

The notion of love can lead to greater acceptance of couples' rights

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An Indiana University study found that how "in love" a romantic couple appears to be is interpreted differently based on the couple's sexual orientation, affecting what formal and informal rights people think that couple deserves.

Long Doan, a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at IU Bloomington's College of Arts and Sciences, said the study was created to understand how people's attitudes differ based on [sexual orientation](#).

"If you ask what someone thinks of a same-sex couple or what they think of a straight couple, they usually have different images in mind for the same-sex and straight couples," Doan said. "By taking away those preconceived differences in relationships, we can pinpoint that the differences in perception are due to sexual orientation alone, instead of other factors that complicate the picture like presumed marital status of same-sex and straight couples."

To achieve this, Doan and his colleagues Annalise Loehr and Lisa R. Miller, doctoral students in the Department of Sociology, developed a study that asked participants to read the exact same story about a romantic couple, while randomly changing the names of the two main characters to denote whether the couple was heterosexual, lesbian or gay.

The findings suggest that people seem to think of loving relationships in a hierarchy, with heterosexual couples being the most "in love," followed by lesbian couples and then [gay couples](#). Additionally, how "in love" a

participant understood the couple to be led them to decide how many informal or formal rights they may deserve as a couple, from holding hands in public to having the right to marry. Doan said these findings can have some implications for the gay rights movement.

"There's a lot of focus on portraying gay couples as just as loving as straight couples," Doan said. "This should be an effective approach because it seems that people are swayed by the notion of love. If you can somehow convince people that gay couples are just as loving, then it seems more likely that the movement will gain more support."

Doan, Loehr and Miller will be presenting their study, "(Double) Standards for Granting Formal and Informal Privileges," on Aug. 16. The paper received the ASA Emotions Section's graduate student paper award.

Provided by Indiana University

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