



NEGATIVE EMOTIONS IN ROMANIAN AND SPANISH ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS. A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH

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Abstract

Emotions and culture have been found to influence the dynamics of romantic relationships. This study extends the psychological research on emotions and romantic relationships by examining cross-cultural differences in terms of individual negative emotions, their categorization in soft, hard, flat, fear-based types and families of negative emotions (e.g., anger, hurt, fear and boredom). The participants were 86 Romanian (84.9% women) and 48 Spanish (89.6% women). They are young, involved in a romantic relationship and answered a questionnaire about the negative emotions and their intensity, experienced in their romantic relationships, in day to day interactions. The results showed some similarities but also cross-cultural differences between Romanian and Spanish romantic relationships. The most reported family of emotions in both samples was anger. However, Romanians experienced the individual emotion of anger and the family of emotions related to anger more frequently than the Spanish participants. The other individual emotion most reported by Romanians was disappointment, and the emotions related to family stress. In contrast, Spaniards experienced hurt more frequently (both, when considering individual emotions and families) and the family emotions of shame. Clinical and theoretical implications for future research are discussed.

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The most intense emotions, both positive and negative ones, are experienced within romantic relationships, which offer a unique context for the elicitation and the interpretation of emotions' messages (Fitness & Fletcher, 1990; Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001). Emotions experienced and expressed during partners' interactions create an emotional climate for initiation or maintenance of romantic relationships (Clark & Taraban, 1991), but also for their dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Moreover, it has found that partners which evoke emotions during couple therapy sessions facilitate their intimacy and conflict resolution (Greenberg & Johnson, 1986). Thus, romantic relationships are defined and constituted by experienced and expressed emotions by their partners. Another important issue in romantic relationships and emotions area is represented by culture. The cultural context, represented by values, meanings and practices, influence how emotions shape and are shaped by romantic relationships (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). In addition, although, a cross-cultural approach has a long tradition in research on emotions (Aune & Aune, 1995; Ekman, et al., 1987; Hofstede, 1983; Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Matsumoto, 1991; Nezlek, Lonstatinos, & Smith, 2008), studies about cross-cultural differences of emotions experienced in romantic relationship are scarce (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). In this context, the main objective of this present study was to explore the cultural differences in experiencing negative emotions within romantic relationships across two populations, Romania and Spain. The study offered the unique opportunity to compare two Latin origin populations with different cultures: one more collectivist and one individualist, one from the East, and the other from Western Europe.

Emotions and romantic relationships

Emotion "is a multifaceted, ubiquitous provider of personal information" (Strongman, 2003, p. 7). It communicates information to ourselves and to others about needs (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2011). More specifically, it informs when a need, goal or value can be harmed or advanced in a situation (Greenberg, 2010). At the same time, Johnson's assertion that relationships are attachment bonds (Johnson, 2017) is both, one of the simplest and one of the most exhaustive

definitions of this type of interpersonal relationship. Recently, several studies have revealed the mutually constitutive character of emotions and relationships (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). Thus, it has been suggested that emotions are not only constructed in the context of relationships with others, but they also shape the relationships in which they occur as a consequence of the interdependence of each member's emotions (*i.e.*, the way in which partners construct their emotions in response to the other partner's emotion).

Over time, several emotion theories have been developed. Emotion has been studied taking into account the phenomenological, behavioral, physiological, cognitive, developmental, social, clinical and cultural principles approaches. Specifically, social theories suggest that emotion is a critical issue in the psychology of romantic relationships. Moreover, emotions can be seen as social relationships (de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986), because "emotions are not in people, but rather they exist between people (de Rivera, as cited in Strongman, 2003, p. 31). Thus, there is a permanently relationship between the person who is feeling the emotion and the person who is the perceived cause of the emotion (de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986).

In the last three decades, Gottman and colleagues have studied the romantic relationships, specially the factors that influence the maintenance or dissolution of a marriage. The results of one of their studies (Gottman & Levenson, 2000) suggest that emotions experienced and expressed during partners interactions could predict divorce with an accuracy rate of 93%. Moreover, if partners display negative emotions (anger, contempt, disgust) and use strategies such as criticism, belligerence, demand-withdraw, defensiveness during conflict interactions, they were more likely to get divorced quickly (Gottman & Silver, 2004). Impett and colleagues (2012) also suggested that the way in which people deal with and regulate negative intense emotions may have an important impact on their emotional well-being and on their quality of interpersonal relationships.

Categorization of negative emotions in romantic relationships

Different categorizations of negative emotions in the context of romantic relationships have been proposed. The "soft" and "hard" negative emotions (Dimidjian, Martell, & Christensen, 2008; Christensen, Jacobson, & Babcock, 1995) taxonomy is one of the most employed taxonomies of negative emotions

experienced within romantic relationships. However, later formulations have suggested the existence of other types of emotions, such as “fear-based” emotions (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004) and “flat” emotions (Sanford (2007b).

To start with, hard emotions are the emotions associated with assertion of control and power in a romantic relationship, while soft emotions are associated with vulnerability and the elicitation of empathy from the partner. Fear-based emotions are associated with control and power in a relationship, but also with vulnerability and weakness. In contrast to these types of negative emotions, flat emotions are associated with withdrawal from conflict and it supposes physically, emotionally and sexually disengagement from the partner. With regard to arousal, hard and fear-based emotions are characterized by a high level of arousal and tension, while soft and flat emotions are characterized by a low level. Moreover, flat emotions are also characterized by a low level of excitement. For example, anger, aggravation and other related emotions reflect hard emotions; while sadness, hurt and vulnerability are good examples of soft emotions. Furthermore, fear and anxiety are representative for fear-based emotions; while boredom, disinterest and apathy are emotions which can fall in the category of flat emotions.

