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Gender Differences in the Perception of Love and Sex among Polish Young Adults

Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate gender differences in the perception of love and sex among Polish young adults. The Perception of Love and Sex Scale was administered to the sample 494 young adults (327 females and 167 males) aged 20–28 years, with the average age of participants being 21.3 ($SD = 1.93$). The results indicated that women were less convinced that love is the primary entity (i.e., Love is Most Important), that sex is an important element of a romantic relationship, but in some ways subsumed by love (i.e., Sex Demonstrates Love), and that love comes first (i.e., Love Comes Before Sex).

Keywords: perception of sex, perception of love, gender differences, young adults

Różnice między płciowe w percepcji miłości i życia seksualnego u polskich młodych dorosłych

Streszczenie

Celem badania była analiza różnic między płciowych w postrzeganiu miłości i życia seksualnego u polskich młodych dorosłych. Kwestionariusz postrzegania miłości i życia seksualnego został wypełniony przez 494 młodych dorosłych (327 kobiet i 167 mężczyzn) w wieku 20–28 lat (średnia: 21,3, odchylenie standardowe: 1,93). Wyniki wskazują, że kobiety w mniejszym stopniu są przekonane, że miłość jest głównym podmiotem (tj. miłość jest bardziej istotna), że relacja seksualna jest ważnym elementem relacji romantycznej ale w pewien sposób podporządkowana miłości (tj. relacja seksualna podlega miłości) oraz, że miłość jest pierwotna (tj. Miłość jest pierwotna wobec relacji seksualnej).

Słowa kluczowe: postrzeganie życia seksualnego, postrzeganie miłości, różnice między płciowe, młodzi dorośli

Introduction

Sexuality is recognized to play an important role in dating relationships, and sexual activity is perceived as an integral example of the development of a relationship (Regan, 2000). From the perspective of social sciences, the relationship between love and sexuality can be divided into five approaches as proposed by Aron and

Aron (1991). These approaches are as follows: (1) theories of sexuality that ignore love or consider love as a result of sexuality; (2) theories that emphasize sexuality, considering love to be a minor or subservient part of sexuality; (3) theories considering love and sexuality to be separated; (4) theories that emphasize love, considering sexuality to be a minor or subservient part of love; and (5) theories ignoring sexuality or considering sexuality to be a result of love.

Alongside the scholarly inquiry into the relationship between love and sex, people in their romantic relationships link love with sex (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002). In their study on the development of the Perception of Love and Sex scale, Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) distinguished four ways in which people typically link love with sex. These ways are as follows: (1) Love is Most Important, i.e. love is the primary entity, (2) Sex Demonstrates Love, i.e. sex is an important element of a romantic relationship, but in some ways subsumed by love, (3) Love Comes Before Sex, i.e. love comes first, and (4) Sex is Declining, i.e. sex is no longer so much a part of the relationship. These scales showed significant associations with relationship variables such as love and sex attitudes, relationship satisfaction, and romantic beliefs (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002).

Evolutionary psychologists point out that women and men are characterized by different reproductive strategies. Men's aim is to impregnate the highest number of partners, whereas women's goal is to find one man who will take care of their offspring (Buss, 2001). Regan and Berscheid (1996) showed in their research that women, more often than men, state that the aim of accomplishing their sexual desire is expressing love for partner, intimacy and involvement in the relationship. For men, more often than for women, the goal to achieve their sexual desire is only the sexual activity. These differences between the representatives of both sexes in terms of reproductive strategies, which are connected with evolution, can be the reason why women and men present different views on sex and love.

This study examines sex differences in the perception of love and sex. Although multiple studies have examined sexual and love attitudes, to the best of our knowledge to date, scant research has examined sex differences in this area in Poland. The present study is part of a larger longitudinal study aimed at investigating marital, love and sex attitudes as predictors of relationship status in young adulthood. Regarding the general lack of research concerning the issue of perception of love and sex in Polish young adults, in the current study we formulated an open research question: Do women and men differ in regard to perception of love and sex?

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study was carried out in a Polish sample of 494 participants (167 males and 327 females) aged 20 to 28 years ($M = 21.30$, $SD = 1.93$). Among participants were university students ($n = 346$) and non-students ($n = 148$). First, the author distributed the questionnaire to the students across different courses with the

instruction to hand it out to their friends. The questionnaire packages were distributed in classrooms to groups from 20 to 30 students at a time and participation was voluntary. Participants were provided with an explanation as to the purpose of the study along with an assurance that all collected information would remain anonymous.

