

Partner's self-revelation affects men and women differently in romance

July 7 2010, by Cathy Keen

Having a partner reveal his true self is much more important to women in romantic relationships than it is for men in dating the opposite sex, a newly published University of Florida study finds.

A woman is likely to report greater happiness when the man in her life presents himself as he really is rather than engage in “false” behaviors to try to please her, said Gregory Webster, a UF psychology professor and one of the study’s researchers. For men, female authenticity had little bearing on their satisfaction, he said.

“We’re not entirely sure why there are [gender differences](#) other than there is a tendency for women to base more of how they’re doing in a relationship on how happy their partner is,” Webster said. “Since women are frequently the ones ‘in charge’ of intimacy in the relationship, when men strive for openness and [honesty](#) the women’s job of regulating [intimacy](#) is made easier.”

While other studies have examined the effects of self-honesty on individual well-being, there has been little research on how it influences couples’ satisfaction, he said.

“In the past, research on authenticity has focused on how being our authentic ‘true-selves’ is important for our own happiness and well-being,” said Amy Canevello, a psychologist at the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research. “This paper is important because it suggests that the benefits of authenticity actually reach

further, affecting the experiences and well-being of those close to us.”

The study, which is published in the June issue of the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, involved 62 [heterosexual couples](#) who had been in an exclusive relationship for at least three months, with most having dated an average of nearly 18 months. They were asked a series of questions about self-disclosure and how their partner’s authenticity affected the quality of their relationship and personal well-being.

Authentic behavior is acting according to one’s values, preferences and needs rather than engaging in “false” behaviors to please others, get rewards or avoid punishments, Webster said. It means striving for openness and sincerity in one’s intimate relationships by allowing those close to you to see “the real you,” he said.

The higher participants’ scores on the Authenticity Inventory measurement used in the study the more likely they were to behave in more intimate and less destructive ways in the relationship, which in turn meant having a more fulfilling relationship and greater personal well-being, he said.

How authentically women presented themselves did not affect men’s [happiness](#), although revealing their real selves tended to make women function better in the relationship, which in turn improved their partner’s satisfaction, Webster said.

The age of the couples may have been a factor in why men and women reacted differently to partners not displaying their true selves, he said.

“The sample was of undergraduate college students who generally have less relationship experience than adults, and I think at that stage women are more mature in their relationship styles than men,” he said. “It could be that women at that age pay more attention to a partner’s authenticity

than the other way around.”

Because “true self” behaviors can influence one’s satisfaction in a relationship, the study’s findings have important consequences over the long term, Webster said.

“It would be interesting to do this research with adults and follow them over a series of years to see which couples divorce and which ones stay together,” he said. “I would suspect that couples who are more authentic with each other are less likely to divorce, which has implications not only for the partners themselves but also if there are children involved.”

To some extent, people who misrepresent themselves may be able to repress or suppress it for a short time, but the truth is bound to come out eventually, Webster said. After finding out their partner is someone different than they thought, some people may simply find it too costly to dissolve the relationship, having invested so much time in it, even if it doesn’t meet their needs, he said.

“The take home message is ‘to thine own self be true,’” he said. “If you’re starting a romance where you’re trying to be someone you’re not in order to impress your partner, it might work for awhile, but it may ultimately hurt the relationship in the long run.”

Provided by University of Florida

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