C H A P T E R   8

Love and Romance

After an intense 3-year courtship, Ken has proposed to Marcy who happily accepted. While planning the wedding details for an occasion equally momentous for bride and groom, their conversations make it plain that it is really Marcy's "day." She's decided where the ceremony will take place, what the wedding party will wear, which flowers to order, and what kind of music and food will be offered. She has even picked out the ring Ken will buy for her. Other than assisting with the guest list, Ken has taken a back seat in planning the event, claiming he merely wants to be "told what to do." If this does not strike you as the typical way most nuptials unfold, then imagine the reverse, with Ken designing the wedding and Marcy mostly acquiescing to his ideas.

In this chapter, we examine heterosexual romantic relationships because they best exemplify how male dominance and interdependence intersect. We consider romantic love's many virtues and benefits, underscoring its importance and centrality for human happiness. At the same time, we show how traditional ideas about heterosexual romance function to preserve male dominance in ways most people fail to realize. Throughout, we distinguish *romantic love* (i.e., love itself) from *traditional romantic ideologies* that specify the roles women versus men are "supposed" to play when enacting heterosexual love.

We are not critics of love; on the contrary, we showcase its rewards and benefits. Rather, we target romantic "scripts" that shape and constrain how love is expressed. We seek to raise awareness about these scripts, which people often perform by rote without realizing they have a choice.

Like gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs about romance are so ubiquitous and well learned they automatically influence human behavior. Therefore, this chapter is oriented toward helping readers to "think twice" about traditional notions of romance so that they can make their own decisions.

To begin, ask yourself, "Do men and women want different things from each other?" The notion that they do is a linchpin of dating advice, be it from films, books, peers, or relatives. (Better advice: If a potential life partner has radically distinct goals from your own, you're better off without that person.) What about cross-sex friendships? Most friends have the same goals, which begs a question: Shouldn't our intimate partner be our friend? Of course, lovers *are more than friends,* but the two categories should overlap. As it stands, giving people different scripts for how to behave in love versus in friendship is deeply problematic. As we explain, the difference between the two types of relationships is that romance is *gendered.* And wherever you find belief in gender differences, power disparities tag along. As a result, heterosexuals are somewhat handicapped on the road to love.

By comparison, gay men and lesbians are free to write their own scripts, affording them more flexible, egalitarian love narratives (Lamont, 2017). From courtship onward, their relationships tend to be equitable and satisfying (Perales & Baxter, 2018), not least because "how people date may potentially set the stage for the dynamics in their relationships" (Lamont, 2017, p. 624). Consider that 77% of millenials desire gender equality at work and at home (Miller, 2018b). Yet women have made more progress in the workplace than in marriage (see Chapter 6). Why? According to studies of millenials, heterosexual dating practices are partly to blame (Lamont, 2014, 2015). When cultural romantic scripts dictate courtship behaviors based on gender difference, gender inequality is carried forward. Put simply, "If you want a marriage of equals, then date as equals" (Lamont, 2020). Without this sturdy foundation, even couples who strive for parity can easily fall into the old roles when work and family conflict (Miller, 2015). The goal of this chapter is to help readers avoid the pitfalls and realize their egalitarian dreams.

Romantic love refers to the intense attachments formed when people "fall in love," including sexual attraction, wanting to merge with another person, and desire to protect the other's welfare. In addition to its emotional properties, falling in love may represent a basic drive as important as sex, thirst, and hunger (Aron et al., 2005). As countless poems, songs, and films attest, few things in life are more exhilarating and rewarding.

By contrast, *traditional romantic ideologies* refer to prescriptive cultural scripts that dictate how love "should" unfold and be enacted. Although helpful guides for novices, the scripts specify different roles and behaviors for men and women. When we play our parts, it is difficult to freely and

wholeheartedly experience love; instead, we feel pressured to perform love in restricted, gendered ways.

By confining people's choices, traditional romantic ideologies also reinforce inequality between the sexes. In particular, they emphasize love as the defining feature of women's lives, undermining their independence and autonomy. In essence, women are encouraged to limit their personal ambitions in exchange for the love and protection of men. This proposition fits with ambivalent sexism theory and other frameworks emphasizing how women can be co-opted into supporting male dominance (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Kay, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001b).

We also address the negative consequences of romantic scripts for men, who may experience conflict between their love for romantic partners and masculine ideals that stress autonomy and downplay interdependence. Like women, men may also feel forced to live up to unrealistic ideals about their romantic role and long instead for a union of equals, in which partners contribute 50/50 to the couple's income and parenting (Miller, 2015, 2018b). Thus both genders should benefit from becoming more aware of the liabilities of gendered romantic scripts. In sum, we seek to show how romantic love's benefits can be sustained and even enhanced for heterosexual partners once they are freed from the traditional rules about how "a man should love a woman" and "a woman should love a man."

