

# Interpersonal, Cultural, and Emotional Influences on Romantic Love

Ana Laura Fonseca & Emily Butler  
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ



## Background

- **Interpersonal relationships** constitute a vital part of our well-being and health.
- **Emotions** shape the way we think, feel, and behave.
- Research studies have found that **cultural** ideas and practices shape our emotions in various aspects including the emotions we ideally want to feel (i.e., ideal affect) and when, where, and how we should express our emotions (i.e., display rules) (Ekman et al., 1987; Tsai, 2007).
- Recent studies demonstrate that cultural ideas and practices shape how close intimate relationships are acted out in terms of expressing **love**, ways of approaching conflict, and describing what embodies a romantic relationship (Beichen & Murshed, 2015; Cionea, Johnson, Bruscella, & Van Gilder, 2015).
- Yet, very few studies have examined how healthy functioning relationships are developed in partners who come from different cultural backgrounds.

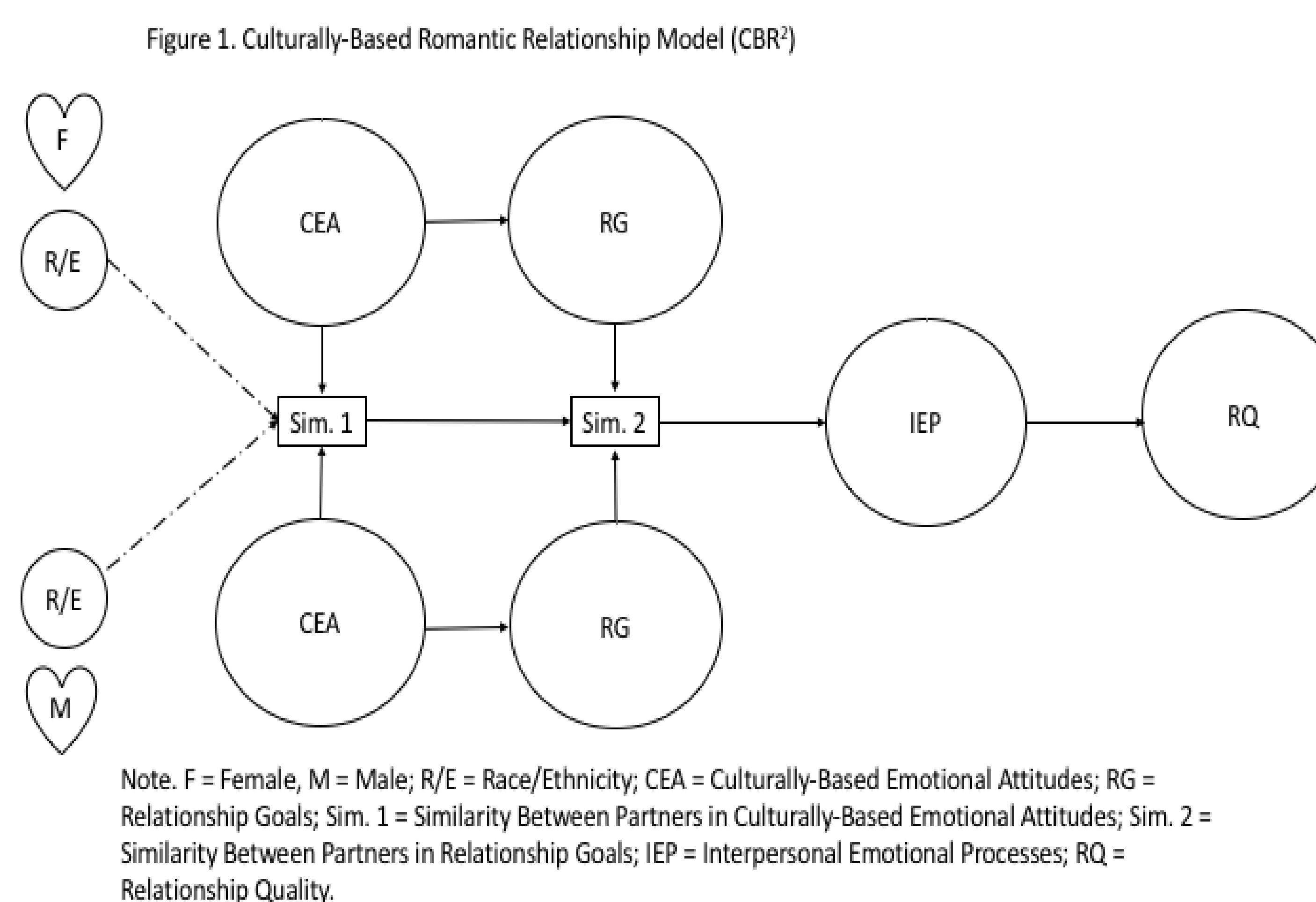
## Why it's important?

- This is of primary importance given that interracial relationships make-up 15% of all marriages in the U.S. (1-to-10) and 5% outside the U.S. giving rise to multiracial families and children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
- Many studies on interracial relationships have reported higher rates of conflict, tension, stress, dissatisfaction, long-term instability, and higher probability of separation and divorce compared to same-race couples (Schlabach, 2013).
- Yet, most of these studies have measured interracial intimate relationships using categorical responses of race or ethnicity and less on the psychological elements of culture.

## Hypothesis

- To examine how similarities in emotional attitudes and relationship goals between partners converge to influence interpersonal emotional processes by focusing on perceptions of effective/ineffective interpersonal responses to emotional disclosure from partner, own use of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, along with perceptions of a partner's effectiveness in using these same strategies, physiological reactivity and recovery, and emotional synchrony.
- The CBR<sup>2</sup> model proposes that similar emotional attitudes and relationship goals between partners will be related to effective interpersonal emotional processes in the lab and the highest level of relationship quality.

## Proposed Model



## Methods

- Focus is on heterosexual romantic couples who are in intercultural relationship, have been committed for at least a year, and both partners agree to participate.
- Once eligibility is established, couples were asked to complete an online baseline questionnaire.
- Following this, couples attended a lab session where they go through a series of four video recorded emotional tasks while physiological responses (EKG and EDA) are recorded.
- These tasks involve romantic partners taking turns in sharing a positive (task 1) and negative event (task 2), sharing a current relationship concern (task 3), and discussing their first dates and attraction to each other at the start of their relationship (task 4). After the tasks, participants were asked to watch the video-recording of their interaction and rate how they remembered feeling during these conversations using a bipolar rating dial (positive and negative emotion).
- Data is currently being processed.

## Implications

- The results from this study can help enhance knowledge on the emotional process that make-up healthy functioning intimate relationships, which are important to individual's happiness and health.
- In addition, results can help us understand how interrelatedness of similarities between partners in culturally-based emotional attitudes and relationship goals are related to the quality of relationship functioning.
- Lastly, results from this study can also extend current relationship frameworks to explore, and possibly focus more on, similarities rather than differences within-and-across cultures.

The authors thank Emily Butler and EDIC lab members for their contribution/support on this project. The authors acknowledge funding from the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth, and Families.

