudes, and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next (Myers, 2012, p. 154). It means that the elements of culture are tested over generations, and people will keep those elements they consider useful and pass them to the next generation, abandoning those elements they consider unnecessary or problematic. For example, one dining habit in which Americans and Chinese differ is that Americans are encouraged to eat with their mouths shut. If they are talking with food in their mouth, it’s regarded as rude and even disgusting. However, the Chinese believe that chatting at the dining table can enhance people’s social relationships, and they regard silence as embarrassing because only enemies don’t talk to each other. Moreover, in China, much business is conducted during dinner. There is even a set of rules about how to behave during a business dinner, such as how to arrange host and guests’ seats and who should order first. Generally, people call it “table culture.” Since most Americans think eating with one’s mouth shut is proper, they teach their children and grandchildren to chew without talking, yet the Chinese think talking while eating is acceptable, so they model and teach this to their children.

It has been suggested that cultures tend to differ along two dimensions, among others: complexity and tightness. According to Triandis and Suh (2002), cultural complexity refers to

such things as gross national product per capita, but it also includes the percent of the population that is urban, the size of the cities, personal computers per capita, and so on. The more complex the culture, the more confused the individual's identity is likely to be (Triandis, 1989). In other words, people who are from a simple cultural background are more likely to know what they want to do or what they will do than those who are from a complex cultural background, such as what they will do for their future careers. For example, Dragonas (1983) sampled the self-concept of 11- and 12-year-olds in the cultures of small Greek villages (simple), traditional Greek cities (medium), and large Greek cities (complex), and found that the more complex the culture, the more confusing was the identity of the individual. Another researcher (Katakis 1976, 1978, 1984, cited in Triandis, 1989) conducted a similar study, and found that when answering the question "what they would be when they are old," the children of farmers and fisherman answered unhesitatingly "farmer" or "fisherman." However, children from large cities frequently responded with answers like "I will find myself." In other words, the more complex the culture, the more individualistic it is likely to be (Triandis, 2001).

On the other hand, there are two key components of cultural tightness: the strength of social norms, or how clear and pervasive norms are within societies, and the strength of sanctioning, or how much tolerance there is for deviance from norms within societies (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2007). Specifically, norms are imposed tightly in such cultures, whereas in loose cultures, deviation from the norms is accepted. For example, wearing strange or outlandish attire is criticized in China, but it more acceptable in the U.S.

In addition, most countries in the world trend toward individualism (Western countries) or collectivism (much of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America). Individualism–collectivism refers to the degree to which societies emphasize having strong ties to in-groups

versus being autonomous and looking after oneself (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2007). Thus, individualism and collectivism are the two ends of a continuum. As representatives of individualistic countries, Americans tend to view themselves as autonomous, independent people who are fundamentally separate from others (Matsumoto & Takeuchi, 1996). They also give priority to their personal goals over the goals of their in-groups (Triandis, 2001). One interesting example is that when the present author (Chinese) and her friend (American) are playing Mario Kart in the team mode, the American friend cares more about whether his individual car wins, rather than his team winning over the opponent's team; whereas the author cares more about the team winning, instead of winning herself, and she feels good if the team wins even though her individual car is not in first place. Hence, Chinese people, who are from a collectivistic background, are more interdependent within their in-groups, such as family, class, and nation. The Chinese people also shape their behavior primarily on the basis of in-group norms, and behave in a communal way (Triandis, 2001). For example, every student has to obey his/her class rules, students in every class have to obey school rules, and schools have to obey the rules of the school district. Every student, class, and school needs to behave like others in the group; otherwise they will draw criticism from the whole.

Basically, people who are from individualistic cultures are identified as independent or autonomous; they have the sense of "being enriched by believing in your power of personal control" (Myers, 2012, p. 40). However, people who are from collectivistic cultures are identified as interdependent, and they are more self-critical and have less need for positive self-regard (Myers, 2012, p. 40). These dissimilar characteristics of people from two cultural categories offer a possible explanation for the phenomenon that family members and friends seem have an important effect on people's romantic relationships in China. Since people from

individualistic cultures have a strong sense of personal control, they believe they should start, maintain, and end a romantic relationship on their own, as a matter of personal choice. Hence, they are less likely to consult with their family and friends. Nonetheless, people from collectivistic cultures are more self-critical; they believe they should ask family and friends' opinions on their romantic relationships, such as if they should date a particular person, if they should break up, or how they should maintain a romantic relationship. For example, when there is a problem in a romantic relationship, people from a collectivistic culture would talk about this issue with their friends and family, tell them the details, and ask their ideas about what they think is best to do. Yet, people from individualistic cultures would be less likely to reveal too many details to their friends and family, and by the time they talk with their friends and family about the problem in the relationship, they have an idea already about what they want to do, and talk about that idea with their family and friends.

Therefore, based on the notions of complex–simple culture, tight–loose culture, and individualistic–collectivistic culture, we can say that the United States is a complex, loose, and individualistic culture, whereas the PRC is a simple, tight, and collectivistic culture. This leads to the question: Does culture influence psychological phenomena, that is, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes?

People in different cultural environments seem to have different interactions and adaptations to the social environment, such as the way people socialize with one another. For example, Americans often use hugs when greeting friends, while the Chinese shake hands. In terms of romantic relationships, the difference in how long romantic relationships and marriages endure for Americans and Chinese can also indicate the influence of culture. For instance, emotional stability is a good indicator of how successful romantic relationships and marital



satisfaction may be for couples. One interesting phenomenon is that Chinese individuals seem to have greater long-term commitment to romantic relationships and marriages, compared with Americans' frequent casual sex and 50 percent divorce rate.

Triandis and Suh (2002) argued that, at the cultural level, people who are from collectivistic cultures belong to groups as a matter of right, by birth or marriage. However, people who are from individualistic cultures need to earn their membership in a group. Thus, people in collectivistic cultures usually build intimate and long-term relationships, whereas people in individualistic cultures usually build non-intimate and short-term relationships. For example, the current researcher has noticed that American college students easily become friends over a semester, meaning they maintain short-term relationships, since they have the same class for only one semester. When a new semester starts, they make new "semester-friends." Of course, there are American students who make long-term friends, but it is less likely. After the semester ends, the students seldom contact each other or get together to hang out. However, in Chinese colleges, students of the same majors are divided into fixed classes made up of the same group of students, and will have the same schedule of required classes for four years. In addition, students are also assigned into fixed dorms in which the same 4–6 females or males will be living together for four years. Therefore, because the same group of students meet every day for four years, it is more likely for them to make long-term friendships. In addition, Triandis (2001) stated in his article that idiocentrics (i.e., individuals who are from an individualistic culture) think of the self as stable and the environment as changeable (if you don't like the job, you change the job), whereas allocentrics (i.e., individuals who are from collectivistic cultures) think of the social environment as stable (duties, obligations) and the self as changeable (fit into the environment). Hence, people who are from collectivist cultures — in this case, Chinese — who

perceive their social environment as stable, are more likely to change themselves and try to “match” with their significant others; as opposed to people who are from individualistic cultures, Americans, in this case, who perceive themselves as stable, are more likely to try to find a matched mate.

Therefore, culture influences people’s world views, beliefs, and values on a large scale, which leads to dissimilar cognitions, feelings, and behaviors across cultures. From the current researcher’s perspective, this suggests that American and Chinese people will hold different attitudes about romantic relationships and mate preferences.

### **Mate Preferences**

Research on gender and cross-cultural differences in mate preference has taken place over many years. Sociological studies beginning in the 1940s offered the first indication that men and women differed on which personality traits are desired of a mate (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003), and there may be some differences among people in different cultures. One study focused attention on an international investigation of 10,047 individuals located on six continents and five islands from around the world (Buss, Abbott, Angleitner, Asherian, Biaggio, Blanco-Villasenor, Bruchon-Schweitzer, Chu, Czapinski, Deraad, Ekehammar, & Lohamy, 1990). Participants rated the importance of 18 traits to relationships, such as emotional stability, good looks, pleasing disposition, mutual attraction or love, similar education background, and dependable character. The results indicated, for both men and women, the most favored characteristic was mutual attraction or love. This trait is viewed as indispensable by almost everyone in the world (Buss, Abbot, Angleitner, Asherian, and, Biaggio, 1990). Dependable character, emotional stability and maturity, and pleasing disposition were also consistent across cultures. But there were differences between men and women’s preferences as well. Men valued

good health and good looks more important than women. Women placed a greater value on ambition and industriousness, and good financial prospects. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, according to Larsen and Buss (2010, p. 249), women place more value on a potential mate's financial resources and the qualities that lead to such resources, because women bear the burdens of heavy parental investment. Thus, women want a mate who can provide resources for raising the next generation. Hence, female participants in this study valued good financial prospects, and ambition and industriousness, more than male participants. In contrast, males placed greater value on a woman's physical appearance, which provides cues to her fertility. Hence, male participants rated good health and good looks higher than female participants.

