

5-2009

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Recommended Citation

Diaz, Maria and Ward, Sarah (2009) "Gender Differences in Exclusive Romantic Relationships," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 9 , Article 5.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals/vol1/iss9/5

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Gender Differences in Exclusive Romantic Relationships

Maria Diaz and Sarah Ward

There is previous research indicating that men and women worry while involved in an exclusive relationship. In the study conducted, we were interested in finding whether there are differences in the issues men and women worry about while involved in an exclusive romantic relationship. We recruited 60 participants, or 30 heterosexual couples. Participants were asked to complete a short survey rating 15 issues on a 5-point Likert scale focusing on how much they worry about different issues. Our findings indicate that there are no significant differences in what issues men and women worry about. However, there was a significant difference in how men and women rated for each item.

Analyzing the emotions that arise from conflict in romantic relationships is useful in helping couples deal with their emotions and better communicate with each other. Having people recall an event that made them certain or uncertain about their relationship can help determine which emotions they felt during that event. Knobloch and Solomon (2003) focused their study on how emotions can affect a person's certainty regarding their romantic relationship. The researchers conducted their study by having participants recall a specific event that made them confident about their relationship and another event that made them unsure about their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon). After recalling the event, the participants were asked to complete surveys asking about how they felt at the time, how the event made them confident or unsure, and the behaviors that followed the event. Behaviors were assessed by affection toward the other person and how they communicated their emotions (Knobloch & Solomon). Their findings indicate that positive emotions correspond with events that made the participants more

confident about their relationship and negative emotions correspond with events that made them unsure about their relationship (Knobloch & Solomon).

Mindfulness is defined as the awareness of what is going on externally and internally at the present time (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Many authors have suggested that mindfulness helps the improvement, connection and closeness in relationships. It promotes one to be more aware of their partner's interests, thoughts, emotions and welfare. In the present study it is examined if mindfulness would enhance romantic relationships quality. The hypothesis for this study is that mindfulness would be positively associated with romantic relationship satisfaction and that it would lower relationship stress (Barnes, Brown, Campbell, Krusemark, & Rogge, 2007). Findings for this study indicated that mindfulness has a positive correlation with romantic relationship satisfaction and lower stress in relationships.

Worry is described as being emotional and cognitive. This study was divided in three parts where 301 participants completed a questionnaire that rated if men or women engaged in more maladaptive worry. In the first part of the study, participants examined if men or women worry more in general. In the second part of the study, participants rated the worry of a man or a woman they knew. In the third and last part of the study, participants rated how men and women worry according to their status. The hypothesis was that people perceive women to worry more than men in general and that low status individuals would experience more maladaptive worry than high status individuals (Conway, Dugas, Pushkar, & Wood, 2003). The results show that the hypothesis was supported.

In the study above, Conway et al. (2003) were interested in finding out if men or women worry more. They conducted further research in order to find out what people worry about. The

hypothesis was that men and women would worry more about issues pertaining to their stereotype. Women would worry more about relationships while men would worry more about accomplishment (Wood, Conway, Pushkar, & Dugas 2005). Participants were recruited on the campus of Concordia University. They were asked to complete a questionnaire about themselves, someone they knew, and a significant other (Wood et al.). In analyzing data about someone the participants knew and their significant other, the results indicate that the hypothesis was true. However, when analyzing the data on the participant's view of themselves, women were found to worry more about accomplishment than men (Wood et al.).

Adolescent romantic relationships sometimes are described as casual hook ups that lack feelings of intimacy or commitment (Giordano, Longmore & Manning 2006). This study focuses on the nature of communication, emotion, and influence within adolescent dating relationships. It was expected that boys would be more confident while involved in the relationship and that they would be less emotional involved than girls because they are stereotyped as wanting sex and girls wanting romance. The study included 1,300 adolescents who were interviewed on their confidence and emotions while involved in a relationship. The sample of boys consists of 957 participants and the majority of them reported lower levels of confidence in different aspects of their relationships, about the same level of emotional involvement as girls but have more power and influence than girls (Giordano et al.). The findings for this study were that adolescent boys are less confident and more emotionally engaged than what they expected.