Sanford and Rowatt (2004) examined the relationship between three types of negative emotions (hard, soft, fear-based) and relationship functioning. They found that hard emotions were associated with negative relationship functioning (low satisfaction, high conflict and high avoidance), whilst soft emotions were associated with positive relationship functioning (high satisfaction, low conflict, low avoidance). Contrary to soft and hard emotions, fear-based emotions were uniquely associated with relationship anxiety. In addition, the existing research suggests that flat emotions may have the most detrimental effects on romantic relationships. For instance, boredom has been shown to predict less satisfaction with the partner in the future (Tsapelas, Aron, & Orbuch, 2009), which can lead to separation.

Beyond the previous taxonomy, other authors have emphasized a classification based on families of emotions. The concept of emotion families was proposed by Ekman (1992), who suggested that there are groups of emotions that share characteristics as commonalities in expression, physiological activity, appraisal processes and regulation strategies. Moreover, Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor (1987) presented a prototype approach applied to emotions based on a large lexicon of emotions. They suggested that an emotion lexicon can

be portrayed as a hierarchy with a basic level and a subordinate level. The basic level is represented by the basic emotions (*i.e.*, anger, fear, joy, surprise), while the subordinate level is represented by context, an intensity level of basic emotions or blends of basic-level emotions.

Emotions and culture

In order to understand the specificity of the meaning of emotion, it is necessary to study the interpretation, experience and expression of emotions cross culturally (Goddard, 1995; Aune & Aune, 1995). As asserted by Goddard (1995) “English lexicon cannot furnish a universal classificatory scheme for emotions” (p. 289), and psychologists should be “interested in the emotions of all people, not just those who speak English” (Russell, 1991, p. 428). Moreover, in the same article, the author highlights that people who speak different languages and live in different social-cultural contexts categorize emotions in different ways.

Social constructionist researchers have emphasized that emotions are a culturally mediated phenomena and are developed through interactions in social relationships. More precisely, emotions are cultural cognitive appraisals, learned or acquired through enculturation, which affect the person and their relationship with the social world in an intimate and deep way (Menon, 2000). Beyond social constructionists, other researchers have also noted that characteristics of emotions represented by quality (understanding the particular characteristics, causes and consequences of the event which elicit the emotion), intensity (depending on the estimation of the likelihood of an event taking place, the perception of an event’s consequences and the ability to solve the problem), behavioral expression (rules for displaying emotions), management (the manner in which they are solved or managed), organization (similarities and differences between emotions) are shaped by cultural activities (Ratner, 2000). It is well known that different cultural issues (cultural variation, cultural norms) have an impact on the frequency and intensity of emotions (Ratner, 2000). For example, on the one hand, cultural variation in emotional expression is an important feature of emotion. Events eliciting emotions generate different levels of emotional intensity in different populations, depending on different cultural concepts related to the event’s nature (estimation of the likelihood of an event happening which can elicit the emotion, consequences of that event, personal ability to solve the problem) or the event’s importance (cultural importance of the event, situation or cultural values attributed to the event, situation or person who elicited the

emotion) (Ratner, 2000). On the other hand, norms related to emotions partly influence their intensity and frequency among different cultures (Eid & Diener, 2001). In addition, the type of culture influences the intensity of the emotion. Specifically, as asserted by Matsumoto (1991), persons from individualistic cultures express anger more intensely to their friends compared to persons from collectivist cultures.

The “actuarial” approach for studying emotional life proposed by Scherer, Wraniak, & Sangsue (2004) suggests that determining the frequency with which negative emotions are reported in a sample is a way to examine odds of emotions in a natural environment. It can be inferred from this assumption that the richness of verbal descriptions of emotions experienced in romantic relationships reflects a greater differentiatedness of emotional experiences and functioning within romantic relationships. Moreover, assessing emotions’ intensity provide important insights for how individual perceive the emotions and differences related to the interpretations of them (Hutchison & Gerstein, 2016). After all, the importance of emotional intensity and frequency, experienced within romantic relationships, should not be underestimated. In other words, taking into account the previous assumptions, it seems reasonable to expect that culture influences not only the intensity, but also the frequency of negative emotions.

Some decades ago, Matsumoto (1989), in a major intent, proposed a model for studying emotions based on the cultural variation dimensions previously proposed by Hofstede (1983): power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. These dimensions are measured on a scale ranging from 0 (*i.e.*, small power distance) to 100 (large power distance). When applied to the field of emotions, this model of culture can provide important clues related to cultural differences. Firstly, according to this model, a culture high on power distance less frequently expresses negative emotions in social groups, because their expression may threaten the existing social order. Secondly, communication of negative emotions is encouraged in cultures high on individualism, but this expression is not supported in cultures low on individualism because it suggests individual variation over the collective goals and dependence on groups. Thirdly, cultures high in uncertainty avoidance may tend to not recognize the emotions or to attenuate attribution of intensity when emotions are expressed or perceived. Finally, cultures high on masculinity make

strong differences between genders. For instance, in a masculine culture, expressing anger may be sanctioned for females but not for males.

