

Critically consider the extent to which relationships have been shown to be different in Western and non-Western cultures

Relationships can differ hugely from one person to the next, this can be due to numerous factors; one of these being culture. In a Western culture, ideals are inflicted on individuals which lead to a certain type of relationship present for the majority, as is the case in non-Western cultures. Obvious differences between cultures may include religion, which in turn could lead to arranged marriage, hence affecting the formation of a relationship.

During the formation of a relationship, proximity appears to be a influential factor, as suggested by Festinger et al. Western cultures tend to exist with relatively easy social mobility, meaning interaction occurs between individuals more frequently. This is not so much the case in non-Western cultures therefore allowing proximity to affect relationships differently. This allows people in Western cultures to interact and form relationships far quicker than those formed in non-Western relationships. This also suggests that individuals in a Western society have a far greater choice of people with whom a relationship could be formed. This leads to a critical difference; Western relationships are voluntary whereas non-Western relationships are involuntary. This creates different ideas surrounding the formation of relations as non-Western cultures may tend towards arranged marriages whereas Western relationships tend to form due to love. However, Epstein found that 'love' appears to be present in about half of arranged relationships, showing that this difference in formation does not necessarily affect the emotions felt by either party later in the relationship. Gupta and Singh found that ten years into a marriage, arranged marriages tended to retain a constant level of 'love' within the relationship, whereas this was not the case in love marriages. However, this study was longitudinal and also reliant on Rubin's love scale which may have been ambiguous as levels of love cannot really be measured. As with many experiments regarding relationships, this was a natural experiment meaning there may have been other factors which weren't identified.

It was also found that divorce rates are lower in non-Western cultures. This may be due to the higher emphasis placed on commitment making divorce a far harder act to carry out., therefore also creating differences in the dissolution of relationships. This difference in dissolution was reiterated by Moghaddam who suggested that Western relationships are temporary, whereas non-Western relationships tend to be permanent. Models of dissolution may therefore be more suited to Western cultures as such processes are less likely to take place in non-Western cultures where commitment is far higher and to more people, for example, family. However, despite this, the dissolution of a relationship will not affect the

relationship as it is in progress, it may only affect the individual's views towards relationship. This therefore does not present much of a cultural difference between relationships, rather a difference between individual views.

Non-Western cultures appear to have greater intolerance to relationships which go against the norm. Diener et al found that co-habiting couples tended to have lower life satisfaction than married couples in cultures with this intolerance. This was found to be the reverse in Western cultures. Although this presents a large difference, it cannot be said that a relationship with marriage is dramatically different to that without marriage. Therefore this idea does not necessarily mean that relationships differ in this respect, rather couples are more like to adhere to the social norm. This study may also be ignoring other influential factors which may affect life satisfaction. Dion and Dion identified a critical difference in interpersonal attraction. They found that people in Western cultures tend to be attracted to someone who is compatible with themselves, whereas in non-Western cultures the emphasis is on dissimilar factors such as social status. This leads to another difference which might be apparent throughout a relationship as couples are together for different reasons. This also means that theories to why relationships are formed cannot be generalised to both types of culture, as suggested by Berman et al.

Different cultures uphold different views on whether monogamy is essential; Western cultures make this the social norm, whereas non-Western cultures tend to allow polyandry or polygyny. This presents a great difference between relationships as they may exist in very different states. However, despite this, the emotions between couples, whether there be one or more partners, may still be the same. Although the way in which a relationship is conducted may be different if more than one partner is present, the interaction between just one individual and one of their partners could be similar to that of those in a monogamous relationship.

There are many different factors which influence different cultures, often resulting in dissimilar social norms. This in turn can often affect the way relationships form, exist, and dissolve. However, there are also many similarities which may be apparent between relationships in different cultures. For instance, love between couples can exist in both cultures which, in turn, will affect relationships similarly.