

A Valentine's Day story: Women more perceptive than men in describing relationships

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Women are better than men in describing their feelings and those of their romantic partners than are men, while the latter tend to project their own feelings upon their partners more than women. This, according to a study undertaken by graduate student Dana Atzil Slonim and Dr. Orya Tishby of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in cooperation with Prof. Jacques Barber and Dr. Carol Foltz from the University of Pennsylvania.

The research was conducted in the United States among 97 couples, married and unmarried, between the ages of 18 and 46. Using a questionnaire, the researchers checked the sensitivities of couples in their relationships in three areas: participants' wishes or desires towards their romantic partner; the perceived response of how their partner will respond to these wishes; and finally for their own responses to their partners' responses.

The couples were asked to answer the survey in two ways: First, how they evaluate their relationship with their partners on the basis of the questionnaire; second, to rate how their partners would respond to the same issues raised in the questionnaire.

Generally speaking, the results of the survey showed a high consensus prevailed among couples regarding a desire to avoid conflict, and in

perceptions of feelings of love, sensitivity and caring for each other. This was found to be especially true among the married couples who participated in the survey. The results showed that those couples were more similar in their attitudes towards one another than even they thought.

Despite this, there was a low level of agreement regarding perceptions on some specific issues. For example, the survey showed that men rated women as much more apprehensive about being abandoned than the women rated themselves. On the other hand, the women rated the men as much less apprehensive of being abandoned than the men rated themselves. Also, the women rated the men as more independent than the men felt about themselves, while the men rated the women as more fearful and less interested in sex than the women rated themselves.

Overall, the results of the survey showed that the women were much more accurate in describing the perceptions of their partners than were the men.

In some issues of relationships, the researchers felt that old male-female stereotypes tended to influence the responses. “Both sexes tend to lean on stereotypes in those areas that are more emotional, such as independence, the fear of being abandoned, fears in general and sexuality. In these areas, it would seem, the partners are not aware of the true thoughts and desires of the other,” the researchers say, who conclude on this basis that “this shows the great importance of open communication -- especially in emotionally-laden topics -- as a tool for reducing conflicts and improving the quality of couples’ lives.”

Source: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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