

# Study shows men say 'I love you' first in heterosexual relationships

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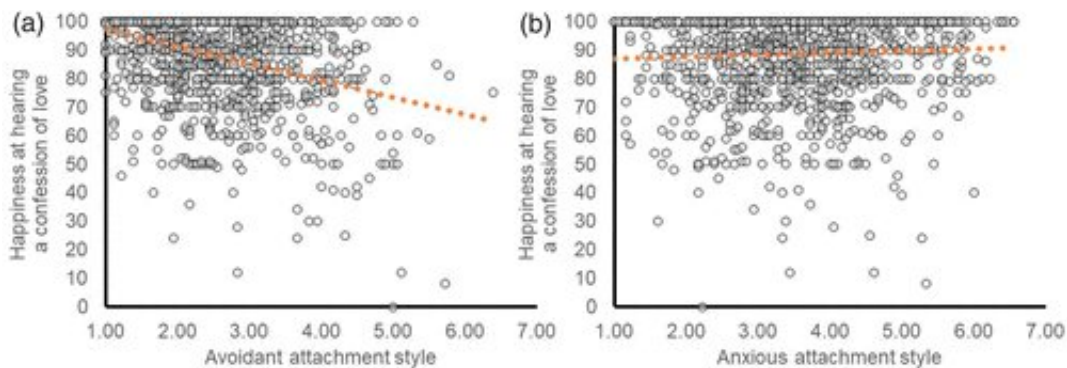


Figure 1. People with avoidant attachment styles are less happy to hear their partner confess love than less avoidant people (Panel a. Raw correlation  $r = -0.36$ , 95% CI  $[-0.41, -0.31]$ ). People with anxious attachment styles are happier to hear their partner confess love than less anxious people (Panel b. Raw correlation  $r = 0.05$ , 95% CI  $[-0.005, 0.11]$ ). Following Lee and Preacher (2013), these two raw correlations differed significantly from one another (absolute Z value = 11.67;  $p$

Men around the world are more likely than women to be the first to say "I love you" in a relationship, new international research from Abertay University has revealed.

The study is the first to have compared attitudes to love confessions across three different continents, analyzing different factors that can potentially influence saying those all-important 'three little words' and how we react on hearing them.

Taking in more than 3,000 participants and analyzing data from seven countries, the research looked at differences across genders, population sex ratios, and also

how people's tendency to worry about relationships or avoid intimacy may impact on making or receiving a declaration of love.

Published just ahead of Valentine's Day, the results of this cross-cultural research showed that, as a whole, men were more likely to confess love before women, with 6 of the 7 nations finding this 'male confession bias' when analyzing data from [individual countries](#) (Australia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Poland and the UK).

On average, men thought about confessing love after around 70 days into a new relationship and confessed love after 108 days, while for women it was 77 days and 123 days respectively. In general, the participants selected two-to-three months into the relationship as an acceptable time to first confess love.

Men in nations where there was a higher ratio of females-to-males were more likely to confess love first in a relationship.

For both sexes, people who ranked themselves as 'highly avoidant' of romantic closeness were less happy to hear "I love you" than others, with those 'highly anxious' about their love lives happier to receive love confessions. The study, published today in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, was carried out in collaboration with the University of Santiago, Chile; Universidad El Bosque, Colombia; University of Wroclaw, Poland; University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, Northumbria University, UK and Federation University Australia.

Participants provided demographic information and completed a series of questions related to saying 'I love you' and their tendency to avoid intimacy and/or worry about the security of their romantic relationship.

Respondents gave answers either describing a current or most recent past relationship where both partners had said 'I love you' at least once.

They were also asked how happy they feel when hearing their romantic partner say 'I love you' and to rate when it becomes acceptable to admit love in a new relationship. Lead author Dr. Christopher Watkins, of Abertay University's Division of Psychology and Forensic Sciences said the study provided the first cross-national comparison of romantic speech acts.

He added: "We know that romantic love and passion are cultural universals, and both feeling and expressing love is important in a good quality [relationship](#). At the same time, people differ, but in a predictable way, in their proclivity toward romantic love, which would partly be expressed by speech acts such as saying 'I love you.'

"Across the cultures we surveyed, our research suggests that men tend to say I love you before women, and both men and women are less happy to hear 'I love you' if they tend to avoid romantic intimacy or closeness. This develops prior research, which observed the same 'male confession bias' when studying just one country—the U.S.

"This work could be developed further, for example, by measuring love confessions in 'real-time' within current relationships and examining the situations where [love](#) confessions are genuine, or less genuine, as a symbol of future commitment to your partner."

**More information:** Christopher D. Watkins et al, Men say "I love you" before women do: Robust across several countries, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/02654075221075264](https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221075264)

Provided by University of Abertay Dundee

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