In relation to the above mentioned dimensions, Romania and Spain are cross-culturally similar in power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity; although different in individualism (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Specifically, both are high on power distance (90 and 57 out of 100 for Romania and Spain, respectively), and both are high on uncertainty avoidance (90 and 85 out of 100 for Romania and Spain, respectively). Surprisingly, both have the same score for masculinity (42), which suggests that both cultures are relative feminine. However, these two cultures differ in terms of individualism and collectivism, Spain being a lesser collectivist culture (51) than Romania (90). Moreover, when studying romantic relationships and emotions in cross-cultural contexts, circumstantial factors such as socioeconomic status (for example, average salary), chronic daily stress and life satisfaction must also be considered. These factors may affect the frequency and intensity of emotions experienced in romantic relationships in these two cultures. For instance, the Human Development Report HDR (2011) found differences in life satisfaction between Romania ($M=4.9$) and Spain ($M=6.2$).

The present study

Previous research on emotions within a romantic relationship has been predominantly carried out in North America (the United States, Canada) or Australian populations but failed to address this issue in European cultural contexts. Moreover, the majority of cross-cultural studies have been conducted in the United States and Japan but have also neglected the European context. To cover this gap, the aim of this study was to explore cultural differences in the experience of emotions within romantic relationships of youths across two European countries: Romania and Spain. Thus, the present research represents an opportunity to study a population that is underrepresented in the area of study when it comes to family and couple psychology. Our focus on negative emotions is due to their destructive effects on romantic relationships. Moreover, given that young couples experience negative emotions more frequently compared with older ones (Lawton, Kleban, Rajagopal, & Dean, 1992), our focus on young romantic relationships represent another opportunity to add new results in the field of interpersonal relationships and to understand their emotional dynamic.

This present study is rather exploratory than confirming hypothesized assumptions. Our goal is to improve the understanding of negative emotional patterns in romantic relationships and to explore its cultural relativity in a European context by comparing the experience of negative emotions within a sample of Romanian and Spanish participants. More specifically, the first aim was to explore the most frequent individual negative emotions experienced in the context of a romantic relationship and to examine whether there are differences between Romanian and Spanish youths. The second aim was to explore whether there are cross-cultural differences related to the frequency of different types of negative emotions (soft, hard, flat, fear-based) experienced within romantic relationships. The third aim was to categorized the reported emotions in families of emotions and to examine whether there are differences in the frequency of these families between Romanian and Spanish youths. Finally, the last objective of the study was to examine the intensity of specific emotions (anger, hurt, irritation, sadness, vulnerability, anxiety, apathy, boredom, disappointment, and disinterest) and the existence of cross-cultural differences between Romanian and Spanish youths.

Method

Participants

The initial sample was made up of 148 youths (95 Romanian and 53 Spanish) who lived in their culture of origin. Nine Romanian and five Spanish participants were excluded from the study, because they had not completed the entire questionnaire or had completed it in an unsatisfactory way. Thus, the final sample comprised a total of 86 Romanian participants (84.9% females) with an average relationship length of 34.55 months and 48 Spanish participants (89.6% females) with an average relationship length of 50.42 months. The socio-demographic and partner relationship characteristics of the study participants are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic and romantic relationship variables

Variables	Romanian (N=86)	Spanish (N=48)
<i>Sex</i>		
Males	15.1%	10.4%
Females	84.9%	89.6%

Table 1. Socio-demographic and romantic relationship variables - *continued*

Variables	Romanian (N=86)	Spanish (N=48)
Age M(SD)	23.28 (3.120)	25.13 (3.160)
<i>Education</i>		
Primary/gen studies	0%	0%
Obligatory studies	0%	2.1%
High school	34.9%	12.5%
Bachelor	34.9%	56.3%
Master	27.9%	25%
PhD	2.3%	4.2%
Romantic relationship length (in months) M(SD)	34.55 (27.42)	50.46 (35.48)
<i>Partner status</i>		
Involved in a committed relationship	70.9%	87.5%
Engaged	14.9%	4.2%
Married	8.2%	8.3%

Measures

Socio-demographics. This section included questions about the participants' gender, age, education, partner relationship status (with three response options: involved in a committed relationship, engaged, married) as well as the length of the relationship.

Emotions in Couples Questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed by the study's authors to assess emotions in romantic relationships. It included two parts. In the first part, the participants were asked to list two positive and three negative emotions that they had experienced in the last three months. According to the focus of this study (negative emotional dynamics between romantic partners), we only used the negative emotions because of their negative impact on romantic relationship functioning. In the second part, the participants had to indicate the intensity with which they had felt specific emotions in the last two weeks on a 5-point scale (1=*not at all*, 2=*not much*, 3=*moderate*, 4=*much*, 5=*very much*). To help the participants answer this question, a list of negative emotions was given (anger, hurt, irritation, sadness, vulnerability, anxiousness, apathy, boredom, disengagement, and disappointment). It was indicated that if some of the emotions they had indicated in the previous question were not in the list, they could complete it in the 'others' option.

Procedure

The participants were recruited through social networks. To do so, we asked for permission to join all Facebook groups with the name of Romanian

and Spanish cities and universities. When receiving permission to join the group, we posted the announcement for our study with the link where the survey could be filled out. A reminder to the study was done two weeks after the first announcement. First, the potential participants were provided with information about the research objectives and inclusion criteria for the study: (1) being involved in a partner relationship for at least a length of three months, and (2) being aged between 18-30 years old. After providing informed consent, the participants were given access to the online survey about emotions in romantic relationships in their mother tongue (Romanian or Spanish).