Materials

The questionnaire package presented to the study participants comprised the following instruments:

Demographic Questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to obtain general descriptive information about the participants' background, first of all gender.

Perception of Love and Sex Scale (PLSS; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002, Polish adaptation – Adamczyk, 2013). The PLSS measures how people view the link between love and sex in their romantic relationships. This instrument consists of four sub-scales: Love is Most Important, Sex Demonstrates Love, Love Comes Before Sex, and Sex is Declining, with acceptable psychometric properties (Hendrick & Hendrick 2002). The internal consistency for the sub-scales in the original study by Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) was as follows: $\alpha = .67$, $\alpha = .80$, $\alpha = .78$, $\alpha = .62$ for Love is Most Important, Sex Demonstrates Love, Love Comes Before Sex, and Sex is Declining, respectively. In the present study, the internal consistency for the sub-scales was the following: $\alpha = .73$, $\alpha = .75$, $\alpha = .83$, $\alpha = .67$.

Results

In order to examine the possible mean differences in the area of perception of love and sex between women and men, a one-way ANOVA was used. The means and standard deviations on Perception of Love and Sex by Gender are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations on Perception of Love and Sex by Gender

	Women (n = 327)	Men (n = 167)	F value	Cohen's d
Variables	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Love is Most Important	2.2 (.65)	2.36 (.68)	6.5*	-0.24
Sex Demonstrates Love	2.43 (.92)	2.68 (.88)	8.2**	-0.28
Love Comes Before Sex	1.99 (.98)	2.43 (1.06)	20.5***	-0.43
Sex is Declining	3.85 (.87)	3.73 (.87)	2.09	0.014

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The performed analysis revealed that women scored lower on Love is Most Important, $F(1, 492) = 6.50$, $p = .011$, on Sex Demonstrates Love, $F(1, 492) = 8.20$, $p = .004$, and on Love Comes Before Sex, $F(1, 492) = 20.55$, $p < .001$ than men did. In other words, women were less convinced that love is the primary entity (i.e., Love

is Most Important), that sex is an important element of a romantic relationship, but in some ways subsumed by love (i.e., Sex Demonstrates Love), and that love comes first (i.e., Love Comes Before Sex).

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine gender differences in the area of perception of love and sex in a Polish sample of participants. The current study found evidence of the differences between women and men in regard to perception of love and sex. In particular, women were less convinced that love is the primary entity, that sex is an important element of a romantic relationship, but in some ways subsumed by love, and that love comes first.

These results do not corroborate with findings obtained in other studies. Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) found no sex differences in the perception of love and sex. The authors explain this with the justification that differences between women and men are becoming blurred and the distance between the representatives of both sexes in the social structure is becoming smaller. What is more, they state that different opinions regarding sex and love between women and men, possible to be observed in different study samples, depend on particular groups of people. Some differences between women and men in terms of beliefs have been revealed in our research.

Therefore, the results of our study are congruent with prior studies and the evolutionary theory showing that men hold a more traditional view on love and marriage, as well as, contrary to stereotypes, are more romantic than women (Brannon, 2002). For example, in a Kephart's study (1967) that was ran on a U.S. sample of college students, men to a higher degree than women expressed disagreement with the statement that they would marry a person without being in love with them. Women do not exclude the possibility of marrying without feeling love, while for men the situation is unacceptable (Brannon, 2002). It turns out that in the realm of love, women are characterized by greater pragmatism and caution than men, and select the future spouse guided by their social and economic status (Rostowski, 1987). This evolution is explained by behaviour researchers (Pratto, 2002) by referring to the parental investment theory. The main presumption is that the sex that is most invested in a child should be the most choosy while mating. According to this thesis, women, as opposed to men, generally take more care in choosing a partner, taking into consideration his physical, family and economic condition. Therefore, in our study women reported lower conviction that love is the primary entity, that sex is an important element of a romantic relationship, but in some ways subsumed by love, and that love comes first (i.e. Love Comes Before Sex).

There are several limitations of the presented study. A major limitation is the lack of other factors which could, alongside of sex, affect perception of love and sex, for example relationship history or personality. Second, even though the current study was conducted on a sample of Polish individuals and expands the generaliza-

bility of the results, further research of cross-cultural nature is needed. Poland is still a country of traditional values, predominantly Catholic, which can significantly affect sexual attitudes and the perception of the link between love and sex.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to a better understanding of the sex differences in the domain of perception of love and sex in the Polish population.

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