Some researchers have focused on the cross-cultural comparison of mate preferences between Chinese and Americans. Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) compared 735 Chinese and 648 American university students by distributing a questionnaire that listed 25 traits. The researchers found that in the American sample, men expressed a stronger preference for the item "physically attractive and sexy looking," whereas women expressed a stronger preference for a partner who was "warm and kind," "wants children," has "high earning potential," has "high social status," and is "wealthy" (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). In the Chinese sample, there were a greater number of gender differences. Chinese men expressed a stronger preference for "physically attractive and sexy looking" and "a good housekeeper," whereas Chinese women expressed a stronger preference for: "healthy," "exciting personality," "sense of humor," "intelligent," "friendly and sociable," "athletic," "high earning potential," "powerful," "has material possessions," and "high social status" (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). Both American men and Chinese men wished their partner to be younger than themselves, and both American

women and Chinese women wished their partners to be older than themselves. Moreover, the American women preferred a partner who wanted children more than the Chinese women, but in China the difference was reversed: Chinese men preferred a partner who wanted children more than the American men. In addition, there was no significant difference in the American sample in preferences for a partner who is a good housekeeper; however, in China, men had a significantly stronger preference that their partners are good housekeepers than women. Last, men from both countries preferred a partner younger than themselves, but the difference was greater in China.

### **Romantic Attitudes**

#### **Love as the basis for marriage**

In the United States, Canada, and other Western cultures, it is generally assumed that two people will marry each other only if there is love between them (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). However, in China, a country with a long history of arranged marriages, love by itself seems a weak reason to get married. In the past, when the parents took charge in children's marriages, they always chose a man for their daughter who had good financial prospects, so that their children did not need to worry about money; and parents always wanted to find a girl who was virtuous and could organize the house well for their son, so that their children did not need to worry about cooking or sewing. Children generally did not have the right to manage their own marriage. If children disobeyed their parents, they would be labeled as un-filial.

Based on the researcher's experience growing up in China, parents' opinions are still very influential in their children's mate preferences, and similarly, parents still value the man's financial ability and woman's housekeeping ability. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why people in China generally will not choose to get married based only on love.

However, in America, many people will choose to get married when they think it's time, and this "time" does not refer to the time they have a stable income, or time they are able to purchase a house. The "time" means they think their love can lead them to a shared future. For instance, Americans are more likely to get married when they are in high school or college students based only on their love for each other. When they are still students, they do not have a strong financial ability to support a family, yet they still choose to get married.

China has a long history of arranged marriage. Parents sort out the potential mate for their children based on their traits. However, the person chosen by the parents is not in love with the son/daughter, because they have not yet met each other. To Americans this sounds terrible, but the Chinese people have a good rationale underlie the arranged marriage: because the two people don't know each other well, or perhaps not at all, and since they don't have any romantic feelings for one another prior to the marriage, the partners in an arranged marriage "have nowhere to go but up" (Xu & Whyte, 1990). It means the arranged marriage might start with some ambiguity about their feelings toward each other, but the relationship between the couple will develop as the couple gets to know each other, which leads to a more intimate relationship. However, when a couple marries based on "love matches," — that is, the individuals plays the dominant role in selecting whom they will marry — the marriage starts out hot and grows cold (Xu & Whyte, 1990). When the romance fades away, people pay more attention to the mate's shortcomings. Although arranged marriages are much less common in current Chinese society, parents still reserve the power to interfere in their children's marriage, as they say that marriage is a matter of two families, not only two people.

In the U.S. there is no history of arranged marriage, so technically Americans control their own marriages, and of course, if they want to marry someone they are considered in love.

So, it's very strange to ask them if they want to marry somebody they do not love. A study by Sprecher and Toro-Morn (2002) compared American and Chinese's attitudes about love as the basis of marriage. They found that both American and Chinese participants indicated that love would be necessary for entering marriage. Yet, American women agreed to a significantly greater degree that they would need to be in love, while there was no gender difference in the Chinese sample. Also, passionate love (sexual attraction) was regarded as less important than intimate love (offering emotional comfort) for maintaining marriage in both American and Chinese samples. American men and women generally did not believe that it was necessary to end marriage if there was no passionate love or sexual attraction. This indicated that both men and women considered emotional satisfaction to be more important than just physical satisfaction for maintaining marriage. Similarly, Chinese men and women also considered emotional satisfaction more important to maintain marriage. However, Chinese men rated physical satisfaction to be more important than did Chinese women (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002).

### **Premarital sex**

Another potentially big cultural divide is the different opinions that Americans and Chinese hold toward premarital sex. A traditional perspective regarding sex in China was that sex essentially existed for procreation, not pleasure. In addition, a husband must have his wife's virginity, so that the husband received his wife "fully." Thus, premarital sex was regarded as unacceptable and shameful to the family. Women who had sex before marriage would be criticized as promiscuous and had a bad reputation, which would result in no man wanting to marry her or only very low-status men willing to consider marrying her. Nonetheless, as Chinese society has changed over time, Chinese people's attitudes toward premarital sex has become more tolerant and accepting. One study (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li, & Hesketh, 2011) surveyed

Chinese people's attitudes toward premarital sex and they found that 64% of urban and 61% of rural participants, 61% of men, 64% of women, 57% of over-30s and 70% under-30s, indicated that premarital sex was acceptable. In addition, when describing premarital sex, the majority of respondents used terms such as "normal," "common," "China is changing," "society is opening-up," and "people should do whatever they want" to explain their beliefs (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li, & Hesketh, 2011). Although there was no big difference between the tolerance of urban people and rural people or men and women, a relatively large difference was found between people who are older than 30 and younger than 30. This study suggested that younger generations have a higher acceptability rate and are more tolerant of premarital sex. However, according to this study, the conservative view was still prevalent, and older people (53%) are more likely to hold such conservative views than younger people (44%). Some examples of more conservative answers were: "Although it is inevitable in modern China, I regard it as immoral. I think young people should stay pure before they get married," and "It [premarital sex] is not good, Chinese traditional behavior should be insisted on. Young people disregard the values we think are important," and "Generally speaking, it is very common, but I think it is shameful. Sex should be taken seriously, not just for fun" (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li, & Hesketh, 2011). Therefore, it seems that, although the general attitude toward premarital sex has been more accepting than before, negative attitudes toward premarital sex are still relatively widespread. Even though young people are more open-minded than older people, they are still influenced by the older generation. Hence, premarital sex seems not fully accepted in today's Chinese society.

Whereas premarital sex is still a controversial topic in China, people in the U.S. seem more tolerant of it. It is more common in the U.S. for high school or college girls to get pregnant before marriage, and many universities provide condoms on campus, which never happens in

China. The author asked one of her American friends if premarital sex was common in the U.S., and if parents and religion oppose it. The friend answered: “Well, it is kind of normal and expected. Parents and teens may have different ideas, but parents’ ideas don’t really matter. Some religions definitely prohibit it, but religion is not necessarily the mainstream view anymore.” One message that was conveyed in this answer was that parents were less accepting of premarital sex, which is similar to China’s situation. One study (Lance, 2007) compared the attitude regarding premarital sex of college students in 1940 and 2000–2005 and found that, in the 1940 group, about two out of three female college students indicated they felt it was wrong for both females and males to engage in premarital sex. For the male college students, about one in three felt it was wrong for both females and males to engage in premarital sex. From the surveys conducted from 2000–2005, the percentage of both female and male college students who thought it was wrong for female and male college students to engage in premarital sex was lower than in 1940 (Lance, 2007). The results indicated that, similar to China, younger generations are more tolerant of premarital sex than older generations.

Overall, in the researcher’s experience, the trend in societal attitudes toward premarital sex in both China and the U.S. has moved in the direction of greater acceptance, and premarital sex has become more common in both countries. However, it seems that this phenomenon is more prevalent in the U.S., considering the relatively large premarital pregnancy percentage. Therefore, on this issue, the Chinese are maybe more conservative than the Americans.