Approach for Data Analysis

Inductive analysis (Bulmer, 1979) was used to analyze the content of the participants' responses. More specifically, for the open-ended items for emotions, a word count approach (more important negative emotions within a romantic relationship will be used more often) was used, but also a classic content analysis (categorization of negative emotions in types and in families' emotions). Two native Romanian coders read all of the responses from the Romanian sample and independently categorized the emotions mentioned into one of the four types of negative emotions (hard, soft, flat, fear-based). To help in the codification of emotions, a pre-established list of words with emotional content for three basic emotions (anger, sadness, fear) was used (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). The same procedure was used for the Spanish sample.

With the regard to quantitative analyses, Z tests were conducted to examine whether there were significant differences in the relative frequencies of individual emotions and categories of emotions between the Romanian and Spanish participants. We decided to use relative frequencies because of the different number of participants from each country (64.44% of the participants were Romanians and 35.55% Spanish). In the case of emotions' intensity, independent sample *t*-tests were used to explore the cross-cultural differences. *P*-values lower than .10 were considered statistically significant due to the fact that the main aim of the study is exploratory. Furthermore, sample sizes are somewhat reduced, and increasing the *p*-value threshold might allow us to identify differences that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Table 2 showed the list of negative emotions indicated by the participants in Romanian and Spanish languages along with their relative frequencies. The emotions mentioned in both samples are presented first, followed by the emotions and words with emotional content which are specific only for the Romanian sample, and lastly, the emotions and words with emotional content mentioned only by the Spanish participants. We presented all the emotions or words with negative emotional content mentioned by the participants for capturing the richness of emotional experiences in romantic relationships.

As can be seen in Table 2, from a total of 112 words with negative emotional content, 37 words (33.04%) were common, 44 words (39.28%) were mentioned only by the Romanian participants, and 31 words (27.67%) were mentioned only by the Spanish participants. From 112 words with negative emotional content, 37 (33.03%) were categorized as soft emotions, 26 (23.12%) as hard emotions, 23 (20.53%) as fear-based emotions and 9 (8.03%) as flat emotions. In addition, 17 (15.17%) words could not be categorized in any of the four types of emotions (“not categorized”).

Table 2. Negative emotions in romantic relationship, type and frequencies

English	Emotion		Type	%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP				
Sadness	Tritete	Tristeza	Soft	30.23	43.75	1.6
Anger	Furie	Rabia	Hard	34.88	20.83	1.7*
Grief	Suparare	Enfado	Soft	15.12	18.75	0.5
Disappointment	Dezamagire	Decepción	Soft	22.09	10.42	1.7*
Frustration	Frustrare	Frustración	Hard	13.95	10.42	0.6
Jealousy	Gelozie	Celos	Hard	12.79	8.33	0.8
Boredom	Plictiseala	Aburrimiento	Flat	8.14	8.33	0
Distress	Stres	Estrés	Fear-based	8.14	4.17	0.9
Ready to explode	Nervi	Nervios	Hard	5.81	6.25	0.1
Fear	Frica	Miedo	Fear-based	5.81	6.25	0.1
Loneliness	Singuratate	Soledad	Soft	3.49	6.25	0.7
Missing	Dor	Echar de menos	Soft	5.81	2.08	1
Irritation	Iritare	Iritación	Hard	3.49	4.17	0.2
Hurt	Durere	Dolor	Soft	1.16	6.25	1.7*
Shame	Rusine	Vergüenza	Soft	2.33	4.17	0.6
Powerless	Neputinta	Impotencia	Soft	2.33	4.17	0.6
Hate	Ura	Odio	Hard	3.49	2.08	0.5
Incertitude	Incertitudine	Incertidumbre	Fear-based	1.16	4.17	1.1

Table 2. Negative emotions in romantic relationship, type and frequencies - *continued*

English	Emotion		Type	%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP				
Insecurity	Insecuritate	Inseguridad	Fear-based	1.16	4.17	1.1
Distance	Distanta	Distancia	Soft	1.16	4.17	1.1
Irritability	Iritabilitate	Iritabilidad	Hard	2.33	2.08	0.1
Sad	Trist	Triste	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Anxiety	Anxietate	Ansiedad	Fear-based	1.16	2.08	0.4
Uneasiness	Neliniste	Angustia	Fear-based	1.16	2.08	0.4
Melancholy	Melancolie	Melancolía	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Nostalgia	Nostalgie	Nostalgia	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Vulnerable	Vulnerabil	Vulnerable	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Preoccupied	Preocupare	Preocupación	Fear	1.16	2.08	0.4
Misunderstanding	Neintelegere	Desentendimiento	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Selfishness	Egoism	Egoísmo	Not categ	1.16	2.08	0.4
Rejection	Respingere	Rechazo	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Confusion	Confuzie	Confusión	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Monotony	Monotonie	Rutina	Flat	1.16	2.08	0.4
Distance	Departare	Lejanía	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
Suffocation	Sufocare	Agobio	Fear	1.16	2.08	0.4
Upset	Suparata	Enfadado	Soft	1.16	2.08	0.4
NA				8.14	8.33	0

Note: RO=Romanian; SP=Spanish; Not categ=not categorized; * $p < .010$

Individual negative emotions reported in romantic relationships in Romania and Spain

In relation to the differences in the experienced individual negative emotions between the Romanian and Spanish participants, as can be seen in Table 2, there were significant differences for anger, disappointment and hurt emotions. More precisely, the Romanian participants had experienced anger (34.88% vs. 20.83%) and disappointment (22.09% vs. 10.42%) in the last three months of their relationships more frequently than the Spanish participants. In addition, the Spanish participants experienced hurt (6.25% vs. 1.16%) more frequently than the Romanian participants. It is important to mention that the frequencies of NA (no answer) are not significantly different between the two samples.