THE BENEFITS OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Considerable evidence supports the cultural view that romantic love represents a wonderful, life-affirming experience that many find central to achieving happiness. Subjectively, when "in love," people report feelings of high energy, transcendence, and euphoric happiness (Fisher, 2004). That's how people just "know" they're in love and why they seldom forget the first time they fell in love. Love can be so powerful that it may be difficult to concentrate on anything other than blissful thoughts of the loved one. Such preoccupation has an analgesic effect, reducing people's sensitivity to pain (Nilakantan, Younger, Aron, & Mackey, 2014). Thinking about a romantic partner also enhances the ability to read other people's emotions, a valuable skill for any successful relationship (Wlodarski & Dunbar, 2014). When newly in love, people are more adventurous and motivated to seek other types of rewards (Brown & Benninger, 2012). They also report more positive attitudes toward the world in general, viewing life through rose-colored glasses (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1988).

Objectively, men and women alike experience passionate love as a neurological and hormonal high (Fisher, Xu, Aron, & Brown, 2016). People

in love show activity in neural substrates linked to producing elation and inhibiting depression (Bartels & Zeki, 2000). When romantically involved, couples automatically coordinate their testosterone levels (with men showing lower and women higher levels) to accommodate mutual sexual desire (Marazziti & Canale, 2004). The hormones oxytocin and vasopressin also contribute to the romantic "cocktail" that prepares people for mating (Feldman, 2012; Winslow & Insel, 2004); both of these hormones are produced by the street drug Ecstasy, known for its hypersocial, euphoric effects (Wolff et al., 2006). For people newly in love, viewing pictures of their partners activates the brain's motivation and reward systems, suggesting that passion represents a drive as rewarding as sating an addict's need for cocaine (Aron et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 2016). In other words, falling in love may be a drive as primal as hunger or thirst. Finally, the notion that people "go crazy" when they fall in love reflects a connection between sexual pleasure and *ecstasy* (derived from Greek roots meaning "to drive out of one's mind"), and sexual passion has long been described as ecstatic. Taken together, the findings are tantalizing in their suggestion that love acts like a euphoric drug on the human body.

People in love often long to merge with their beloved, to cease being two separate selves. The "bonds of love" expand people's self-concepts; newlyweds automatically identify with the traits that describe their partners but not themselves, suggesting that love blurs the boundaries between two people (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). For example, imagine that your partner is athletic (but you are not), whereas you are musical (but your partner is not). On reaction time tests, you might quickly and mistakenly recognize the trait "athletic" as belonging to yourself, and your partner might similarly identify with the trait "musical." This phenomenon occurs even for newly learned information about one's partner, suggesting that it unfolds rapidly (Slotter & Gardner, 2009). Expanding the self through a loving relationship can also be psychologically protective. Couples with blended identities were better at withstanding psychological threats, such as when their partners outperformed them on a task (Lockwood, Dolderman, Sadler, & Gerchak, 2004). Instead of feeling defensive, they focused on their relationship's strength: Their partner's success became their own success.

People also tend to endow their romantic partners with highly favorable and idealized attributes, a practice that promotes healthy close relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Murray & Holmes, 1997). Nobody's perfect, but couples with "positive illusions" about each other tend to have less conflict and more stable relationships than those who view their partners as flawed. Ironically, oft-heard marital advice to "be realistic" about the virtues and vices of our partners may act to undermine, rather than benefit, romantic relationships.

In addition, people in happy unions tend to exaggerate their partners' physical attractiveness (Swami, Furnham, Georgiades, & Pang, 2007), which is likely to improve sexual interest, frequency, and bonding. By contrast, people in unhappy unions downgrade their partners' appeal (Penton-Voak, Rowe, & Williams, 2007). People who are satisfied with their relationship tend to protect it in various ways. For example, they resist temptation by downgrading the attractiveness of other potential partners (Cole, Trope, & Balcetis, 2016). They also alter the past by mistakenly recalling that they "always" felt their partner was ideal (McFarland & Ross, 1987). Lovers are not blind, but they do resemble dreamers. Thus falling out of love can feel like waking up, wondering what we once "saw" in our exes that made them so appealing.

By any measure, satisfactory intimate relationships powerfully enhance people's psychological and physiological well-being (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Fisher, 2004). Thus romantic love and its sexual expression are among the most sought-after and intense experiences two people can share. Being in love can even extend people's lives; happy relationships are associated with longevity for both women and men (Kaplan & Kronick, 2006; Wong et al., 2018).

However, when wrapped in traditional romantic ideologies that exalt women for their beauty and selflessness, love becomes culturally fused with benevolent sexism and may encourage women to accept less independence and autonomy in exchange for men's romantic ardor and love. Such traditional notions can also constrain men, who may feel that they need to live up to romanticized ideals, like the "knight in shining armor," to attract and retain a female partner. In the next section, we review the historical and cultural development of traditional notions of romance that constrain how men and women are "supposed" to enact their love.