The current study intends to examine how people from collectivistic and individualistic cultures are different in mate preferences and beliefs toward romantic relationships. This study is important because it takes the current societal changes and its influences on people’s mate preferences and romantic beliefs into consideration. Moreover, although some researchers have



tested mate preference and beliefs toward romantic relationships separately before, the current researcher attempted to replicate the mate preference findings from past research, as well as issues around marrying for love and premarital sex. But the current research also examined the issue of the influence of family and friends on relationships. Thus, the researcher hypothesized:

1. Chinese men will express a stronger interest in a potential mate's housekeeping "ability" than will American men.
2. Chinese women will express a stronger interest in a potential mate's financial prospects than will American women.
3. American participants will express a stronger desire to "marry for love" than will Chinese participants.
4. The Chinese participants will express a stronger concern about a potential mate's chastity than will American participants.
5. The Chinese participants will express a greater tendency to be influenced by family and friends about their "mate" choice than will American participants.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The present study had a total of 583 participants: 86 American males, 205 American females, 181 Chinese males, and 111 Chinese females. All the participants were currently enrolled in colleges in the United States or China.

The American participants were comprised of students enrolled at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB/SJU), two private, Catholic colleges with a combined enrollment of around 4,000. The participants varied in their majors, which included Psychology, Biology, Nursing, Nutrition, Management, and others. The Chinese participants were comprised of students enrolled at Sichuan University (SCU), the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC), and Chengdu University (CDU). SCU and UESTC are two of

China's key national universities under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education, and are included as two of the first universities into "Project 2011," a project in China for developing 100 first-class universities and a number of key fields of research for the 21st century. SCU has an enrollment of around 42,000, including undergraduate and graduate students at three campuses. UESTC has an enrollment of around 45,000, including undergraduate and graduate students at four campuses. CDU is a relatively smaller-sized university. CDU has an enrollment of 21,000 undergraduate students at five campuses. The major campuses of SCU, UESTC, and CDU are located in Chengdu, Sichuan, China. Participants' majors included Polymer Material and Engineering, English, Mechanical Design, Manufacturing and Automation, Landscape Design, Forest Resources Protection, and Recreation, and Tourism Management.

## **Materials**

The survey was created in English, and was translated into Chinese by the researcher. The researcher's former English teacher, who works at Chengdu No. 20 High School, Mrs. Ma Min, and Hu Jingdan, an undergraduate English major student at Southwest Petroleum University, assisted in reviewing the English–Chinese translation. The survey consisted of questions created by the current researcher, as well as questions from surveys used in previous research (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002; and Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). First, the survey contains demographic information such as sex, sexual orientation, major, year in school, age, nationality, and the region in which participants grew up. (Participants were asked about sexual orientation because the study focuses on heterosexual relationships.)

**Survey 1: Mate preferences.** To test participants' mate preferences, the survey that Toro-Morn and Sprecher used in their 2003 study was applied. The survey contains 25 possible personality characteristics that a person may consider most for a marriage. Examples include:

honest and trustworthy, healthy, sense of humor, wants children, good looking, high social status, wealthy, younger than I am, older than I am, and friendly and sociable.

Following Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003), the participants were asked to rate each characteristic on a 1–5 Likert scale indicating how important a trait is to them for a mate:

- 1 = It does not matter to me if my partner has this characteristic.
- 2 = I have a slight preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 3 = I have a moderate preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 4 = I have a strong preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 5 = This would be a necessity; I would not even consider a person as a mate if he/she did not have this characteristic.

**Survey 2: Love as the basis for marriage.** To assess participants' belief toward love as the basis for marriage, three questions were asked:

1. If a man (woman) had all other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you are not in love with him (her)?
2. If a woman (man) had all the other qualities you desired and you experienced a friendship/companionate love, but not a sexual attraction or passionate love for her (him), would you marry her or him?
3. If you and your partner are in love, but you don't have a stable income, a place to live, or one of you have serious illness, would you still marry this person?

The first two questions were used in Sprecher and Toro-Morn's (2002) study and the current researcher created the third question.

The participants rated each question on a 1–5 Likert scale indicating how likely it is they will choose to get married if the only thing certain is love. A higher score indicates a stronger love-marriage connection:

- 1 = Strongly no
- 2 = Moderately no
- 3 = Undecided
- 4 = Moderately
- 5 = Strongly yes

**Survey 3: Premarital sex.** To assess participants' attitudes toward premarital sex, three questions were asked:

1. Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage or not?

The original question read: "There has been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex changing in this country. If a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?" Since the first part of the question is out of context for the current study, the author decided to delete that part of the question. Also, the author separated the question from the response options to keep it consistent with other questions.

2. Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage, but they plan to get married in the future?
3. If you are going to get married, do you accept that your future husband or wife has had sexual relations with others?

The first question was used in Glenn and Weaver's 1979 study, and the second and third questions were created by the current researcher.

The participants were asked to rate each question on a 1–5 Likert scale indicating the acceptability of premarital sex. A high score indicates a higher acceptability of premarital sex.

- 1 = Always wrong
- 2 = Almost always wrong
- 3 = Wrong
- 4 = Wrong only sometimes
- 5 = Not wrong at all

**Survey 4: Influence of family and friends on romantic relationships.** To assess the influence of family and friends on participants' beliefs about romantic relationships, four questions that were developed by the current researcher were asked:

1. When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you consult with your family and friends about what you should do?
2. When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you take family and friends' advice about what you should do?
3. If your parents suggest you that you should break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think the two of you do not match, how likely you will follow their direction?
4. If your parents suggest you that you should marry your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think it's time, how likely you will follow their direction?

For the first two questions, the participant rated each question on a 1–5 Likert scale.

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Only sometimes
- 3 = Usually
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always

For the second two questions, the participant rated each question on another 1–5 Likert scale:

- 1 = I will never consider such suggestions
- 2 = I will think about it, but I do not take it seriously
- 3 = I will think about it, and I take it somewhat seriously
- 4 = I will think about it, and take it seriously
- 5 = I will follow their directions

The four responses were analyzed together, and a higher score indicated stronger family and friends' influence on their romantic relationships.

## **Procedure**

For the American participants, the survey was posted on Survey Monkey and the link to the survey was sent out via emails. The survey was part of the laboratory experience in the Introductory Psychology –subject pool, “Psychology Research in Action” (PRIA), in which students have the option of participating in psychological studies. In addition, professors from the Department of Psychology, a professor from the Department of Philosophy, and two professors from the Department of Modern and Classical Languages sent the link to the survey

via email to their students. The students had the right to choose whether to participate or not, and their participation was not related to their grade in class.

A total of 344 American students filled out the survey, but only 312 completed the entire survey. Among the 312 remaining participants, 10 were either homosexual or bisexual, 10 were not American citizens or had only lived in the U.S. for two to four years (e.g., international students coming to the U.S. for college). The researcher excluded those participants' responses, since this study focused on the influence of American/individualistic culture and Chinese/collectivistic culture on *heterosexual romantic relationships*. Hence, those who were homosexual/bisexual, or who have not lived in the U.S. long enough to absorb the culture, were not included in this study. In addition, a 42-year-old participant was excluded, since he was a significant outlier in regard to age and his life experience could skew the results. Therefore, there were 291 usable responses for American participants.

For Chinese participants, the researcher recruited participants by requesting three employees (one faculty member and two staff members) at the three universities in China to give paper copies of the survey to students to complete. However, it was made clear to students that their participation was voluntary. The students were informed that the surveys were confidential and anonymous. Once again, participation had no influence on class grade. Surveys were placed in folders, and instructors and other students were not allowed to inspect the surveys. The researcher collected the completed surveys after all participants had finished.

A total of 700 surveys were provided to the Chinese students (300 to SCU, 200 to UESTC, and 200 to CDU), but only 426 completed surveys were returned (163 from SCU, 141 from UESTC, and 122 from CDU). Eight participants left the survey blank or wrote "Decline to participate" under the consent form, 18 left more than two blank responses, 88 made random

responses (e.g., all the responses were “1”) or the responses were in an unusual pattern (e.g., repeated “1” “2” “3” “4” “5”), 13 indicated they were homosexual/bisexual, and seven had logical flaws (e.g., chose “Older than I am” as a necessary characteristic for his/her mate, but also chose “Strong preference” for “Younger than I am”). The researcher decided to eliminate those surveys, which left 292 usable surveys from the Chinese sample.

## **Results**

### **Hypotheses**

An independent *t*-test and factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied using SPSS. The first hypothesis (Chinese men will express a stronger interest in a potential mate’s housekeeping “ability” than will American men) was not supported. As indicated in Table 1, the mean scores of American and Chinese male participants were similar, and the mean scores suggested that they had a slight to moderate preference for “Good Housekeeper” in their mates. Considering the ratings of mate characteristics from high to low, the mean scores also suggested that “Good Housekeeper” was the fifteenth most important characteristic in a mate for American males and was the thirteenth most important characteristic for Chinese males (Table 1).