In Table 3 the most common frequent emotions are presented for the both samples, as well as the most frequent individual emotions for each sample. We decided to present the summed frequency synonym emotions in order to have a more global perspective for the most frequent emotions experienced within a romantic relationship. As it can be seen, sadness and anger are the emotions with the highest frequency in both samples. Moreover, concern and nervousness are the emotions with the highest frequency mentioned only by the

Romanian participants, and desperation is the emotion with the highest frequency for the Spanish participants.

Table 3. The most frequent negative emotions

English	Emotion		Type	%RO	%SP
	RO	SP			
Sadness	Tristete	Tristeza	Soft	30.23	43.75
Anger	Furie	Rabia	Hard	34.88	25
Grief	Suparare	Enfado	Soft	15.12	18.75
Disappointment	Dezamagire	Decepción	Soft	22.09	10.42
Frustration	Frustrare	Frustración	Hard	13.95	10.42
Jealousy	Gelozie	Celos	Hard	12.79	12.49
Boredom	Plictiseala	Aburrimiento	Flat	8.14	8.33
Distress	Stres	Estrés	Fear-based	8.14	4.17
Ready to explode	Nervi	Nervios	Hard	5.81	6.25
Fear	Frica	Miedo	Fear-based	10.46	6.25
Concern	Ingrijorare		Fear-based	8.14	
Nervousness	Nervozitate		Fear-based	8.14	
Uncertainty	Nesiguranta		Fear-based	5.81	
Desperation		Desesperación	Hard		8.33
Incomprehension		Incomprensión	Soft		6.25

Note: RO=Romanian; SP=Spanish.

Categorization of emotions and a cross-cultural comparison

First, cross-cultural differences in the frequency of different soft, hard, flat and fear-based categories were also tested. As depicted in Table 4, soft emotions showed the highest percentage for both samples, while hard emotions were the second category. There were not significant differences between the two samples at experiencing the four types of negative emotions.

Table 4. Relative frequency of hard, soft, flat and fear-based in two samples

Emotion type	%RO	%SP	Z test
Hard	30.62	27.08	0.4 (0.66)
Soft	35.27	48.61	1.5 (0.13)
Flat	6.58	4.16	0.6 (0.56)
Fear-based	17.82	15.27	0.4 (0.70)
NA	2.71	2.08	0.2 (0.82)
Not categorized	6.97	2.77	1 (0.30)

Note: RO=Romanian; SP=Spanish.

Second, emotions were categorized in families (*see* Table 5). The name of the family emotions (given by the most frequent emotions) and its frequency are highlighted in bold. Families of emotions were generated based on the participants' responses but also, taking into account the literature of basic

emotions and emotions families. As can be seen, anger is the family emotions with the highest percentage for both samples. The second family of emotions for the Romanian participants is represented by distress (46.5%), while for the Spanish participants it is sadness (45.83%). The subsequent families for the Romanian participants are sadness (32.55%), disappointment (26.73%), boredom (20.92%), grief (17.44%), jealousy (12.79%), fear (12.78%) and loneliness (12.78%). For the Spanish participants, the most frequent families emotions are: distress (24.99%), grief (20.83%), loneliness (20.83%), boredom (18.74%), disappointment (18.74%), jealousy (14.57%), fear (10.41%), shame (10.41%) and incomprehension (10.41%). Moreover, it can be observed that desperation is the specific family for the Spanish participants. From the first seven families of emotions with the highest frequency, five (sadness, grief, disappointment, loneliness, incomprehension) are soft emotions, whilst two (anger, jealousy) are hard emotions, two (fear, distress) are fear-based emotions and only one (boredom) is representative of flat emotions.

The comparison between the two samples showed significant differences for anger, distress, hurt and shame. Evidence was found for the Romanian participants having experienced more emotions from family anger (68.6% vs. 52.8%) and the family distress (46.5% vs. 24.99%) in the last three months of their relationships compared to the Spanish participants. In contrast, the Spanish participants experienced more emotions from hurt family (6.25% vs. 1.16%) and more emotions from family shame (10.41% vs. 2.33). It is worthy to mention that no significant difference was found between the two groups of participants for the NA (no answer) response.

Table 5. The most frequent negative emotions families

English	Emotion		%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP			
<i>Sadness</i>	Tristete	Tristeza	30.23	43.75	
Sad	Trist	Triste	1.16	2.08	
Sadness when she/he ignores me	Tristete cand ma ignora		1.16		
			32.55	45.83	1.5
<i>Anger</i>	Furie	Rabia	34.88	20.83	
Frustration	Frustrare	Frustración	13.95	10.42	
Ready to explode	Nervi	Nervios	5.81	6.25	
Irritation	Iritare	Iritación	3.49	4.17	
Irritability	Iritabilitate	Iritabilidad	2.33	2.08	
Annoyance	Enervare		4.65		
Irascibility	Irascibilitate		2.33		
Irritated	Iritat		1.16		
Anger		Ira		4.17	