THE CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF LOVE AS THE BASIS FOR MARRIAGE

To understand traditional ideologies of romance, it is helpful to know their history. Not that long ago, marriage was a transaction. In fact, the concept of basing marriage on love only developed about 200 years ago (Coontz, 2005; Westermack, 1903). Before then, men and women married to secure alliances, to increase their families' property and wealth, and to ensure sufficient progeny to inherit the gains. If a wife did not produce children (or had only female children), her "failure" was deemed grounds for divorce.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, living conditions for most people were so bleak that marriages were based on enhancing one's chances of survival rather than mutual attraction (Hafner, 1993). Emotional rewards

from marriage were a luxury made possible by rising standards of living. Even so, women, as the economically disadvantaged sex, were encouraged to be more pragmatic than men when choosing a mate (Maushart, 2001). Today, many Westerners would consider a match based strictly on financial security to be hopelessly crass, signaling the advances made by women in securing their independence but also the increased value placed on emotional gratification when people marry for the sake of love. Western marriages have firmly morphed into the idea that a couple should "fall madly in love," propelling them to legalize their union.

Medieval to Modern Notions of Romance

Although love-based marriages began around 200 years ago, the idea of romance started much earlier. Historians peg its beginnings to 12th-century France, in the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine (Heer, 1962). Inspired by the feudal system and adopted as a game, this new form of gender relations involved knights "courting" ladies of higher birth, with women playing the role of lord and men the role of servant. To win a lady's esteem and affection, knights carried out various wishes for them, ranging from simple favors to acts of bravery and heroism. In return, knights sought tokens of affection, such as a kiss or a perfumed handkerchief, and would kneel to receive them, a ritual that survives today in men's practice of kneeling before a woman to propose marriage. In other words, romance as an ideology began between men and women of different status, with women having the upper hand. Thus we can trace the origins of men putting the women they love "on a pedestal" to medieval origins. Elevating women to a "higher status" in matters of the heart began due to a genuine disparity in social class between ladies and knights in medieval France. Today, however, it informs heterosexual relations across cultures and social strata as a feature of benevolent sexism.

Unfortunately, the "pedestal" of love confines women as much as it "elevates" them in men's affections. Traditional romance narratives only superficially endow women with the trappings of superior status, acting to placate women even as they are denied real power. Although women are "courted" by men, the qualities traditionally appealing in women, such as youth and beauty, are actually low in status (and short in shelf life) compared with men's power and wealth. Moreover, traditional ideologies accentuate prescriptive stereotypes that men should actively initiate relationships, whereas women should remain passive responders (Sanchez, Fetterolf, & Rudman, 2012).

Consider how dating rituals reflect stereotypic gender roles. The man asks a woman out, decides on the plans, buys her flowers, picks her up, opens the door for her, and pays for the date; he makes the first moves

toward intimacy (affectionate or sexual) and sees her safely home (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Paynter & Leaper, 2016). These behaviors reflect male dominance tempered by paternalistic chivalry and benevolent sexism (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003). By contrast, the woman's role is more concerned with appearances than finances: She waits to be asked for a date, buys new clothes, acquiesces to his plans, eats less than he does at dinner, and pays nothing (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). Male dominance also dictates how heterosexual commitments unfold. The man is expected to propose marriage, while the woman is expected to sacrifice her identity by taking his name—assumptions linked to endorsing benevolent sexism (Robnett & Leaper, 2013).

It is easy to see how these romantic rituals conflict with egalitarian close relationships: Men are powerful because they do the choosing, while women hope to be chosen. More surprising is that dating scripts have not changed over time (Eaton & Rose, 2011). Holland and Skinner (1987, pp. 89–90) described similar romantic rituals for college students in the 1980s:

> A male earns the admiration and affection of a female by treating her well. Intimacy is a result of this process. The female allows herself to become emotionally closer [perhaps as a lover] to those attractive males who make a sufficient effort to win her affection. Besides closeness and intimacy, the process of forming a relationship also has to do with prestige. When a male is attracted to a female and tries to earn her affection by good treatment, her attractiveness is validated and she gains prestige in her social group. For his part, the male gains prestige among his peers when he receives admiration and affection from and gains intimacy with females.

Romantic gendered scripts dictate that the man actively "earns" a woman's affection, while she "acquiesces" to his attention. Moreover, a woman's love is treated as a commodity that men "buy" by treating her well (e.g., buying her gifts and taking her to nice restaurants). The trade-off (men's earning power for women's physical intimacy) is not only an unromantic transaction, but those who endorse it tend to be men high on hostile sexism (Rudman & Fetterolf, 2014). In fact, mere exposure to the trade-off (by watching a video) increased men's beliefs that their relationships with women are adversarial (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2017). Finally, relationships do not seem especially loving when women earn prestige by capturing a man's resources or when men gain status by buying a woman's love and affection. Rather, these scripts both reflect and perpetuate gender inequality.

