

Full Length Research Paper

Women in Love and Men at Work: The Evolving Heterosexual Couple?

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We studied how the participants incorporated their emotions, feelings and behaviors into their relationships on an everyday basis. In our study, we focused on how women are viewed as being very emotional and how men show little to no emotion in their heterosexual relationship. Our findings indicate what system women and men build their relationships upon and how they differ from each other. Hopefully, men and women will understand that there are gender differences and that they will have to compromise on what they personally want in a relationship.

Keywords: women, relationships, gender differences

Introduction

From a very early age as children, we were all introduced to the word “love.” Everyone has their own opinions of what love is and what it consists of. Love can have many definitions; it depends on how the person uses the word and to whom they are speaking. The main definition of love consists of a deep, passionate, or sexual affection for another human being. For many people, you can have that feeling of love right away or some may have to acquire the feeling over a long period of time. Love can bring feelings and all kinds of emotions. This paper will look into heterosexual couples’ relationships and what each partner may want in the actual relationship. The couples’ views will also show the different gender stereotypes that they face in their relationships.

Many women in a heterosexual relationship are seen as either dreaming of or actually having a fairy tale romance take place in their life. They are also seen as being very committed in their own relationships. For women growing up, they were shown the fairy tale movies or most likely heard the romantic stories of princesses such as Cinderella. Girls grow up wanting a boy to come and sweep them off their feet, be their Prince Charming and live their life happily ever after. Men as children were seen playing with cars, video games, and action figures. They are not dreaming about being a girl’s Prince Charming.

Men typically want sex in their relationship and seem to have to work harder on their commitment issues. Girls were exposed to the fairy tale romance at such a young age while men have to learn what their partner wants in the relationship firsthand.

This paper looks at how we studied our participants and how the participants incorporated their emotions, feelings and behaviors into their relationships on an everyday basis. Our study will look particularly at how women are viewed as being very emotional and how men show little to no emotion in their heterosexual relationship. Our research will show what system women and men build their relationships upon and how they may differ from each other. Hopefully, men and women will understand that there are gender differences and that they will have to compromise on what they personally want in the relationship.

Literature Review

In Angie Burns’ 2002 study, “Women in love and men at work,” she looks at heterosexual romantic relationships and the gender roles that men and women take on. There have been a multitude of studies that have provided the framework that Burns needed to perform her research and find that women are in love and men are at work.

Many researchers in the past have conducted studies that deal with the overlying theme of fantasy and romance. More often than not, females have been shown to correlate their everyday lives with fairy tales, movies and stereotypical Hollywood romances. As trite as it seems, many women equate the heroines that they envision themselves to be with the role they take on in their romantic relationships. In a pair of memory studies conducted, a better perspective on social experience and memory was gained in regards to couples watching romantic movies on a date (Harris, 2004). The partners in this study were asked to take on a character's role in the film and thus become them. Director Michael Hoffman characterized "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by William Shakespeare by describing the film as a reflection to a person. The stereotype that this reflection created was that of the person's relationship and the role they should be envisioning themselves in (Jones, 2004).

Another research article encompasses the war movie genre of the late 1930s which explored issues such as gender and sexual differences relating to propaganda film and interracial romances (Freiberg, 1992). In addition, the issue of masculinity in the Western world is critiqued as men are seen to be stereotyped into models of manhood (Peek, 2003). This study done by Peek was used to redefine the new ideal man and how men everywhere are trying to live up to this standard, especially in their romantic relationships. In 1985, fantasy themes were traced over a 33 year period to examine the vision of male and female relationships (Hubbard, 1985). By tracing these fantasy themes, gender stereotypes were able to be analyzed and the researchers were able to see the stereotype of the new ideal male and the ideal female. Analyzing the same trend, another study was done to research the past 25 years of Hollywood filmmakers who have come to portray men and women in movies in new ways (Powers, 1993).

The final three studies all encompass the fairy tale romance which is often made evident in novels. One article focuses on how women might perceive romance in a novel and takes a closer look at why women are so interested in these novels (Crawford, 1994). This same study shows a correlation between the expectations we have from these novels and the expectations we have out of real romantic relationships. Another study took a closer look at how men always have sexual behaviors on their mind and women are more about the fairy tale romance and the emotions in their life (Feldstein, 2005). Finally, researchers analyzed how scientists referred to the egg and sperm and how even their actions are often explained with the same language that is used to describe relationships between men and women. Specifically, the sperm were described as seeking out the egg and conquering it, while the egg was described much more passively. This is despite the evidence that shows that the egg does much to ensnare the sperm (Martin, 1991).