A specific issue that arises in relationships is jealousy which can cause conflict and worry. Aune and Comstock (1997) researched the effect of the length of a relationship and what would be considered a right time to express jealousy and the right amount of jealousy. They

hypothesized a positive correlation between time and expression and intensity and expression. One hundred and sixty-four students were recruited on college campuses who were involved in a relationship (Aune & Comstock). Participants were asked to think about a time when they felt jealous and/or threatened by someone else while in their relationship. They described the situation and then rated the intensity of their jealousy (Aune & Comstock). The results indicated that there was significance in the time and expression and significance in time and the right amount of jealousy perceived as being acceptable (Aune & Comstock).

Romantic relationships can cause the two people involved to worry about different issues. Sometimes these issues can cause conflict and stress in the relationship. Simon, Kobielski, and Martin (2008) conducted research involving late adolescents and how their beliefs about conflict along with their goals influenced their behavior regarding the romantic relationship they were in. They hypothesized that believing in constructive ways of dealing with conflict would lead to acting in a constructive way to solve the conflict and therefore believing in deconstructive ways of dealing with conflict would lead to acting in a deconstructive way to solve the conflict (Simon et al.). Participants were given a questionnaire to determine their beliefs on conflict and a questionnaire to determine their goals in relationships. The results indicate that late adolescents view conflict in relationships as a positive thing that can lead to helping their romantic relationship instead of hurting it (Simon et al.). The type of behavior in conflict was also found to be positively correlated to the type of goals a person had about the relationship.

In our study, we predicted that there would be gender differences in what men and women worry about while involved in an exclusive relationship. Leahy (2005) provides insight to why people worry and ways to deal with worrying. He points out that worrying can be a factor

in depression and anxiety. Knowing what we individually worry about can help us to focus on ways to overcome feelings of anxiety. In previous literature there are findings which support what and how much men and women worry about while in a relationship. We wanted to research this hypothesis in order to satisfy our own curiosity and provide information to other young adults who are involved in an exclusive romantic relationship. Knowing what a significant other is thinking can help to constructively develop the relationship instead of suppressing emotion and conflict.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 60 college students attending Lindenwood University. We exclusively recruited 30 heterosexual couples who were at the moment involved in an exclusive, romantic relationship ages 18 to 27 years old. Most of the participants were Caucasian (53.3%), followed by Hispanic (33.3%), African American (8.3%), Asian (3.3%), and Other (1.7%). Researchers accessed participants through and verbal scripts (see Appendix A) from the college library, Spellmann computer lab, cafeteria, or dormitories. Participants received candy (Starburst or Hershey's chocolate) upon completion of the survey.

Materials

The materials for the present study consisted of a survey about issues regarding what people may worry about while involved in an exclusive, romantic relationship (see Appendix B). The survey asks the participants to rate 15 issues on a 5-point Likert scale with the anchors being 1 (never worry) and 5 (always worry). Researchers randomly chose the 15 issues, such as your partner lying to you or having the same beliefs and values, men and women may worry about

while involved in an exclusive relationship. A questionnaire packet (i.e., informed consent form, demographic questionnaire (see Appendices C & D) was also given to the participants which were completed before the survey. The informed consent form was given to participants in order for them to know the risks and communicate to them that their answers will be confidential and to make sure they are at least 18 years old. The demographic survey allowed researchers to collect data about the participant's gender, age, ethnicity and previous and current relationships regarding the duration of these relationship. The survey also asked participants to define what they believed an exclusive romantic relationship meant using a free response format.

The survey was conducted on the campus of Lindenwood University in Butler Library, Spellman computer lab, cafeteria, and campus housing. Pens or pencils were provided to participants in order for them to fill out the surveys. A feedback letter was handed to each participant after they completed the study in order to explain the purpose of the study and give them contact information for any questions and/or feedback (see Appendix E).