Although close relationships need not slavishly follow the culturally defined model, "experience is anticipated, interpreted, and evaluated in

light of it" (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990, p. 94). For example, women may be afraid to ask a man out on a date because "men need to feel they are in control" or insist that men should pay for dinner to show that they are interested in more than a "quick hookup" (Lamont, 2020). Indeed, women conditioned by the Cinderella story might expect a man to rescue them and sweep them off their feet with extravagant gifts. Thanks to dating apps, you might think women are more likely to be "swiped" off their feet, but instead they are wary that men use them primarily for casual sex (LeFebvre, 2018). This is true of gay men, by far the primary users of dating apps; by contrast, heterosexual couples are still more likely to meet in real life (M. Rosenfeld, 2018a). Among heterosexuals who do use Tinder, both genders are primarily looking for love (Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Ligtenberg, 2017). However love is pursued, be it online or off, using gendered lenses to find it is unlikely to reap the best result (Lamont, 2020).

In sum, traditional romantic ideologies, including men's "courting" of women and holding them in "high esteem" for traits such as modesty and dependence, originated in the royal courts of medieval France. The idea that men "grant women's wishes" through deeds and services in exchange for women's affection has survived, with the added reward of sexual favors. Although these conventional romantic notions began in medieval France with ladies who had greater social and economic status than their knightly suitors, today they ironically help to maintain women's lower cultural status. Women may be worshiped as "the fairer sex" and placed on a pedestal by men seeking to "capture" their love and devotion, but as we show in the following section, such exchanges reinforce gender inequality.

Romance and Ambivalent Sexism

Placing women on a pedestal contingent on how well they conform to traditional femininity is benevolently sexist, envisioning women as dependent on men's protection and provision. Benevolent sexism exalts women who live up to feminine ideals that undermine women's power and influence in public life. Women's traditional purviews are love, family, relationships, and tending to others, which endow them with a duty to be selfless (e.g., willing to sacrifice personal ambitions to care for the family). Gendered romantic ideologies encourage an exchange hostile to female empowerment: male protection for women's right to be men's equals on dimensions that society values most, such as achievement, recognition, money, and power.

Historically, women accepted this exchange for lack of better options. Prior to romantic ideology's emergence in medieval France, women were viewed as blatantly inferior to men, a view reinforced through religion (Painter, 1940). Medieval Christianity explicitly impugned women as

"unclean," burned nonconforming women at the stake as heretic witches, and blamed Eve, the first woman, for humanity's fall from grace. The newly emerging benevolently sexist view must have seemed like a miracle to medieval women. In this context, romantic ideologies that worshiped women were an important counterbalance to hostile sexism.

Nonetheless, around the world, religious doctrines continue to depress gender equality (Seguino, 2011). A key manifestation is the Madonna–whore dichotomy, derived from two religious parables: The story of the Virgin Mary exalts female purity, whereas the story of the temptress Eve blames female sexuality as the origin of human sin. Casting women as either extremely "good" (pure) or "bad" (sexual) creates an unrealistic binary reminiscent of ambivalent sexism. The purity pedestal is narrow but elicits benevolent sexism, whereas a "fallen" woman who strays from it elicits the contempt of hostile sexism.

The Madonna–whore dichotomy clearly restricts female sexuality. Less obviously, it also harms men: The more men endorsed Madonna–whore beliefs, the less they were satisfied in their sexual relationships (Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018). Perhaps Madonna–whore beliefs (e.g., "A sexy woman is usually not a good mother") inhibit men from committing to women with whom they have sexual chemistry. In addition, Madonna–whore beliefs were positively associated with men's hostile and benevolent sexism scores (Bareket et al., 2018). Men's sexism harms heterosexual relationships, reducing both their own and their partner's sexual satisfaction (Rudman & Phelan, 2007). Thus eliminating the Madonna–whore dichotomy would benefit intimate unions for both men and women.

When they are less extreme, conventional scripts about romance may serve some positive functions (Hammond & Overall, 2017). They offer a ritualized "set of rules" that enable adolescents to overcome a highly segregated childhood marked by avoidance of the other gender (see Chapter 3). Further, by encouraging benevolence, romantic scripts may counter male tendencies to dominate and compete, making them kinder, gentler partners. For instance, men who endorsed benevolent sexism were successful at resolving relationship conflicts, likely because they accepted their partners' influence when discussing the conflicts (Overall, Sibley, & Tan, 2011). Men's benevolence toward women may reflect a desire to share a long and happy life with a devoted partner, but it also has an ironic effect that works against that goal. Benevolent sexists of both genders are more willing to dissolve their relationships when their partners fail to meet their idealized expectations (Hammond & Overall, 2014). By holding women to ideals of purity and devotion and men to ideals of chivalry, benevolent sexism sets people up for disappointment, undermining the stability of intimate relationships.