The second hypothesis (Chinese women will express a stronger interest in a potential mate’s financial prospects than will American women) was supported. The mate preference characteristics, “High Earning Potential,” “Has Material Possessions,” and “Wealthy” were rated significantly lower by American female participants than by Chinese female participants. As indicated in Table 1, for “High Earning Potential,” the mean score of American female participants was 2.70, with a standard deviation of 1.05, while the mean score of Chinese female participants was 3.15, with a standard deviation of 1.31 ( $t(314) = -3.36, p < .05$ ).

**Table 1****Means of Mate Preferences for Men vs. Women within Each Culture**

	American		Chinese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Honest & Trustworthy	4.76 (1)	4.88 (1)	4.28 (1)	4.48 (1)
Warm & Kind	4.16 (3)	4.47 (2)	3.88 (2)	3.98 (3)
Good House Keeper	2.76 (15)	2.92 (13)	2.99 (7)	3.05 (12)
Healthy	3.91 (6)	3.78 (9)	3.72 (3)	4.14 (2)
Athletic	3.26 (12)	3.27 (12)	2.45 (15)	3.33 (7)
Exciting Personality	3.95 (5)	4.03 (6)	2.22 (16)	2.61 (17)
Sense of Humor	4.29 (2)	4.39 (3)	2.78 (10)	3.38 (5)
Friendly & Sociable	4.06 (4)	4.30 (4)	3.04 (5)	3.62 (4)
Intelligent	3.84 (8)	4.02 (7)	3.01 (6)	3.28 (8)
Expressive & Open	3.73 (10)	3.82 (8)	2.89 (8)	3.15 (9)
Good Background & Heredity	2.70 (16)	2.73 (16)	2.06 (18)	2.49 (19)
Physically Attractive	3.91 (7)	3.58 (10)	2.88 (9)	2.71 (15)
Sexy Looking	3.41 (11)	2.84 (14)	2.48 (14)	1.98 (21)
Religious	2.45 (17)	2.82 (15)	1.80 (21)	1.74 (24)
High social status	1.90 (20)	2.06 (20)	1.62 (23)	1.85 (23)
Highly educated	3.03 (13)	3.32 (11)	2.78 (11)	3.10 (11)
High earning potential	2.45 (18)	2.70 (17)	2.19 (17)	3.15 (10)
Has material possessions	1.80 (21)	1.90 (23)	1.88 (19)	2.57 (18)
Wealthy	1.78 (22)	1.95 (22)	1.68 (22)	2.23 (20)
Powerful	1.67 (23)	1.87 (24)	1.50 (24)	1.87 (22)
Wants children	3.81 (9)	4.20 (5)	3.22 (4)	2.83 (14)
Creative and artistic	2.88 (14)	2.48 (18)	2.62 (13)	2.67 (16)
Popular	2.00 (19)	1.97 (21)	2.72 (12)	2.96 (13)
Older than I am	1.37 (25)	2.28 (19)	1.31 (25)	3.36 (6)
Younger than I am	1.52 (24)	1.41 (25)	1.84 (20)	1.23 (25)

The second hypothesis (Chinese women will express a stronger interest in a potential mate's financial prospects than will American women.) was supported. The mate preference characteristics, "High Earning Potential," "Has Material Possessions," and "Wealthy" were rated significantly lower by American female participants than by Chinese female participants. As



indicated in Table 1, for “High Earning Potential,” the mean score of American female participants was 2.70, with a standard deviation of 1.05, while the mean score of Chinese female participants was 3.15, with a standard deviation of 1.31 ( $t(314) = -3.36, p < .05$ ).

For “Has Material Possessions,” the mean score of American female participants was 1.90, with a standard deviation of .91, and the mean score of Chinese female participants was 2.57, with a standard deviation of .89 ( $t(314) = -6.26, p < .05$ ). As for “Wealthy,” the mean score of American female participants was 1.95, with a standard deviation of .93, and the mean score of Chinese female participants was 2.23, with a standard deviation of .93 ( $t(314) = -2.55, p < .05$ ).

Considering the rating of mate characteristics from high to low, as indicated in Table 1, “Has Material Possessions” was the seventeenth most important characteristic for American females and the tenth most important characteristic for Chinese females in a mate; “Has Material Possessions” was the twenty-third most important characteristic for American females and eighteenth most important characteristic for Chinese females in a mate; “Wealthy” was the twenty-second most important characteristic for American females and twentieth most important characteristic for Chinese females in a mate. In general, for “High Earning Potential,” American females had a slight to moderate preference and Chinese females had a moderate to strong preference; for “Has Material Possessions” and “Wealthy,” American females had no preference to slight preference and Chinese females had a slight preference to moderate preference.

The third hypothesis: “American participants are more likely to ‘marry for love’ than Chinese participants” was partially supported in that Americans participants and Chinese participants were significantly different on the first item assessing attitudes toward love in marriage (“If a man/woman had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him/her?”), and the third item (“If you and your partner are in love,

but you don't have a stable income, a place to live, or one of you has a serious illness, would you still marry this person?"). The results showed (see Table 2) that American participants ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = .88$ ;  $t(581) = -8.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were less likely to marry a person who had all qualities they desired, but they shared no mutual love, than were Chinese participants ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = .98$ ;  $t(581) = -8.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The mean scores indicated that American participants would "Strongly" to "Moderately" reject this marriage and Chinese participants would "Moderately" reject this marriage to being "Undecided" about this marriage. Moreover, American participants ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ;  $t(581) = 4.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were more likely to marry a person with whom they shared "mutual love," even though they probably had "no stable income, had no place to live, or had a serious illness" than Chinese participants ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ;  $t(581) = 4.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The mean scores suggested that both American and Chinese participants would be "Undecided" to "Moderately" certain about this marriage. However, there was little variance in responses, which indicated that the differences were not particularly significant. No significant difference was found on the second item ("If a woman/man had all of the other qualities you desired and you experienced a friendship or companionate love but not a sexual attraction or passionate love for her/him/, would you marry her/him?"). This indicated that both American and Chinese participants had fairly similar opinions toward this question and both groups were "Moderately" rejecting to "Undecided" about this marriage.

**Table 2**

**Means of Love Only as a Basis of Marriage for Men vs. Women within Each Culture**

	American		Chinese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
If a man (woman) had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him (her)?	1.73	1.49	2.15	2.27
If a woman (man) had all of the other qualities you desired and you experienced a friendship or companionate love but not a sexual attraction or passionate love for her (him), would you marry her (him)?	2.08	2.25	2.46	2.18
If you and your partner are in love, but you don't have a stable income, a place to live, or one of you has a serious illness, would you still marry this person?	3.47	3.75	3.30	2.81

The fourth hypothesis (The Chinese participants will express a stronger concern about a potential mate's chastity than will American participants) was also partially supported.

Significant differences were found for item 1 ("Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual intercourse before marriage?") and for item 3 ("If you are going to get married, would you find it is acceptable that your future husband or wife has had sexual intercourse with others before you became a couple?").

Generally, both Chinese and American participants believed premarital sex is, "Wrong Only Sometimes," but Chinese participants were slightly less accepting of premarital sex. For item 1 (see Table 3), Chinese participants ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.05; t(581) = 3.82, p < .05$ ) scored significantly lower than American participants ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.23; t(581) = 3.82, p < .05$ ), which suggested that Chinese participants were more likely than American participants to consider that premarital sex was wrong. For item 3, Chinese participants ( $M = 3.23, SD = 1.18; t(581) = 5.70, p < .05$ ) also scored significantly lower than American participants ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.14; t(581) = 5.70, p < .05$ ), indicating that Chinese participants were less likely than

American participants to accept that their future husbands/wives had sexual intercourse with others prior to marriage. No significant difference was found on the second item (“Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual intercourse before marriage, but they plan to get married in the future?”), suggesting that Chinese and American participants had very similar opinions when considering whether it is wrong or not to have sexual intercourse before the planned marriage, and most thought it was “Not Wrong at All.”