Procedure

We recruited couples who are students from Lindenwood University through the use of flyers and verbal scripts (see Appendix F). The study was conducted in various locations on campus. Each person in the couple was given a pen or pencil and asked to read and sign two copies of an informed consent form; one for the participant and one for the researcher. Identification numbers were given out to each participant to ensure anonymity, however each couple was given a certain number/letter code in order to compare their responses. The researchers then gave the participants the survey and explained to rate the following 15 issues about what they worry about when involved in their current relationship. A 5-point Likert scale

was used to measure how much they worry. After this was completed, the participants were asked to fill out a short demographic survey. A feedback letter was given to each participant after completing the study to indicate the purpose of the study and provide contact information of the researchers in case they have any questions. Finally, candy was given to each participant as a thank you for participating in our study.

Results

We conducted a paired samples t-test with sex of the participant being the first variable and each of the 15 issues being the second variable. Overall, the results were not statistically significant; however for 5 out of 15 issues we did find significance. These issues included “Your partner getting physically hurt” $t(29) = -2.428, p < .022$, “Your partner getting emotionally hurt” $t(29) = -2.552, p < .016$, “Being liked by your partner’s friends and family” $t(29) = -4.287, p < .001$, “Both you and your partner being financially stable” $t(29) = -2.575, p < .015$, and “Pregnancy” $t(29) = -2.525, p < .017$.

Discussion

Our hypothesis was not supported by our findings. It appears that there are no significant differences in what men and women worry about while involved in an exclusive romantic relationship. Some limitations to our research would be that we recruited couples only who were involved in an exclusive romantic relationship. Both the man and the woman had to complete the same survey. By doing so, each partner in the couple served as the control for the other partner. However, this limited the number of participants in our study as it would be easier to recruit any person involved in a relationship despite whether their partner completed the survey. Also, while administering the survey, the couples were sitting next to each other. This could potentially have

a major affect on the results since having the person right next to you could influence your answer. For example, saying that you never worry about a certain issue when in fact, you always worry about it.

Our research does not correspond with others' findings. Wood, Conway, Pushkar, and Dugas (2005) found statistical significance in that people perceive men and women worry more about issues based on their stereotype. This could be due to our small sample size and limited time given to conduct our research. In previous research, the effect of the length of a relationship and what would be considered a right time to express jealousy and the right amount of jealousy was the focus. In our study, one of the items on the survey was "Your partner being excessively jealous." We found no statistical significance with 43.3% of participants stated they never worry about this issue. It would be interesting to find out if this was due to how long the person has been in the current relationship. Another limitation regarding our study would be the survey itself since it was not standardized. By finding a survey that has already been used in previous research, it would have allowed the researchers with a more valid and reliable survey.

While analyzing the demographic survey, researchers found information regarding previous and current relationships that may have affected the results of the study. The longer the couple has been together, the more experiences they will share and better know each other. Ten percent of people have been in their current relationship for 1 month, 5 months, or 7 months. Also, how many relationships in the past a person has been in can also affect what and how many experiences they have been in such as feeling jealous or worrying about money, to name a few. When asked how many relationships the participant has been in within the past 5 years, 46.7% said 2 relationships. The last question on the demographic survey asked participants to

define using a free response format what they think an exclusive relationship is. When analyzing this data into 6 categories (dating one person and loving one person, not having sex with anyone else or being faithful to one person only, having emotional feelings for one person only, liking each other mutually or equally, being serious about the relationship or dating one person for a long time, and trusting that person) the majority of participants, 48.3%, defined an exclusive romantic relationship as “dating one person and loving one person.”

Further research should be conducted by analyzing the above mentioned factors and whether these influence what men and women worry about in a relationship. Further research should also be conducted on this issue considering our study was only made up of 30 couples and a larger sample size would provide more accurate results. Also, since our sample size consisted mainly of Caucasians and Hispanics, differences in ethnicity could have affected our results. Further research should be conducted on differences in ethnicity and what people worry about while involved in an exclusive romantic relationship.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Description

We are looking for couples only for this study, meaning people who are involved in an exclusive, romantic relationship.