Moreover, traditional romantic ideologies readily devolve into justifications for inequality. For instance, the romantic belief suggesting that it takes "the love of a good woman" to "civilize" a man can easily become a rationalization for traditional roles. In an attempt to appeal to female voters, President Ronald Reagan jovially stated in 1983 that "if it wasn't for women, us men would still be walking around in skin suits carrying clubs." Although he meant to compliment his audience, representatives of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, it backfired. As one Republican woman commented, "To me he seemed to be saying that the only reason we're here is to create families" (Isaacson, 1983).

Such views of women once justified excluding women from dangerous or stressful occupations (e.g., police work, piloting airplanes, or joining the military) "for their own good." Today, employment discrimination based on sex is illegal in many countries. Yet men in romantic relationships may still restrict women "for their own good." A male partner's concern may be loving or it may presume that women can't take care of themselves; it can even be a manipulative strategy aimed at controlling women. Such mixed motives creates interpretative ambiguity for female partners. For example, imagine a husband who assumes control of the family finances because it would be "too demanding and stressful" for his wife. Is he being genuinely benevolent or sexist or both (i.e., thinking he is being nice, but making sexist assumptions)? Or is protectiveness merely an excuse to control the couple's resources? Given paternalism's long history in gender relations, the wife may be uncertain about her husband's motives.

Deciding how to react to a male partner's restrictions is especially tricky because romantic partners rightly care for each other. However, while men are socialized to protect female partners, women who endorse benevolent sexism tend to acquiesce, even when it restricts their freedom. Consider a pair of studies conducted in Spain (Moya, Glick, Expósito, De Lemus, & Hart, 2007). In one study, female psychology majors were offered an internship involving counseling men convicted of domestic abuse or sexual assault. The women were informed about this opportunity during a session attended by their steady boyfriends, ostensibly to make sure that the internship would not "cause problems" for their relationship. The boyfriends, sequestered in another room, were instructed to write a scripted note opposing participation in the internship. Depending on random assignment, the boyfriend simply opposed the girlfriend's participation ("I would convince her not to do it") or added a benevolent justification ("I would be very concerned for her safety"). Women who read the benevolent justification reacted positively to their boyfriends' restrictive response. However, when the boyfriend gave no justification, women's reactions depended on their own level of benevolent sexism: Women with high scores reacted positively and did not view their boyfriends as sex-

ist, but those with low scores reacted more negatively, suspecting that the boyfriend was "discriminating against me as a woman." (In debriefings, women were informed that their boyfriends' statements were not genuine so their relationships were not harmed by participating in the research.)

In a second study, Moya et al. (2007) investigated female law students, who were asked to imagine their boyfriends opposing their participation in a legal internship working with men who may have been falsely convicted of violent crimes. In the scenario, the boyfriend either offered no explanation ("I would convince her not to do it") or one of two benevolent justifications: "I am concerned that it would not be safe *for you*" or "I am concerned that it would not be safe *for a woman*" (italics added). Women who endorsed benevolent sexism reacted positively to being restricted in all three conditions. But for women who resisted benevolent sexism, whether the justification was personalized (" . . . for you") or gendered (" . . . for a woman") mattered. As before, they reacted negatively to restriction without explanation, but they accepted personalized benevolence while rejecting gender stereotyped benevolence as discriminatory. Interestingly, the change from "for you" to "for a woman" had an impact, but only on women who renounce benevolent sexism.

In sum, women who endorse benevolent sexism accepted that their male partners were acting "for their own good" when imposing a protective restriction, even when the partner did not explicitly say so. By contrast, women who reject benevolent sexism paid close attention to their male partners' explanations, accepting at face value the justification that "I am concerned for your safety." But when a benevolent justification explicitly referred to their perceived vulnerability "as a woman," they suspected discrimination.

Is there anything wrong with a boyfriend concerned for his girlfriend's safety? Of course not, and she should be concerned with his safety as well. But protective paternalism has long been used, either deliberately or unintentionally, to restrict women's freedom and independence. For instance, benevolently sexist men tend to undermine their female partners' goals and competence through patronizing advice (Hammond & Overall, 2015). In romantic relationships, both partners may have a tough time deciding where to draw the line between justified concern and protective paternalism. In specific cases, whether a male partner's protective actions are only benevolent, benevolently sexist, or even deliberately manipulative may depend on the eye of the beholder.