Table 5. The most frequent negative emotions families -continued

English	Emotion		%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP			
Anger because his/her partner does not help with house duties		La ira por no ayudar en casa		2.08	
Hostility		Hostilidad	68.6	2.08	1.9*
<i>Grief</i>	Suparare	Enfado	15.12	18.75	
Upset	Suparata	Enfadado	1.16	2.08	
Sulk	Imbufnare		1.16		
			17.44	20.83	0.5
<i>Disappointment</i>	Dezamagire	Decepción	22.09	10.42	
Melancholy	Melancolie	Melancolía	1.16	2.08	
Nostalgia	Nostalgie	Nostalgia	1.16	2.08	
Disappointed	Dezamagit		1.16		
Bitterness	Amaraciune		1.16		
Disappointment		Desilusión		2.08	
Nostalgia		Añoranza		2.08	
			26.73	18.74	1
<i>Jealousy</i>	Gelozie	Celos	12.79	8.33	
Jealousy		Los celos		2.08	
Jealousy		Celosía		2.08	
Possession		Posesión		2.08	
			12.79	14.57	0.3
<i>Boredom</i>	Plictiseala	Aburrimiento	8.14	8.33	
Indifference	Indiferenta		3.49		
Go-by	Nepasare		2.33		
Bored	Plictisit		1.16		
Negligence	Delasare		1.16		
Disengagement	Dezinteres		1.16		
		Pasotismo por parte de la pareja		2.08	
Nothing		Nada		2.08	
Monotony	Monotonie	Rutina	1.16	2.08	
Unimportance	Neimportanta		1.16		
Inattention	Neatentie		1.16		
Anguish		Agobio		4.17	
			20.92	18.74	0.3
<i>Distress</i>	Stres	Estrés	8.14	4.17	
Incertitude	Incertitudine	Incertidumbre	1.16	4.17	
Insecurity	Insecuritate	Inseguridad	1.16	4.17	
Anxiety	Anxietate	Ansiedad	1.16	2.08	
Uneasiness	Neliniste	Angustia	1.16	2.08	
Concern	Ingrijorare		8.14		
Uncertainty	Nesiguranta		5.81		
Agitation	Agitatie		2.33		
Preoccupied	Preocupare	Preocupación	1.16	2.08	
Impatience	Nerabdare		1.16		
Craving		Ansia		2.08	
Pressure		Presión		2.08	
Nervousness	Nervozitate		8.14		
Doubt	Indoiala		1.16		
Distrust	Neincredere		2.33		

Table 5. The most frequent negative emotions families -continued

English	Emotion		%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP			
Discontent	Nemultumire		2.33		
Impulsivity	Impulsivitate		1.16		
Doubtful		Dudoso		2.08	
			46.5	24.99	2.5**
<i>Fear</i>	Frica	Miedo	5.81	6.25	
Fear (fright)	Teama		4.65		
Fear of losing	teama de a pierde		1.16		
Terror/dread	Spaima		1.16		
Fear of abandonment		Miedo al abandono		2.08	
Fear/insecurity toward future		Miedo/inseguridad al futuro		2.08	
			12.78	10.41	0.4
<i>Loneliness</i>	Singuratate	Soledad	3.49	6.25	
Missing	Dor	Echar de menos	5.81	2.08	
Distance	Distanta	Distancia	1.16	4.17	
Distance	Departare	Lejanía	1.16	2.08	
Lack	Lipsa		1.16		
Distance		Alejamiento		2.08	
Distance		Extrañamiento		2.08	
Distance		Estar lejos		2.08	
			12.78	20.82	1.2
<i>Hurt</i>	Durere	Dolor	1.16	6.25	1.7*
<i>Shame</i>	Rusine	Vergüenza	2.33	4.17	
Guilt		Culpa		2.08	
Culpability		Culpabilidad		2.08	
Pity		Lastima		2.08	
			2.33	10.41	2*
<i>Powerless</i>	Neputinta	Impotencia	2.33	4.17	
Despair	Deznadejde		1.16		
			3.49	4.17	0.2
<i>Hate</i>	Ura	Odio	3.49	2.08	0.5
<i>Vulnerable</i>	Vulnerabil	Vulnerable	1.16	2.08	
Vulnerability	Vulnerabilitate		1.16		
			2.33	2.08	0.1
<i>Incomprehension</i>		Incomprensión		6.25	
Misunderstanding	Neintelegere	Desentendimiento	1.16	2.08	
Criticism	Critica		4.65		
Criticized	Criticata		1.16		
Rejection	Respingere	Rechazo	1.16	2.08	
			8.13	10.41	0.4
<i>Desperation</i>		Desesperación		8.33	
<i>Inconsideration</i>		Desconsideración		2.08	
Contempt	Dispret		1.16		
Disgust	Dezgust		1.16		
			2.33	2.08	0.1
<i>Despite</i>	Ciuda		1.16		
Resentment		Rencor		2.08	
Resentment		Resentimiento		2.08	
			1.16	4.16	1.1

Table 5. The most frequent negative emotions families -continued

English	Emotion		%RO	%SP	Z test
	RO	SP			
<i>Others</i>					
Selfishness	Egoism	Egoísmo	1.16	2.08	
Confusion	Confuzie	Confusión	1.16	2.08	
Suffocation	Sufocare	Pesadez	1.16	2.08	
Vanity	Orgoliu		1.16		
Individualism	Invidualism		1.16		
Superiority	Superioritate		1.16		
Inferiority	Inferioritate		1.16		
Lie	Minciuna		1.16		
Dispute	Cearta		1.16		
Malice	Rautate		1.16		
Pessimism	Pesimism		1.16		
Betrayal	Tradare		1.16		
Lack of compassion	Lipsa compasiunii		1.16		
Lack of affection		Falta de cariño		2.08	
Incomode		Incomoda		2.08	
Demanding		Ser exigente		2.08	
Embarrassment		Ridículo		2.08	
			15.08	14.56	0.1
NA			8.14	8.33	0