There were other research articles that obviously dealt with the romantic relationship aspect of the study that we feel need to be

highlighted because our study deals with more than just fairy tale narratives and men wanting sex. For example, a previous study looked at how people may fall in love using words with emotions (Helmuth, 2003). Another study, CBQ Review Essay, analyzed how supermarket tabloids were serving as methods to disintegrating female stereotypes which led to gender differences between two authors (Greenburg, 1999). In 2001, researchers looked at positive affective shifts between men and women after first-time intercourse and the different perspectives that the two genders had in relation to continuing a long-term relationship (Buss, 2001). They found that first-time intercourse did not lower one's opinion of his or her partner's attractiveness except in the case of males with many previous sexual partners. Lastly, researchers presented a new instrument for measuring attitudes toward their personal meaning of romance (Bradley, 1990). The Romantic Communication Scale (RCS) was used, and males were found to adapt to this scale better; although both sexes were seen to prefer traditional romantic events and behaviors.

Overall, many researchers throughout the world have done numerous studies pertaining to romantic relationships. More specifically, researchers have analyzed the fairy tale romance that tends to form gender stereotypes by both sexes. Romance is an intricate area to understand because it involves two people who are often very different trying to understand each other and the world they exist in. Because of this, stereotypes are often formed, and romantic relationships can be a little confusing.

Synthesis of Literature Review

Angie Burns' 2002 study, "Women in love and men at work," explores fictional and factual accounts of women who want love and men who want sex and feel they have to work at relationships. Burns explores if and how gender differences often affect heterosexual intimate relationships. The research findings were based on discourse analysis of qualitative interviews with women and men who were asked about their romantic relationships and asked to answer truthfully and openly about their wide array of experiences. Eleven women and eleven men between the ages of 17 and 60 took part. All of the participants were white and British. Burns found that there were two strong narratives that became evident in the 22 interviews that took place. One was the romantic narrative and the other was the workaday narrative. In the romantic narrative, primarily given by the female participants, they spoke of being "in love", "failing to control their emotions", and even a passionate love that interrupted day-to-day activities (Burns, 2002, p.159-160). This narrative mirrored that of fairy tales and "chick flick" movies that often end with the hero winning over the heroine. On the other hand, men expressed a workaday narrative in which they told of their experience of having to work at relationships. Feelings did not govern the male's experiences in their relationships, although many of the men did emphasize that they took the relationship as seriously as their partner, even if they did not have the same emotional investment. Burns concluded that that the once overemotional

woman has calmed down as a stereotype, and the once emotionally inexpressive man is starting to take relationships seriously. The research raises questions about gender difference in romantic relationships and how the heterosexual couples differ in their intimacy levels.

The researchers believe this is a topic worth exploring further because of the interest in the issue of gender and romance in relationships and because relationships form much of the interpersonal communication in our everyday lives. This study is being replicated to look at different groups of people who are involved in romantic relationships here in the United States and possibly offer a different perspective on gender differences and stereotypes. There has been much research done about the fairy tale narratives often asking the question: Are women simply in love; and are men simply at work? As college students, this topic is interesting because we feel that we are at an age where we are trying to find answers, possibly trying to form relationships and also desiring to learn a little more about the romantic relationships in our lives as well as our peers' lives.

We believe it is important to recognize that there is a hierarchical structure in society today, and in order to combat gender stereotypes, we must analyze and reanalyze research studies to better understand relationships especially in the romantic realm. We want to discover the differences between genders and if women are truly in love and if men are truly at work, or if there is something more to it.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this replication study was to determine how women and men view love in their heterosexual relationships. Our particular interests dealt with fairy tale romances for women and men just wanting to have sex in the relationships and having to work a little harder at them. The researchers came up with the following research questions.

RQ1: Do women tend to be more overbearing with their emotions and feelings in the relationship?

Women tend to share too much information with their partners. They are more emotional when it comes to all aspects of their relationships. Men have a tendency to not release much emotion in the relationship. They are taught usually from an early age that it's not okay for men to cry.

RQ2: Do women and men view commitment differently in their relationships?

Women view commitment as being with only one person the rest of their life. They will let the person know how they feel and how committed they are in the relationship. Men on the other hand are more inclined to be less committed during relationships. They also will have more sexual partners than women.

RQ3: Do women really want the fairy tale romance in their life?