Not only do benevolently sexist women accept restrictions by male partners (Moya et al., 2007), but they also prefer male partners who endorse traditional gender roles that restrict women (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009). In one study, adult German women asked to choose between a husband focused equally on career and family life and a career-driven partner

who expected his wife to be responsible for home and family life (Thomae & Houston, 2016). On average, women strongly preferred the less traditional man, but those who endorsed benevolent sexism showed the reverse pattern, favoring the career-driven partner (see also Travaglia et al., 2009). Similarly, a meta-analysis showed that women high on benevolent sexism are attracted to men with high earning potential (Sibley & Overall, 2011). Thus benevolent sexism may encourage women to forgo financial independence, preferring a man to provide for them.

In summary, benevolent sexism helps to explain why women hold differing opinions concerning whether they want a relationship characterized by traditional or more egalitarian gender roles. However, even in contemporary Western cultures, people are exposed early and often to traditional romantic ideals. In particular, women are socialized from a very young age to believe that their bodies, emotions, and psychology make them especially designed for romance, which pressures them to embody traditional romantic ideals as the essence of being female.

ROMANTIC SOCIALIZATION: SCRIPTS EVEN A CHILD CAN FOLLOW

Take a guess: Which author appears in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as having published the most books? Is it Philip Roth? John Irving? Stephen King? As prolific as these authors are, they do not even come close to Dame Barbara Cartland, who published over 700 books before she died in 2000 (at the age of 98). Her books sport titles such as *The Wings of Love, The Drums of Love, The River of Love,* and *Love in the Clouds*. Now guess who primarily reads her books: men or women? That one was easy.

Romantic socialization starts early through continual exposure to gendered models of behavior in storybooks, video games, films, and television (Gutierrez, Halim, & Leaper, 2019). By age 4, girls prefer romantic fairy tales, whereas boys prefer adventure tales (Collins-Standley, Gan, Yu, & Zillman, 1996). The popular marketing of "princess culture" to young girls (e.g., by Disney) is the largest girls' franchise in marketing history (Orenstein, 2006). By early adolescence, magazines for girls heavily promote attractiveness and dating as constant themes (Zurbriggen et al., 2018). Thus women are encouraged to view their worth in terms of their ability to attract the other gender from an early age (Martin, Luke, & Verduzco-Baker, 2007).

In a content analysis of romantic fiction, bold, aggressive, and wealthy men were depicted as desirable mates, whereas women's desirability depended on beauty, friendliness, and timidity (Whissell, 1996). Television ads also show a heavy reliance on gender stereotypes that are cross-culturally consistent and have not changed over time (Furnham &

Lay, 2019). Moreover, women exposed to gender-typed media in laboratory studies report less interest in personal achievement, compared with women exposed to gender-neutral media (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002; Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). In short, the cultural diet that feeds romantic fantasies to girls and women has been unaffected by the Women's Movement. In the next section, we describe how sex stereotypes and romantic ideals can compromise romantic relationships for both genders.

Adolescence and Romance

Adolescence is a notoriously awkward time of life. The rapid physical changes that accompany puberty can increase both boys' and girls' self-consciousness about their appearance and social acceptance. Both girls and boys face stumbling blocks, such as sexual objectification for girls (Tiggemann & Williams, 2012) or the behavioral problems and poor achievement that more likely trouble boys (Tyre, 2008). It seems safe to say that adolescence is challenging for both genders.

Moreover, adolescence heralds the novel dilemma of how to attract romantic partners. Regardless of gender or sexual orientation, physical attractiveness strongly influences romantic desirability (Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, & Hunt, 2014; Ha, van den Berg, Engels, & Lichtwarck-Aschoff, 2012). A painful adolescent irony is that physical changes, such as facial acne and body odor, coincide with an increased desire to be sexually attractive.

In Chapter 7, we described how cultural norms valuing women chiefly for their appearance impedes their relationship with their bodies, through processes such as self-objectification and body shame (Moradi & Huang, 2008). The trouble starts in adolescence, when girls experience physical changes contrary to the thin female body ideal that society promotes. Girls' percentage of body fat increases during puberty. This physical change, combined with a cultural preference for a slim feminine form, is a recipe for eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, which girls experience at a much higher rate than boys (Tiggemann & Williams, 2012; see Chapter 7).

Puberty is less problematic for boys, who experience greater muscle mass and a growth spurt that brings them closer to the ideal physical appearance for men (Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999). Physical strength and height can also translate into increased interpersonal power and influence. However, these changes are so important that boys who do not "keep up" with their peers are at risk for taking anabolic steroids (Lenahan, 2003; Parent & Moradi, 2011). The pressure on boys to enhance their muscularity continues across the lifespan, with men of all ages desiring to achieve a

muscular physique (Fisher, Dunn & Thompson, 2002; McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Many male undergraduates (51%) are dissatisfied with their bodies, and 90% desire greater muscularity (Frederick et al., 2007). Moreover, a stronger drive for muscularity correlates with lower self-esteem in adolescent boys (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Thus, like girls, boys are pressured to live up to exacting standards that can result in body dissatisfaction when they fail to achieve the ideal.