Note: RO=Romanian; SP=Spanish; * $p < .10$ ** $p < .01$

Intensity of emotions and cross-cultural differences

Finally, we assessed the intensity of the reported emotions over the last two weeks. As can be seen in Table 6, the most intense emotion for the Romanian participants was anger, while for the Spanish participants was irritation. Both of these emotions are hard, selfish emotions. Related to the less intense emotions, some differences emerged. The least intense emotion felt by the Romanians is disinterest, which is a flat emotion; while the least intense emotion felt by the Spanish is hurt, a soft emotion. Cross-cultural comparisons between the samples showed a significant difference only for anger $t(132)=2.179, p=.031$.

Table 6. Mean of emotion intensity experienced within romantic relationship in the last 2 weeks

Emotion	RO	SP
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Anger	2.80 (1.21)	2.33 (1.15)
Hurt	1.92 (1.30)	1.73 (1.00)
Irritation	2.49 (1.17)	2.56 (1.02)
Sad	2.49 (1.26)	2.50 (1.16)
Vulnerable	2.12 (1.28)	2.04 (1.01)
Anxiety	2.05 (1.20)	2.38 (1.31)
Apathy	1.79 (1.13)	2.10 (1.20)

Table 6. Mean of emotion intensity experienced within romantic relationship in the last 2 weeks -
continued

Emotion	RO <i>M(SD)</i>	SP <i>M(SD)</i>
Boredom	1.81 (1.03)	1.92 (1.08)
Disappointment	2.19 (1.26)	1.88 (1.14)
Disinterest	1.66 (1.02)	1.87 (1.04)

Note: RO=Romanian; SP=Spanish

Discussion

The major focus of this exploratory study was to examine whether the experience of negative emotions in romantic relationships varied across two European cultures (*i.e.*, Romania and Spain). Despite the similarities between these two countries, Romania and Spain differ in terms of individualism, Spain being a more individualistic culture. In an individualistic culture, personal objectives prevail over group objectives, while in a collectivist culture group goals take precedence over individual goals. Returning to our principal aim, the results showed some similarities but also differences in experiencing negative emotions in Romanian and Spanish romantic relationships, which are presented in the following.

Cross-cultural differences in experiencing individual negative emotions. We found support for cross-cultural differences in three emotions. More precisely, the Romanian participants experienced more anger and disappointment, while the Spanish participants experienced more hurt. There are several potential explanations for these results. First, we have to consider a methodological explanation. When testing for cultural differences at the individual level, we did not sum up the frequency of emotions which have a close meaning or are synonyms. Secondly, it could be also possible that the Romanian participants experience more stress than the Spanish ones, possibly caused by the economic situation of country. Economic stress has an important influence on how partners cope together with daily stressful situations (Rusu, 2016). Eventually, this could lead to the experience of more frequently anger in romantic relationships. Thirdly, existing research suggests that anger “is the result of hurt feelings and fear and that underneath anger there is a great deal of unresolved and unexpressed pain and fear of further hurt” (L'Abate, 1977, p. 13). Moreover, Greenberg (2010) suggests that people feel angry in response to feeling hurt. Lemay, Overall, and Clark (2012) suggest that the same situation - relational

devaluation - can elicit either anger or hurt. Thus, Romanian people may have experienced during their lives more repetitive cycles of unresolved feelings of hurt and fear. And, because of this reason they mentioned that they had experienced more anger within their romantic relationships. Finally, it is possible that Spanish people have better emotional skills developed due their individualistic culture which enables them to recognize the primary emotions. The later ones are defined by Greenberg as the “direct initial reactions to a situation, being sad for a loss” (2010, p. 4). Also, in the context of their collectivist culture, Romanian people have fewer emotional skills by easily recognizing secondary emotions which are seen as reactions toward someone’s feelings and thoughts, being angry because they felt hurt by their partner (Greenberg, 2010).

Cross-cultural differences in experiencing negative types of emotions. Although there is a lack of significant differences for the soft, hard, flat and fear-based types of negative emotions, some similarities and differences can be observed. First, there is the same order for the Romanian and Spanish participants related to the types of negative emotions. More precisely, the Romanian and Spanish participants mentioned more soft emotions, than other type. Moreover, if we compare the relative frequencies for each type of negative emotion, we can observe that the Romanian participants mentioned more hard emotions than the Spanish participants, while the Spanish mentioned more soft emotions. We probably did not find significant differences because although the emotions categorized as being soft, hard, flat or fear-based have some differences, they also have some similarities. Future research should put more emphasis on the differences among the negative emotions categorized in these types of negative emotions.

Family emotions and cultural differences. The results related to the categorization of negative emotions in families of emotions are in line with those obtained for individual emotions, showing that Romanian people have experienced more emotions from anger and family stress, while Spanish people have experienced more emotions from hurt and family shame. As mentioned before, a higher frequency of emotions from family stress for the Romanian participants may be related to their economic stress situation. According to Randall and Corp (2014), Romanians experience a high amount of stress and lower life satisfaction compared to the EU mean while Spain has a higher life satisfaction and fewer stress levels. Nevertheless, another possible explanation

for these differences can be revealed from previous research, which has suggested that emotional concepts available for different cultures might encourage people to experience and express certain emotions rather than others (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Wierzbicka, 1999). Perhaps, the available emotional concepts in the Romanian language encourage more outbursts of anger emotions.

