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The communication of romantic interest and the influence of love styles, attachment styles and relationship characteristics

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Abstract: Over the past three decades, scholarly interest in the communication of romantic intent has grown tremendously. A great deal of research has explored the range of behaviours used to indicate romantic interest and to promote contact and sexual encounters (deWeerth & Kalma, 1995; Grammer, Honda, Juetter, & Schmitt, 1999; Grammer, Kruck, Juetter, & Fink, 2000; Greer & Buss, 1994; Jessor, 1978; Moore, 1985, 1995; Moore & Butler, 1989; Muehlenhard, Miller, & Burdick, 1983; Simpson, Gangestad, & Biek, 1993; Walsh & Hewitt, 1985). Research has also investigated the variety of ways that people engage in the ritual of flirting, with the use of verbal and non-verbal communication (Abrahams, 1994; McCormick & Jones, 1989; Moore, 1995), the motivations underpinning flirtatious communication (Henningsen, Braz & Davies, 2008) and the use of flirting strategies (Hall, Carter, Cody & Albright, 2010). Strong links have also been demonstrated with attachment theory (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and love styles (Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). The current study was designed to further investigate individual differences in the communication of romantic intent. We were specifically interested in the relationships between flirting styles, attachment dimensions and love styles. The aim of the current study with a sample of 718 adults was to examine the influence of adult attachment styles (anxious and avoidant), love styles (eros, ludus, storge, pragma, mania and agape), and relationship characteristics (intimacy, passion, commitment) on the flirting strategy (traditional, sincere, polite, physical and playful) used to signal romantic intent. Results indicated individual differences in the use of flirting strategies which varied predictably as a result of attachment style, love style and relationship characteristics. Theoretical implications as well as future directions for research are outlined in relation to the findings.

Keywords: attachment; flirting; intimacy; love; passion