We believe that all women truly want the whole romantic scene. Women grow up believing that their life is going to end happily ever after they find their Prince Charming. Women are seen viewing romantic movies and novels more than men.

RQ4: Are men seen as having to work harder in their relationships?

Men do not always see eye-to-eye with women. Women want to feel loved all the time. Men often have to buy gifts and pay more attention to the way their partner feels on any specific day. Men are not as touchy as women, so they have to be careful with the words they use on a daily basis to their partner.

Methods

Design

The following findings were obtained by using a qualitative interview questionnaire with women and men who responded about their personal intimate relationships in regards to themselves and their partner. These questions were aimed at trying to find the similarities and differences of how heterosexual men and women feel and think about the opposite sex in their relationships. There were ten questions on the questionnaire and each question tried to objectify whether or not males and females were different in their opinions about one another in their relationships.

Participants

In this study, there were sixteen heterosexual couples interviewed. Each couple consisted of one male and one female. The ages of the couples ranged from twenty to seventy-three. Half of the couples are currently in a marriage while the other half are planning on getting married. All were Caucasian and live in the United States. Most of the participants were either friends of the researchers or family of the researchers. These family and friends were chosen due to the personal nature of the study.

Procedure

The qualitative interview questionnaire was either given directly to each participant or given by using the telephone. Each participant was notified that they would remain anonymous for this study. We had each couple either write down their answers in a comfortable environment, or we wrote in the answers for them from the telephone interview. Each couple consisted of one male and one female; therefore, we conducted each questionnaire with each gender separately. There was no system of whether or not the male or female should answer first.

After all questionnaires had been completed, we then took all of them and analyzed each question separately. There were many similar themes that emerged within each answer so we used a tally system to code the participants' answers. Each theme was then grouped together and analyzed to get the overall objective of this study.

Analysis and Results

There were many interesting and unique ideas that emerged from the questionnaire dealing with the different perspectives from each gender in relationships. Many stereotypes were noticed within this study as seen socially acceptable to society. This study showed just how different men and women tend to think about their relationships and how each gender tends to think about the opposite sex. We will start by analyzing the women's interviews of their relationships and their perceptions of emotions and actions in their corresponding relationships. Then, we will look at the other side, the men's interviews and how they perceived themselves in the same situations.

The Women's Interviews

While the women answered the questions to the questionnaire, there seemed to be more thought given in each of the answers analyzed. After the question was asked, the women tended to pause just for a second and then give lengthy answers. Each woman was notified that her name would not be used in the study.

The first question, after age, pertained to when they felt that they knew they had fallen "in love" or were "in love" (Burns, 2002, p.160). There were two main responses that were tallied. The first response was that women felt this way shortly after they had become "best friends" with their boyfriend. The second main response stated that women felt this way after one year of dating. These two answers are similar due to the fact that both of these are about the same time-frame. Some other responses were around the three month time frame, first kiss and at first sight.

The third question was asked about what characteristics had attracted them to their partner. Overwhelmingly, the biggest answer was personality. Women felt that once they had a chance to get to know someone, the more they were attracted to them. Another response that was tallied high was that the opposite sex was funny. This ties in to the personality aspect because if someone is funny, it is part of their personality. Looks and honesty were only mentioned once out of all of the responses.

The next question dealt with the term "commitment" and what it meant to them. The majority of the answers dealt with loyalty, honesty, and love. Loyalty was the main response as many women felt that you must show devotion and honesty to your partner. They stated while enduring many hardships with the person you love, you must remain loyal and committed.

The fifth question asked, "What was the biggest realization of the opposite sex that you have attained during the relationship?" There were various answers on this topic. Some included, men don't change, men are not as sensitive as women, men don't have detailed conversations, men don't listen, men only care about sports, and men don't realize women's feelings. Most of these seemed to be general

stereotypes about men, but it was noted that "men don't listen" was the only answer to be marked twice.

Question six talked about what contributions were made to maintain a happy relationship. There were two responses that were marked the most and the same amount: trust and honesty. Teamwork was close behind, but the main two were trust and honesty. These women felt that you have to have these two elements in order to maintain a lasting relationship.

Questions seven and eight were very similar and were one word answers. Question seven asked if they felt that they were putting an equal amount of effort into their relationship whereas question eight asked if they felt that they were more or less emotional than their romantic partner. The responses to question seven were ninety-eight percent yes, and the responses to question eight were one hundred percent more emotional.

The next to last question dealt with whether or not women tended to compare their relationships to a romantic narrative. This question was not asked to the men, only the women. There were only three answers given in the questionnaire. The majority of the women answered "yes" while some answered "no" and a few answered "sometimes."