Emotions intensity and cross-cultural differences. The findings concerning cross-cultural differences between the two samples at emotions' intensity level evidenced that there was a significant difference for only one emotion: anger. The Romanian participants had experienced anger within their romantic relationship in a higher intensity than the Spanish participants. A previous study conducted by Dieter and colleagues (2000) did not find differences between cultures (Romania and Spain being one of them) and with regard to the intensity of negative emotions felt in the context of romantic relationships. However, the previous study did analyze individual emotions (restless, very lonely, bored, depressed or very unhappy and upset), whereas our study focused on specific negative emotions such as anger, hurt, irritation, sadness, vulnerability, anxiety, apathy, boredom, disappointment, and disinterest elicited by their partner and its intensity. Thus, we cannot emphasize that these results are inconsistent with earlier research, but rather it represents a deeper approach of studying negative emotions experienced in romantic relationships across cultures. However, the differences related to the intensity of anger could be explained by the fact that Romanian people have experienced more repetitive cycles of unresolved hurt feelings, fear, pain, and they use anger as a defense mechanism for going away from the perceived cause of their feelings. It is well known that anger supposes control and power over the other one, the desire to change the situation by harming, fighting or conquering the other person involved in the situation (Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996). Thus, if they expressed the hurt feelings and vulnerability associated with hurt, but they did not receive a desire response, by time their hurt feelings, pain and fear become anger, and the intensity of anger is increasing when the victim is frequently dissatisfied with perpetrator's behavior. Another possible explanation could be that Romanians might possibly recognize just the first level of relational emotional dynamics, and they evaluated the intensity of recognized emotions. But, because of possible fewer emotional skills they do not recognize the profound emotions as hurt.

One general explanation for the lesser number of significant differences related to the negative emotions experienced in romantic relationships in the Romanian and Spanish samples is that in the last years, studies suggest a tendency for Romania to have diminished its collectivist cultural characteristics in the context of the development of more individualistic cultural characteristics.

Limitations

There are several important limitations of the study which deserve to be presented. More precisely, the most important caveat is related to that fact that we did not measure the participants' level of cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1983), we analyzed the data reporting to the average scores from a previous conducted study (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). We decided to do so because participants characteristics are similar to Hofstede and colleagues (2010) participants'. However, measuring the actual level of Hofstede's dimensions in the future studies will enable researchers to present more accurate relationships between emotions and cultures.

Secondly, the data was collected in a relative small sample, which suggests caution in the generalization of the study's results. Thirdly, the results are based on the participants' auto-selection. We do not know if there are differences between the persons who saw the study announcement but decided not to participate and those who decided to participate. Fourthly, our findings reflect gender sample composition which affects the generalizability of our results for both genders. There were more female than male participants. It would be interesting to explore the emotional dynamics within dyads or with a more equivalent group of participants.

Conclusions and implications

Our findings suggest that between the two selected European samples (Romania and Spain), there are some cultural similarities but also differences. The cultural similarities are the following: (a) anger family is the family of emotions with the higher frequency for both samples, and (b) anger and irritation (as hard emotions) are the emotions with the higher level of intensity experienced by the participants within their romantic relationships. The cross-cultural differences found are the following: (a) the Romanian participants experienced anger and disappointment more frequently, while the Spanish participants

experienced hurt more frequently, as individual emotions; (b) Romanians experienced emotions from anger and distress families more frequently, while Spanish experienced more emotions and more frequently from hurt and shame families; and (c) the Romanian participants experienced a higher level of anger intensity compared with Spanish participants. The results were explained through the individualist versus collectivist type of culture, and the relative low number of differences is related to the actual tendency of the Romanian culture to become more individualistic.

The results of this study add new evidence related to the emotions and romantic relationships in the growing body of literature on family and couple psychology and cover the gap related to the singular cultural context in which the majority of studies have been conducted. Moreover, our results are in accord with previous research on emotions within romantic relationships, and they have some clinical implications. Previous research emphasized the important role of emotions such as anger, hurt, shame and distress in relational functioning or on the dyadic satisfaction through processes such as intimacy (Mackenzie, Smith, Uchino, White, & Light, 2014; Fitness & Fletcher, 1993). In addition, understanding the complexity of human emotional reactions within romantic relationships is a necessary goal in couple therapy. EFT highlights that activating emotions during therapy (firstly, the secondary emotions, following by the primary emotions) leads to deep changes in automatically functioning schemes, which frequently are the sources of the partners' problems.

Further systematic research on emotions and romantic relationships in Europe, more particularly in Eastern Europe, needs to be conducted in order to provide knowledge on emotional experiences and dynamics in romantic relationships. Different age cohorts, different marital status, and more representative samples of the whole populations must be considered. Moreover, future longitudinal and daily diary studies on Romanian romantic relationships should analyze different processes related to emotions (for example, their recognition or regulation) as well as their impact on relationship outcomes as, for instance, dyadic satisfaction or relational functioning. Additional studies might offer important insights about how cultural variables (*e.g.*, daily stress, socio-economic conditions, gender roles) and individual variables (*e.g.*, personality traits, individual emotion regulation strategies) could affect romantic relationships on a day-by-day basis and over long term.

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