**Table 3**

**Means of Premarital Sex of Marriage for Men vs. Women within Each Culture**

	American		Chinese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual intercourse before marriage?	3.99	3.93	3.67	3.45
Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual intercourse before marriage, but they plan to get married in the future?	4.28	4.25	4.23	3.96
If you are going to get married, would you find it is acceptable that your future husband or wife has had sexual intercourse with others before you became a couple?	4.02	3.68	3.22	3.26

The final hypothesis (The Chinese participants will express a greater tendency to be influenced by family and friends about their “mate” choice than will American participants) was partially supported as well. The family and friends involvement survey had two “categories” in terms of “influence”: the first two items focused on how often the participants *consult with* and take advice from their family and/or friends (“When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you consult with your family and/or friends about what you should do?” and “When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you take family and/or friends’ advice about what you should do?”), while the second two items focused on how often the participants *obey* their parents (“If your parents suggest that

you should break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think the two of you do not match, how likely is it that you would follow their direction/advice?” and “If your parents suggest that you should marry your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think it is time, how likely is it that you would follow their direction/advice?”).

The “consultation category” was not supported, because American participants ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ,  $t(581) = 7.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = .87$ ,  $t(581) = 6.47$ ,  $p < .05$ ) rated the first two items significantly higher than Chinese participants ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = .90$ ,  $t(581) = 7.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .74$ ,  $t(581) = 7.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

**Means of Influence of Family and/or Friends for Men vs. Women within Each Culture**

	American		Chinese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you consult with your family and/or friends about what you should do?	2.65	2.96	2.18	2.48
When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you take family and/or friends' advice about what you should do?	2.58	2.62	2.11	2.29
If your parents suggest that you should break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think the two of you do not match, how likely is it that you would follow their direction/advice?	2.63	2.79	2.57	3.01
If your parents suggest that you should marry your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think it is time, how likely is it that you would follow their direction/advice?	2.43	2.70	3.18	3.20

The mean scores showed that both American and Chinese participants would “Only Sometimes” consult with and take advice from family and friends, yet American participants are more likely to do so. The “obedience category,” which means how likely participants would do what their parents told them to do, was partially supported. There were no significant differences found in the third item, but Chinese participants ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $t(581) = -8.16$ ,  $p < .05$ )

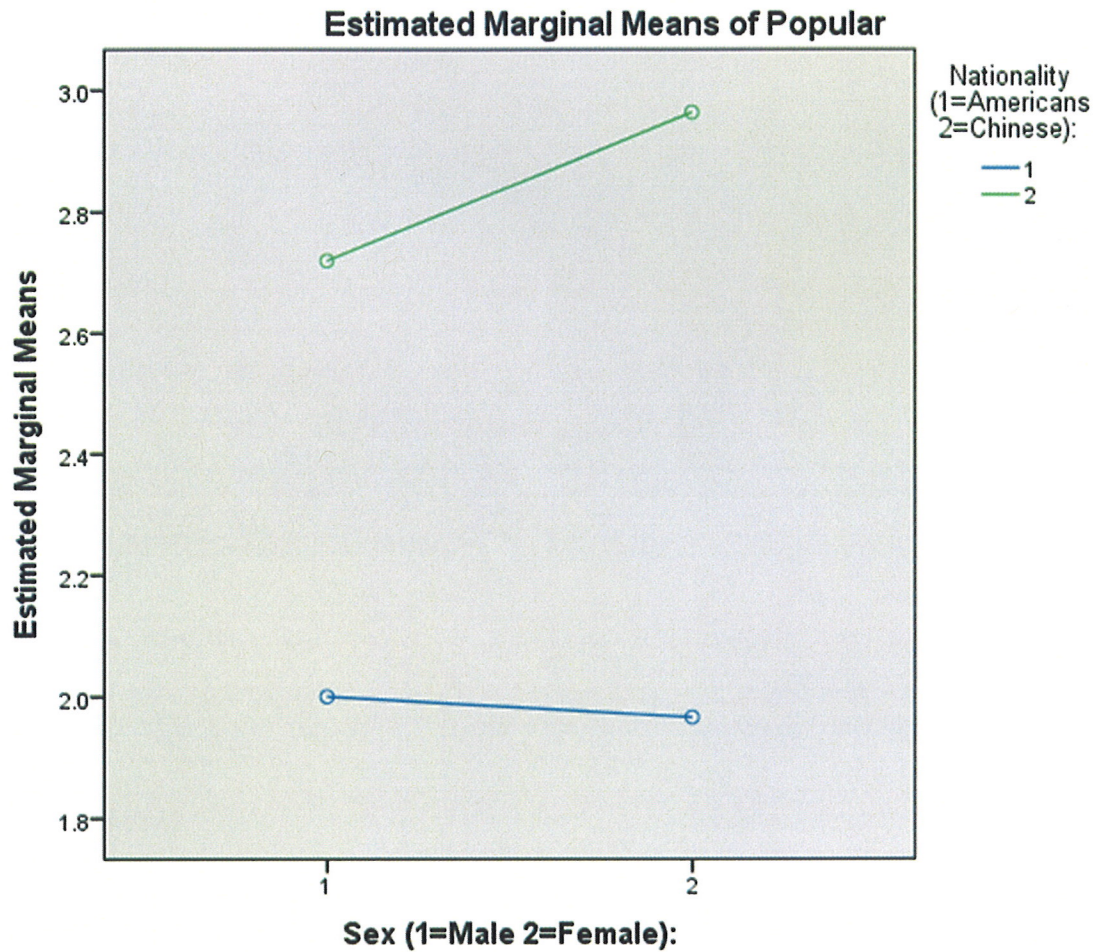
rated the fourth item significantly higher than American participants ( $M = 2.62, SD = .90, t(581) = -8.16, p < .05$ ), as indicated in Table 4. The mean scores indicated that the American participants would “Think about” but “Do Not Take Seriously” parents’ suggestions about getting married, while Chinese participants would “Think about” and “Take somewhat Seriously” that suggestion. Therefore, in general, Americans are more likely to consult with and take advice from family and friends, but the Chinese participants are more likely to obey their parents’ insistence on getting married.

### **Additional Meaningful Significant Differences**

The study yielded some significant results beyond those examined based in the hypotheses.

**Survey 1: Mate preferences.** For “popular,” Chinese participants ( $M = 2.81, SD = .96, t(580) = -10.73, p < .05$ ) rated this item significantly higher than American participants ( $M = 1.98, SD = .92, t(580) = -10.73, p < .05$ ). The results suggested that most Chinese participants had a “Moderate” preference to have a “Popular” mate, whereas most American participants had a “Slight” preference having a “Popular” mate. Also, as shown in Table 1, the Chinese female participants rated “Popular” highest, Chinese male participants rated it second highest, American male participants rated third highest, and American female participants rated least highest. In addition, as shown in (Figure 1), a significant difference was found in nationality ( $F(1, 578) = 107.82, p < .05$ ).