Masculinity and muscularity are so intertwined that the question, "Am I muscular enough?" becomes fused with the concern, "Am I man enough?" For example, men's body image suffered after they received false feedback that they had scored low on a "masculinity test" (Hunt, Gonsalko-rale, & Murray, 2013). Specifically, compared with men told they scored high on masculinity, those who "failed" the test viewed their bodies as less muscular and estimated they would be able to do fewer push-ups. Media images do not help; men's propensity to read fitness magazines (which celebrate idealized images of male bodies) correlates with poorer body image (Morry & Staska, 2001). Interestingly, an experiment showed that viewing idealized images of female bodies had the same effect on men (Lavine et al., 1999), suggesting they did not feel manly enough to attract desirable women. Therefore, exposure to highly desirable bodies, whether male or female, can undermine men's confidence in their muscularity. Given the prevalence of such images in the media, boys, like girls, may be at risk for developing chronic body shame (Mescher & Rudman, 2014; Moradi & Huang, 2008).

In sum, abrupt physical changes, combined with a desire to be romantically attractive, can make adolescence difficult to navigate. Boys and girls alike experience increased self-consciousness and concern with their physical appearance. However, even though boys (like girls) suffer from anxiety-inducing pressure to embody unrealistic ideals, physical changes during adolescence generally increase boys' height, muscularity, and interpersonal power. By comparison, the changes that girls undergo are less in sync with the physical ideals for their gender.

Heterosexual Romance, Interdependence, and Power

In Chapter 3, we described how girls and boys tend to ignore or even denigrate the other gender. Puberty dramatically changes this situation, as heterosexual adolescents become intensely interested in forming romantic attachments. Given their often segregated childhoods, it can be challenging for boys and girls to "get together."

Gender differences in interaction styles, which have been well practiced and honed throughout childhood, can exacerbate this challenge (Leaper, 2014). In a meta-analysis of children's language use (Leaper &

Smith, 2004), boys were more likely to use speech that was highly assertive and low in affiliation (e.g., commands), whereas girls were more likely to use collaborative speech that was both affiliative and assertive (e.g., proposals for joint activities, elaborating on another's comment). These same gender differences emerged in a meta-analysis of adults' interaction styles (Leaper & Ayres, 2007). Thus the general themes of male assertiveness versus female cooperation begin early, laying the groundwork for male dominance in adulthood.

After a childhood spent avoiding the other gender, adolescent heterosexual relations are bound to be at least somewhat difficult to negotiate. Traditional romantic scripts, such as how a date is expected to proceed, provide normative guides to cross-sex interaction. As previously shown, dating rituals still prescribe a more powerful role for male partners than female partners (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Paynter & Leaper, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2012). The boy is supposed to initiate the date, pick the girl up, pay her way, and deliver her home safely. Boys are also expected to initiate sexual contact. In short, cultural romantic ideals reinforce gender rules that boys should be active and assertive but also play the role of protector and provider. Male chivalry represents an integral part of "romance." Not surprisingly, preference for traditional dating scripts was strongest among young adults who endorse benevolent sexism (Paynter & Leaper, 2016). Fans of romantic comedies, which often feature male chivalry, also tend to embrace gendered romantic ideals (Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

Romantic scripts for girls prescribe accommodating boys in order to attract them. This advice can be summed up as "play up to his ego, introduce topics that you know he knows something about or likes to talk about, don't confront him openly or be too assertive, laugh at his jokes, and admire his accomplishments" (Maccoby, 1998, p. 196). After a childhood spent short-circuiting male dominance by avoiding boys, adolescent girls are expected to allow boys to "take charge" to promote romance. Traditional romantic ideologies encourage female partners to use indirect strategies, rather than direct influence over male romantic partners. For instance, *The Rules* (Fein & Schneider, 1995), a popular dating guide, consistently sounds the theme that women gain power over men by being mysterious and "playing hard to get" to pique continued male interest. Women's traditional role as gatekeepers to sex (deciding "how far to go") can also be a form of power within romantic relationships, but it comes at the cost of female sexual agency (Sanchez et al., 2012).

Other differences in how men and women express sexuality are also culturally dictated. The *sexual double standard* stigmatizes girls for the same behaviors that boost male status, providing boys and men more freedom to pursue sexual activities. Not surprisingly, men report more interest in

sex than women (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). However, in Chapter 9 we show how such gender differences are untrustworthy (i.e., not genuine) because they reflect social pressures that encourage male "conquests" while derogating women's sexual interest as "slutty."