Description:

In this study, you will be asked to complete a short survey regarding issues men and women worry about in an exclusive relationship. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time.

Sign-Up Schedule

Name

Date/Time

Phone Number

Location

Appendix B

SURVEY

SUBJECT ID NUMBER _____ (Assigned by the Researcher)

On a scale of 1-5, please rate the following:

1- never worry **2-**sometimes worry **3-**undecided **4-** often worry **5-**always worry

- 1) Your partner lying to you _____
- 2) Your partner being sexually unfaithful to you _____
- 3) Whether you see a future in the relationship _____
- 4) Your partner loving you as much as you love him/her _____
- 5) Your partner getting physically hurt _____
- 6) Your partner getting emotionally hurt _____
- 7) Being liked by your partner's friends and family _____
- 8) Spending enough time together _____
- 9) Both you and your partner being financially stable _____
- 10) Being able to be completely open with your partner, such as being able to tell him/her anything _____
- 11) Having the same beliefs and values _____
- 12) Compromising who you are as a person (being someone you're not or do not like) _____
- 13) Pregnancy _____
- 14) Whether your partner is thinking about ending the relationship _____
- 15) Your partner being excessively jealous _____

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

I, _____ (print name), understand that I will be taking part in a research project that requires me to complete a short survey asking about what issues I worry about when I am involved in an exclusive relationship. I understand that I should be able to complete this project within 20 minutes. I am aware that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I should not incur any penalty or prejudice because I cannot complete the study. I understand that the information obtained from my responses will be analyzed only as part of aggregate data and that all identifying information will be absent from the data in order to ensure anonymity. I am also aware that my responses will be kept confidential and that data obtained from this study will only be available for research and educational purposes. I understand that any questions I may have regarding this study shall be answered by the researcher(s) involved to my satisfaction. Finally, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and am legally able to give consent or that I am under the age of 18 but have on file with the HSP office, a completed parental consent form that allows me to give consent as a minor.

_____ Date: _____

(Signature of participant)

_____ Date: _____

(Signature of researcher obtaining consent)

Student Researchers' Names and Numbers:

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Course Instructor

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Appendix D

Data Gathering Material

Questionnaire

*Remember at any time you may skip any questions that you may feel are too personal. There will be no penalty for doing so.

SUBJECT ID NUMBER: _____ (Assigned by Researcher)

- 1) Are you Male_____ Female_____
- 2) Age _____
- 3) Caucasian_____ Hispanic_____ African American_____ Native
American_____ Asian_____
- 4) How long have you been in the current relationship? Put years and/or months

- 5) How many exclusive relationships have you been in the past 5 years? _____
- 6) How do you define an exclusive relationship? _____

Appendix E

Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in our study. The questionnaire was used in order to determine if there is a difference in what issues men and women worry about while involved in an exclusive relationship.

Please note that we are not interested in your individual results; rather, we are only interested in the results of a large group of consumers, of which you are now a part of. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to bring them up now or in the future. Our contact information is found at the bottom of this letter. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the findings of this study at a later date, please contact us and we will make it available to you at the completion of this project.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigators:

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Supervisor:

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Appendix F

We Need Your Help!

We are looking for couples involved in an exclusive, romantic relationship that are willing to help out by completing a short survey regarding issues men and women worry about in an exclusive relationship .

It will only take 20 minutes of your time and candy will be given out upon completion. This survey will be used in the study we are conducting for our Advanced Research Methods class.

We cannot do this without you!

If you are interested, please fill out the sign-up schedule below. Each couple needs to come together and sign up for the same time.

Date	Time	Name	Phone Number	Location
4/9	1:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/9	1:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/9	1:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/9	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/9	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/9	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/9	2:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/9	2:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/9	2:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/10	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/10	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/10	2:00-2:20			Library-Left side
4/10	2:30-2:50			Library-Left side
4/10	2:30-2:50			Library-Left side