The last question asked what these women felt was the most important aspect of their relationship. Out of all of the answers given, love was the number one response. Honesty, space, communication and trust were also stated as answers.

The Men's Interviews

The men were interviewed separately from the women but the girlfriends and wives were present in some of the interviews. While the women tended to give lengthy answers and only took a brief pause to respond, the men gave short answers and most of them had trouble answering some of the questions. The men's responses tended to be short and to the point.

The first question, after age, pertained to when they felt that they knew they had fallen "in love" or were "in love" (Burns, 2002, p.160). Most of the responses stated that men felt that they were in love after the first date. Two other responses were at the four-month mark and the one-year mark. Nothing was mentioned about being friends or getting to know the other person.

The third question was asked about what characteristics had attracted them to their partner. The main answer was that the "looks" of the opposite sex had attracted them. Personality, family and sincerity were also mentioned as some characteristics.

The next question dealt with the term "commitment" and what it meant to them. The men's answers to this question were almost the same as the women's answers. The term, "long-

term” was mentioned the most often and monogamy was mentioned a few times.

The fifth question asked, “What was the biggest realization of the opposite sex that you have attained during the relationship?” The responses to this question were in one big category: women as being very sensitive. Some other one-time responses included women are always right, women are stubborn and men give more gifts than women do. Question six talked about what contributions were made to maintain a “happy” relationship. There were three answers that tallied the same to this question. They included love, sex, and honesty. Needing space and compromise were also mentioned but the main three were love, sex, and honesty in that order.

Questions seven and eight, once again, were very similar and were one word answers. Question seven asked if they felt that they were putting an equal amount of effort into their relationship whereas question eight asked if they felt that they were more or less emotional than their romantic partner. All of the men answered “yes” to putting an equal amount of effort and all answered “less emotional” to question number eight. The responses to question eight coincide with the women’s answers as both sides seemed to agree that the women are more emotional in their relationships.

The next to last question dealt with whether or not men felt that they had to constantly work at their relationship. The responses were fifty/fifty in that half of the men said that they did not have to constantly work at it and the other half did.

The last question asked what these men felt was the most important aspect of their relationship. Four categories were obtained from the men’s responses to this question. They included: communication, trust, love and being around one another on a regular basis. Happiness and family were also mentioned but not as frequently as the top four.

Discussion

We know that the article identifies two broad categories: discourses and narratives. These two categories give birth to two types of people: the romantic and the workaday. The article does not say there are differences between men and women that make them seem as if they are incompatible. However, men tend to discuss relationships and emotions differently. Men were seen as emotionally inexpressive and restricted from communicating in the same way the opposite sex did. The women usually used a fairytale love story that based itself on how unexpressive men were about emotions.

The implications of this study can be different from person to person. A big reason that this article is important is because it explores male and female dynamics. It gives women a better understanding on where men stand on ‘love’. The same goes for men; they get a better understanding on how women feel about ‘love’. Women showed their emotions centered on

having feelings for their partner, and men showed a different sort of emotion centered on working at intimacy. The article also gives a broader look into gender stereotypes. Since the study left little room for non-disclosure, the participants were surrounded by their own gender stereotypes.

The limitations that were obvious in the article are important to understand because it could give greater insight in future studies. One way the article prohibited itself from taking a more general point of view was that there was no racial diversity. Some other factors need to be discussed as well. There were age barriers that the study missed because it was targeting mostly college students. Another way the study could have been further explored would be to have taken these research questions out of Britain and brought them to the United States. The group also felt that because people are sometimes shy, there could have been many things that the participants left out because they did not want to self-disclose too much information about themselves.

Both the original study and the replication showed how gender stereotypes are very much in existence today. However, these stereotypes are evolving and our civilization is slowly equalizing towards understanding each other better. Both studies show how men and women have two very different perceptions of the opposite sex. As society evolves, research in both studies show that men and women are educating themselves more on the opposite sex so the postmodern man and women are taking relationships more seriously than they used to. The original study done by Burns showed the “woman as emotional carer and man as rational worker” (Burns, 2002, p. 169). This holds to be true in the replication study. This does not mean all women are housewives and all men are the breadwinners. This is the nature of different genders and the way they tend to act in romantic relationships.

Factual and fictional accounts of relationships will always occur. However, it is up to society and individuals to analyze information about the opposite sex to truly understand them and relate to where they are coming from: are they women in love or men at work?

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