Figure 1

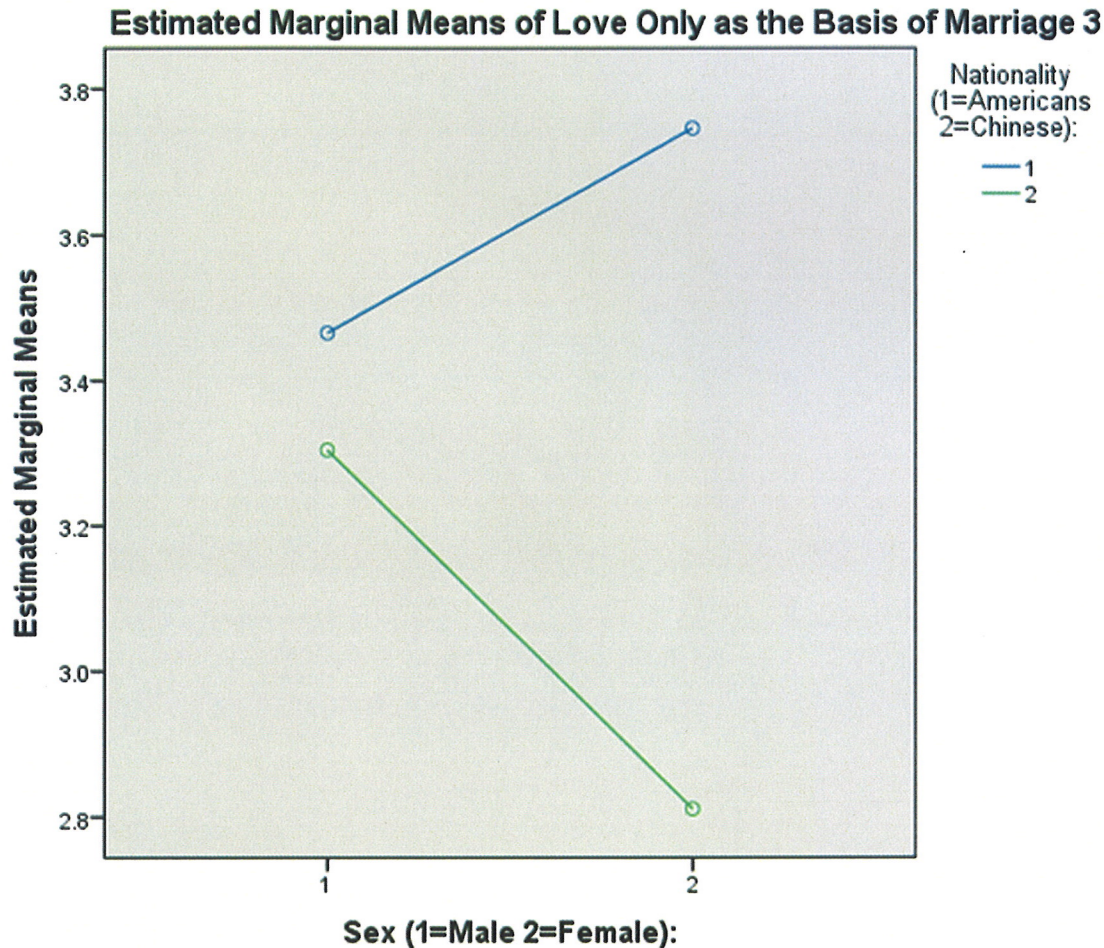


**Survey 2: Love as the basis for marriage.** The results of the third item (“If you and your partner are in love, but you don’t have a stable income, a place to live, or one of you has a serious illness, would you still marry this person?”) indicated a difference based in nationality that supported the third hypothesis. However, when the researcher looked at this item in terms of sex and nationality interaction, no difference was found between American and Chinese males (they both would “Moderately” accept this marriage). Yet, a significant difference was found between American and Chinese female participants. As shown in Table 2, the American female participants had a mean score of 3.75, with a standard deviation of 1.07 ( $t(314) = .00, p < .05$ ).

This suggested that most of the American female participants would “Moderately” accept the marriage. The Chinese female participants had a mean score of 2.81, with a standard deviation of 1.10 ( $t(314) = .00, p < .05$ ). This suggested that most of the Chinese female participants would be “Undecided” about this marriage. The results indicated that while American female participants would be more likely to “marry for love,” the Chinese female participants would tend to consider the mate’s financial ability and health condition. Hence, the results actually supported the second hypothesis (Chinese women will express a stronger interest in a potential mate’s financial prospects than will American women) and connected with the mate preferences characteristic “Healthy,” which indicated that Chinese female participants indeed wanted a mate who are healthy enough to earn money and support a family. Moreover, comparing the pattern in terms of American and Chinese samples, there is an interaction of sex and nationality, as indicated in Figure 2.



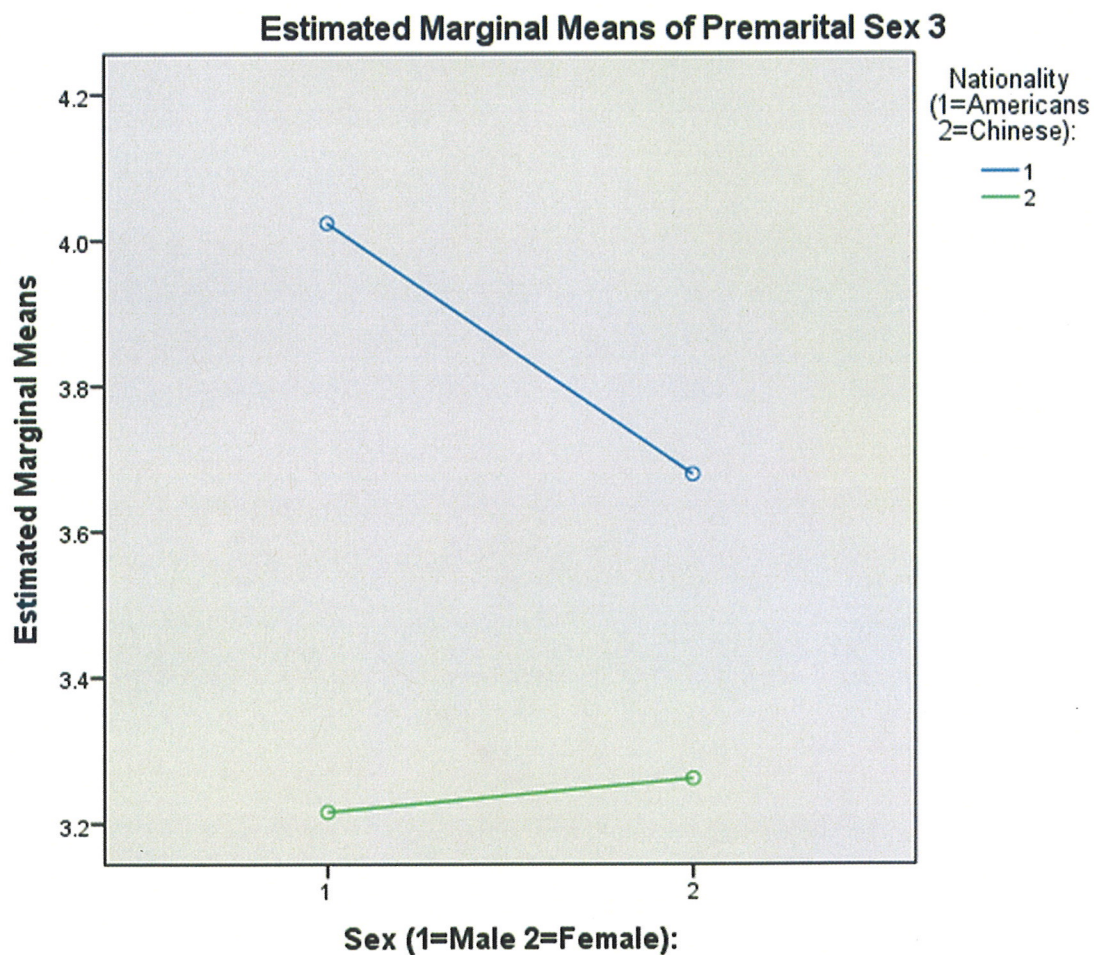
Figure 2



**Survey 3: Premarital sex.** A significant cultural difference was found on item 3 of premarital sex survey, “If you are going to get married, would you find it is acceptable that your future husband or wife has had sexual intercourse with others before you became a couple?” This supported the hypothesis: “The Chinese participants will emphasize the mate’s chastity more than American participants.” However, there was also a significant gender difference with the American participants. The mean score of American male participants was 4.02, with a standard deviation of 1.07 ( $t(289) = .02, p < .05$ ). It indicated that most of them were “Somewhat accepting” that their future wives had had sexual intercourse with others before they became a

couple. The mean score of American female participants was 3.68, with a standard deviation of 1.16 ( $t(289) = .02, p < .05$ ) indicating that they either “Don’t Know” if they would accept a husband who had had sexual intercourse with others before, or were “Somewhat Accepting” that their future husbands had had sexual intercourse with others before. The results were even more interesting when comparing the pattern with the Chinese male and female participants (Figure 3). Chinese male participants objected more than Chinese female participants that their future husbands or wives had had sexual intercourse with others before they became a couple, whereas American female participants objected more than American male participants.

Figure 3



## Discussion

The results of this study indicated that American and Chinese college students had both significant differences and similarities in their mate preferences, as well as their beliefs regarding love as the basis for marriage, premarital sex, and involvement of family and friends in their romantic relationships.

The differences included: Chinese female participants valued the mate's financial prospects more than American female participants; both American male and female participants were more likely to 'marry for love' than Chinese male and female participants — that is, American participants would "Strongly" reject marriage to someone they do not love, but they would marry a person whom they love even if they have no "Stable Income," no "Place to Live," and one of them has a "Serious Illness." In addition, Chinese male and female participants emphasized their mate's chastity more than American male and female participants; Chinese male and female participants found premarital sex to be more "wrong" than American male and female participants; and Chinese male and female participants were less likely to accept their future husband or wife had sexual intercourse with someone other than them prior to becoming a couple; and last, while American male and female participants were more likely to "consult with" their parents about their romantic relationships, Chinese male and female participants were more likely to "obey" their parents about getting married.

On the other hand, similarities included: both American and Chinese male participants had very similar opinions about the characteristic "Good housekeeper" and all female participants had a stronger preference than male participants for the "Good Housekeeper" characteristic in a mate; both American and Chinese participants would not marry a person to whom they are not sexually attracted; both American and Chinese participants consider

premarital sex to be “Wrong only Sometimes”; and both American and Chinese participants would take their parents’ suggestion for breaking up with their boyfriends/girlfriends “Somewhat seriously.”

