

Research may hold key to a happy marriage

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With every third marriage in Australia ending in divorce, the secrets to a happy marriage continue to elude many couples. But not for much longer with University of Queensland researchers on the case.

A UQ team is examining cross-cultural relationships to see whether wisdom from traditional Eastern cultures can be used to strengthen relationships in Australia.

UQ lead researcher, Professor Kim Halford, from UQ's School of Psychology, said Chinese cultures traditionally had very low rates of divorce.

"This study may help to uncover some of the factors that help Chinese couples achieve harmonious relationships," he said.

"So far, we have found Chinese people tend to place high value on good relationships with extended family, doing their duty to their spouse and others, and preserving their partner's 'face' or dignity.

"Marriage in the Western world, on the other hand, has become very fixated on romance, passion and expression of feelings between the spouses.

"While these are good qualities to have in a marriage, it is important for couples to have a sense of belonging to their wider family and to commit to the work of making the marriage last.

"Many of the traditional Chinese marriage values are likely to make marriages happier, and at lower risk of divorce."

Co-researcher, Danika Hiew, said their previous study explored Chinese and Western perceptions about what makes [marriage](#) great.

"We found that [Westerners](#) tended to talk about being in love, and expression of affection, whereas Chinese were more likely to comment on working together to build a good life. They put a strong emphasis on the concept of 'togetherness'," she said.

"These beliefs flow into ideas about the extended family as well. Chinese people saw the couple as part of an extended family unit, and relationships with family and community as very important, whereas Westerners saw the couple as somewhat separate from the extended family.

"Ideas about talking through issues also varied by culture, with Westerners tending to believe that open expression of ideas and opinions is healthy, and Chinese emphasising preservation of harmony.

"In Chinese culture, criticism and disagreement are often not stated openly in order to avoid damaging the [relationship](#)."

Mrs Hiew said the aim of the research was to develop relationship education programs that included Chinese relationship skills and values.

"Current relationship education programs are based on research with white couples in America, Europe and Australia," she said.

"These programs are based on Western concepts of a good relationship and do not include ideas from other cultures.

"For example, most programs emphasise the Western ideal of romance but not the Chinese ideal of responsibility to family.

"Our research group hopes to develop relationship-education programs that include the strengths of both Eastern and Western cultures, and can strengthen the relationships of couples from diverse backgrounds.

"We think that better understanding Chinese relationship ideas and skills, and how these differ from Western relationship practices, will help us to do that."

More information: psy.uq.edu.au/lov

Provided by University of Queensland

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