### **Mate Preferences**

The current study found similar results as the study conducted by Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003), which also examined American and Chinese people’s mate preferences. The similarities included: American male participants had a stronger preference than female participants on the items of “Physically Attractive” and “Sexy Looking”; the American female participants had a stronger preference than male participants on items “Warm and Kind” and “Wants Children”; Chinese male participants had a stronger preference than female participants on the items “Sexy Looking” and “Younger than I am”; Chinese female participants had a stronger preference than male participants on the items “Healthy,” “Athletic,” “Exciting Personality,” “Sense of Humor,” “Friendly and Sociable,” “High Earning Potential,” “Has Material Possessions,” “Powerful,” and “Older than I am.”

Similar to the Toro-Morn and Sprecher study (2003), many of the traits were preferred to a greater degree by the American participants than by the Chinese participants. Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) explain this condition as follows: “These traits were created by American researchers, thus there may be less relevance to the Chinese participants (Toro-Morn and Sprecher study, 2003).” For example, “Religious” is a characteristic that most Chinese people would not consider to be important in a mate because most of them do not have a religion. The second reason was that “the greater experience with completing surveys might make the American participants more likely to endorse the survey items” (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003).

The third reason was that “the English version of response options may not correspond exactly to the Chinese version due to the translation” (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003).

In the Toro-Morn and Sprecher study (2003), Chinese male participants rated the “Good Housekeeper” characteristic significantly higher than American male participants. But in the current study, no difference was found between American and Chinese male participants. This indicated that Chinese male participants in the 2003 study still held the traditional view: to support a family, men are responsible for making money, and women are responsible for managing the house. Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) offered the following explanation: “although one of China’s most celebrated achievements has been its commitment toward gender equality, both Chinese and Western researchers continue to document that women are still seen as primarily responsible for childcare and housework.” However, in the current study, Chinese female participants rated the “Good Housekeeper” characteristic higher than Chinese male participants. In the current researcher’s experience, this might be due to the gradually more prevalent idea of gender equality. The Chinese government made significant improvements in women’s lives in the past few years, for example, “granting them the right to divorce and to work on an equal footing with men, and offering greater educational opportunities than those found in most other developing countries” (Hewitt, 2009). Moreover, after the discovery of an incident in which five men forced underage rural girls into the sex trade, not only the Chinese government, but also the Chinese women themselves have been fighting for their rights. Chinese women now are trying to be what Chairman Mao proclaimed: that women “hold up half the sky.” Hence, compared to 10 years ago, many Chinese women today work outside the home, so they feel overwhelmed if all the housework is on women’s shoulders. Hence, Chinese women think a “Good Housekeeper” should no longer be an important characteristic merely for women, but also

for men. Therefore, Chinese women in 2013 value “Good Housekeeper” more than women in 2003.

In the current study, American women valued “High Earning Potential” less than Chinese women. However, in the Toro-Morn and Sprecher study (2003), American women valued “Has Earning Potential” more than Chinese women. One possible explanation might be that the U.S. was not in an economic recession yet in 2003, so American women expected their mates could earn a lot of money. Yet, the Chinese economy was still developing in 2003, so Chinese women did not believe their mates could earn a high income. However, in 2013, with the U.S. in the shadow of a recession, American women also did not have high expectations that their mates could earn a high income. On the contrary, the Chinese economy continued to grow steadily in 2013, with many job opportunities. In addition, the economic development also caused currency inflation, which led to cost-of-living increases, so Chinese women expected their mates could earn more money in order to support a family and maintain a good quality of life.

Another interesting result was that the Chinese participants had a stronger preference than American participants for the characteristic “Popular.” This was interesting, because people from a collectivistic culture tend to put value in a group, such as family, friends, colleagues, or basketball team; being popular, to some degree, means a person is standing out in that group, which collectivistic people would normally avoid. On the contrary, people from an individualistic culture are more likely to be recognized for their unique characteristics. Moreover, “American individualism encourages self-expression and the pursuit of individual dreams and goals, and highlights personal emotions” (Matsumoto & Tacheuchi, 1996). Therefore, the current investigator expected American participants to rate “Popular” as a more important characteristic than Chinese participants.

One possible reason for the results could be that Chinese college students are more individualistic and Westernized than before. Matsumoto and Tacheuchi (1996) suggested that “culture, defined along a socio-psychological dimension known as individualism vs. collectivism, is not a static, fixed or rigid entity. Instead, it is fluid, flexible and dynamic, shared by members of a culture.” One study (Ishii-Kuntz, 1989) found that younger generations expressed more individualistic values than the older generation. In China, young college students hold a more individualistic view than their parents or grandparents. Nowadays, the Western influence is flooding into China via media and the internet, and there is a great deal of news about the U.S., as well as American TV shows, and movie stars, scientists, and politicians are seen by people in China. This advanced communication technology makes the world functionally smaller and more accessible. Moreover, modern transportation makes it easier to travel to other countries, so that more Chinese students choose to study abroad in the U.S., which allows them to experience American culture. With the desire to know more about the world outside of China, all of these factors allow Chinese college students to accept U.S. culture, which makes them think that “being outstanding” is good. While trying to be outstanding themselves, they also prefer “Popular” boyfriends or girlfriends. On the contrary, being recognized for their unique characteristics is normal, so American college students would not put special attention on this characteristic.

### **Love Only as the Basis of Marriage**

The Sprecher and Toro-Morn study (2002) compared the different attitudes about love only as the basis of marriage between American and Chinese male participants and American and Chinese female participants. The researchers found that both male and female participants indicated that love would be necessary for getting married, but female participants agreed to a

significantly greater degree than did male participants that they would need to be in love to get married (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). However, the current study found a quite different result. American male participants indicated to a greater degree the necessity of love for marriage than American female participants, which meant that American male participants would be less likely than American female participants to marry someone they don't love and American female participants would be more willing to marry without love.

Moreover, Kephart (1967) also found that female participants were more willing than male participants to marry someone they did not love. As cited in Sprecher and Toro-Morn (2002), "women needed to be pragmatic about marriage choices because their husband often determined their financial security and social status." It indicated that women, more than men, valued financial ability and social status. Simpson, Campbell, and Berscheid (1986) also examined this question, but they did not find any gender differences.

In addition, in the current study, American participants were more likely to "marry for love" than Chinese participants, which indicated that love was the most important factor for American people to enter a marriage. However, for Chinese participants, in addition to love, health conditions and economic conditions are equally important. As previously discussed, a marriage in China is an important matter for the extended family, not just two individuals. Thus, the family will value the fiancé's health and economic conditions. Most families hold the opinion that "doors should match," which means people should marry individuals of approximately equal status (Jankowiak, 1989). In order to marry someone from the same "door," the families usually set some criteria. For example, men's jobs or incomes, their political stance, and their health are considered, while women's looks and secondary physical characteristics are being judged. Hence, this is why Chinese participants were less likely than American participants to marry a person



when they have “no stable income,” “no place to live,” and one of them has “illness.” This also explains why Chinese female participants had a stronger preference for their mates to be “Healthy.” Moreover, although the “dating culture” is developing in China, many people still hold a traditional view that “love can grow.” Therefore, once a person “has all other qualities” people desire, they probably will marry that person even if they are not in love, because they believe mutual love will grow as they get to know each other better.

### **Premarital Sex**

Glenn and Weaver (1979) assessed American people’s attitudes toward premarital sex over time in 1972, 1974, 1975, 1977, and 1979. They found that people who responded “Always Wrong” to premarital sex decreased from 36.6 percent in 1972 to 29.3 percent in 1979. Meanwhile, people who responded “Not Wrong at All” to premarital sex increased from 27.3 percent in 1972 to 38.7 percent in 1979.

In the current study, the researcher focused on the cultural and gender differences regarding premarital sex of participants who were from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In terms of gender differences, 5.2 percent of the male participants, both American and Chinese, responded “Always Wrong” and 29.6 percent of the male participants responded “Not Wrong at All” to the question on premarital sex, while the most frequent response (42.3 percent) to this question was “Wrong Only Sometimes.” Female participants were similar, in that 5.7 percent responded “Always Wrong,” 27.8 percent responded “Not Wrong at All,” and 42.4 percent responded “Wrong Only Sometimes.”

In terms of cultural differences, 8.6 percent of American participants, both male and female, considered premarital sex “Always Wrong” and 41.9 percent of American participants considered premarital sex “Not Wrong at All,” which was also the most frequent response of

American participants. For Chinese participants, 2.7 percent responded “Always Wrong,” but only 15.4 percent responded “Not Wrong at All.” The most frequent response for the Chinese participants (51.0 percent) was “Wrong Only Sometimes.” Therefore, there was a significant cultural difference between the Chinese and American participants in their attitudes towards premarital sex, with American participants being more likely than Chinese participants to accept premarital sex. In addition, the American participants in the current study came from a Catholic school, where premarital sex is strongly discouraged. Thus, it is possible that American students who are from non-religious colleges may be even more accepting toward premarital sex.

### **Influence of Family and Friends**

As for the influence of family and friends, the results indicated that American participants were more likely to consult with parents and take their advice, whereas Chinese participants were more likely to obey their parents about getting married. Thus, the present investigator believes that family had influence on both American and Chinese participants, but in different forms. Most American participants considered their parents good people with whom to consult, and from whom to get good advice. Moreover, the so-called “helicopter parents,” which refers to the moms and dads who are largely involved in their children’s life, may contribute to the communication between parents and children in the U.S. According to Lun (2006), “The days of parents dropping off their student on campus and waving good-bye are gone. Enter the world of the parent coordinator,” which suggested that communication and interaction between parents and children has increased, compared to the past. With the development of communication technologies, it’s getting easier for parents to keep in touch with children.

In addition to voice and text messages, many parents also have Facebook and Twitter, which allows them to know about their children’s recent life-updates fairly easily. Since the

parents know more about their children's life, it probably arouses parents' curiosities about the details, which causes them to ask more questions.

As discussed earlier, American students are more likely than Chinese students to make short-term friends, so American students might feel it's inappropriate to talk in-depth about their romantic relationships with their short-term friends. Hence, the parents and children are more likely to communicate, including talking about romantic relationships. In contrast, most Chinese participants regard parents as authority figures, due the traditional Chinese culture of family hierarchy. Thus, they were less likely to communicate their romantic relationships with parents. In addition, as discussed earlier, since Chinese students have the same classes with the same class of other students for four years and the same six students share a dorm room for four years, they tend to make long-term friends. Thus, Chinese students are more likely than American students to talk about their romantic relationships in-depth with each other.

Moreover, many Chinese people would keep their boyfriend/girlfriend a secret until they think the relationship is "mature" enough to let their parents know. In American culture, meeting a mate's parents is prevalent and normal — and usually of little consequence — but it is oftentimes a "big deal" to meet with the mate's parents in Chinese culture. The message of meeting with the mates' parents is, "I think we are good to get married, but we need to get permission from my parents." Therefore, the reason that Chinese participants were more likely to obey their parents' direction of getting married is because their parents are satisfied with their boyfriends/girlfriends and permitting them to get married. In addition, it seems plausible that hiding boyfriends or girlfriends from parents also contributed to the lower level of consultation with parents in China.

## Limitations

There were a few limitations to the current study. First, the sample was not randomly selected. Instead, this study consisted of a convenience sample because not all students had an equal chance to be selected. For American participants, only students who enrolled in Introductory Psychology courses and students who received emails from professors had the opportunity to decide whether to participate or not. For Chinese participants, only students majoring in Polymer Material and Engineering, English, and a few others had the opportunity to take the survey. Therefore, the sample in this study was not representative of all American or Chinese college students.

Second, although the sample size was relatively large ( $N = 583$ ), the samples clearly did not represent the entire United States or China, as the participants were college students, and their mate preferences and attitudes toward romantic relationships may be influenced by higher education. Moreover, the participants were limited to students from four colleges in two cities. Hence, again, the sample was not representative.

Third, although the researcher tried to keep the English version of the survey and its Chinese translation the same, some participants likely still interpreted the questions differently. For example, the researcher asked some American and Chinese friends what they thought “Exciting Personality” meant. American friends responded: “It’s a person who was excited, energetic, or active all the time,” while Chinese friends responded: “It’s a person who had the ability to make others feel excited.” Hence, the results of the survey were likely, to some degree, influenced by the different perceptions and understanding from American and Chinese participants.

Fourth, the conditions under which Chinese and American participants completed the survey differed: American participants completed the survey online, which was a more convenient, private, and quicker option. But the Chinese participants had a paper version, which they had to complete either in classrooms or dorm rooms. After completing the survey, they had to go to elsewhere to turn in the surveys. Thus, Chinese participants had a more complex and potentially less private process for completing the survey. In addition, Chinese participants completed the survey during the final week of the term, which may have been a mood-affecting factor. Because the final exam could determine whether students would pass a course or not, it was extremely important. Thus, some participants might not have taken the survey seriously because it was too time consuming. This may explain why so many surveys were not returned (troublesome process), and also why many of the participants produced patterned responses (because they wanted to save time).

## **Conclusion**

The present study provided empirical evidence of how people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in mate preferences and beliefs about romantic relationships. The researcher hopes that, through consideration of the results, individuals can have a better understanding of mate preferences, romantic relationships, gender differences, and cultural differences. Moreover, couples, especially inter-racial couples, can understand why certain mate characteristics are so important to them, based on their cultural backgrounds. For future studies, researchers should endeavor to eliminate limitations of the current study — for example, recruit a more representative sample, fix the translation problems, and apply a more consistent data collection process for both groups. Furthermore, future researchers should acquire samples from

other countries, and examine related other topics, such as whether people will divorce when there is no love left in the marriage, and the cultural and gender differences in relationship attachments.

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## Appendix

### *Demographic information*

Sex:  
Sexual orientation:  
Major:  
Year in school:  
Age:  
Nationality:  
Region:

### *Mate preferences*

Please rate the following characteristics on a scale from one to five:

- 1 = It does not matter to me if my partner has this characteristic.
- 2 = I have a slight preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 3 = I have a moderate preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 4 = I have a strong preference for this characteristic in a mate.
- 5 = This would be a necessity; I would not even consider a person as a mate if he/she did not have this characteristic

Honest and trustworthy	Sexy looking
Warm and kind	Good housekeeper
Healthy	Athletic
Exciting personality	High earning potential
Sense of humor	Powerful
Intelligent	Has material possessions
Expressive and open	Good background and heredity
Friendly and Sociable	High social status
Physically attractive	Religious
Highly educated	Wealthy
Wants children	Older than I am
Creative and artistic	Younger than I am
Popular	

### *Love only as the basis of marriage*

Please rate the following questions on a scale from one to five:

- 1 = Strongly no (one score)
- 2 = Moderately no (two score)
- 3 = Undecided (three score)
- 4 = Moderately yes (four score)
- 5 = Strongly yes (five score)

- If a man (woman) had all other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you are not in love with him (her)?
- If a woman (man) had all the other qualities you desired and you experienced a friendship/companionate love but not a sexual attraction or passionate love for her (him), would you marry her or him?
- If you and your partner are in love, but you don't have a stable income, a place to live, or one of you have serious illness, would you still marry this person?

### *Premarital sex*

Please rate the following questions on a scale from one to five:

- 1 = Always wrong (one score)
- 2 = Almost always wrong (two score)
- 3 = Wrong (three score)
- 4 = Wrong only sometimes (four score)
- 5 = Not wrong at all (five score)

- Do you think that is wrong for a man and a woman to have sex relations before marriage?
- Do you think that it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage, but they plan to get married in the future?

Please rate the following questions on a scale from one to five:

- 1 = Strongly not accept (one score)
- 2 = Somewhat not accept (two score)
- 3 = I don't know (three score)
- 4 = Somewhat accept (four score)
- 5 = Strongly accept (five score)

- If you are going to get married, do you accept that your future husband or wife has had sexual relations with others?

### *Influence of family and friends on romantic relationships*

Please rate the following questions on a scale from one to five:

- 1 = Never (one score)
- 2 = Only sometimes (two score)
- 3 = Usually (three score)
- 4 = Often (four score)
- 5 = Always (five score)

- When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you consult with your family and friends about what you should do?
- When there is a problem between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, how often do you take family and friends' advice about what you should do?

Please rate the following questions on a scale from one to five:

1 = I will never consider such suggestions (one score)

2 = I will think about it, but I do not take it seriously (two score)

3 = I will think about it, and I take it somewhat seriously (three score)

4 = I will think about it, and take it seriously (four score)

5 = I will follow their directions (five score)

- If your parents suggest you that you should break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think the two of you do not match, how likely you will follow their direction?
- If your parents suggest you that you should marry your boyfriend or girlfriend because they think it's time, how likely you will follow their direction?