For male adolescents, masculine ideals that value having many sexual partners and assertiveness can lead to sexual coercion. The prototypical rape scenario, in which a stranger assaults a woman, is rare compared with sexual assault by acquaintances, friends, boyfriends, and husbands (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; see Chapter 11). Both adolescent boys and men tend to misinterpret female friendliness as sexual (Abbey, 1991), increasing the likelihood for sexual coercion (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011). Further, romantic scripts dictating that women should be coy (even when sexually interested) encourage men to misinterpret "no" as a token form of resistance (i.e., to think that "no doesn't really mean no"). This, in turn, makes men more likely to engage in sexual aggression (Osman, 2003; see Chapter 11).

In sum, interest in romance requires adolescents to learn how to interact with the other gender after a childhood spent apart. For heterosexuals, gender segregation begins to break down as they attempt to become intimate. New power dynamics evolve, but remain shaped by gendered scripts that specify how romance is "supposed to" unfold. In particular, girls learn to accommodate boys by letting them be more "in charge" in romantic relationships. As a result, adolescent heterosexual romance is a gateway toward greater male power in adulthood. This is not to say that power flows in only one direction; sexual attraction sets the stage for girl's dyadic power as boys strive to win them over. Their role as sexual gatekeepers also lends girls considerable influence, although it may be counteracted by male sexual coercion.

The Glass Slipper Effect

By the time women reach college age, they have been strongly "educated in romance" (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Paynter & Leaper, 2016). Even today, women are taught that attracting a mate and raising a family should be their primary life goals, rather than directly seeking economic rewards and prestige for themselves. At the same time, women are strongly motivated, often with family support, to be achievement-oriented, independent, and career-focused. These competing pressures can create intrapsychic conflicts for women.

Researchers have investigated women's competing motives (to be both attractive to men and independent) by examining how female college students respond when romantic desirability goals are activated. In laboratory studies, women primed with romance have shown poorer perfor-

mance on academic tests, compared with women in control groups (Park, Eastwick, Young, Troisi, & Streamer, 2016; Zanna & Pack, 1975). Similarly, priming women with romance had the effect of reducing their interest in pursuing math and science careers, given that "girl geeks" are not thought to be romantically desirable (Park, Young, Troisi, & Pinkus, 2011).

Women may be unaware of competing motives, creating inconsistency between their explicit and implicit romance-related beliefs. If you ask a roomful of college women, "How many of you are waiting for Prince Charming?" they will laugh or roll their eyes; few hands are raised. Yet women may still be influenced by a lifetime of exposure to romantic fairy tales, pretend play in girlhood centered on feminine roles (princess, girl-friend, bride, and mother), and the social emphasis on attracting boys during adolescence (Martin et al., 2007). These well-learned romantic scripts, repeatedly practiced in girls' lives, may later affect women's choices and behavior without conscious intent. If women implicitly believe that a man will provide for them, they may become less ambitious for themselves, leading to a later power and resource disadvantage. Childhood romantic fantasies may become so deeply embedded that they inadvertently affect young adult women's aspirations.

To test this hypothesis, Rudman and Heppen (2003) used the IAT. In Chapter 4, we explained that the IAT measures beliefs and attitudes people may be unaware of and does so in a manner that cannot be "faked." When asked explicitly, women disavowed having romantic fantasies associating male partners with chivalry; nonetheless, women demonstrated this association on the IAT. Specifically, they were more likely to associate male romantic partners with fairy-tale words (e.g., *Prince Charming, White Knight, protector, hero, magic, castle*) than with similarly favorable reality-based words (e.g., *kind, patient, intelligent, witty*). Thus women possessed implicit romantic fantasies. In addition, the more women possessed implicit romantic fantasies, the less interest they showed in obtaining direct power for themselves. That is, women who scored high (as opposed to low) on the romantic-fantasy IAT aspired to lower income careers and showed less interest in prestigious occupations (e.g., being CEOs, corporate lawyers, and politicians). They also showed less interest in higher education (e.g., a graduate or professional degree) and were less willing to volunteer for a leadership role in an upcoming experiment.

Rudman and Heppen (2003) termed this the "glass slipper" effect: Women who have absorbed gendered romantic scripts may hobble their own ambitions and aspirations, putting their faith in romance. Although traditional romantic ideologies are subjectively pro-female, they are also benevolently sexist. The glass slipper effect suggests that women may be implicitly co-opted by cultural romance scripts, leading them to cede power, status, and resources to men. In this way, cultural romantic scripts

may undermine women's career ambitions with the implicit assumption that a future Prince Charming will provide for and protect them, reinforcing gender inequality.

What about men? Rudman and Heppen (2003) found that men did not implicitly associate female romantic partners with fairy-tale fantasies (e.g., *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, princess,* and *maiden*), but they did associate them with sexual fantasies (e.g., *Venus, sex goddess,* and *sex kitten*). However, men's implicit fantasies were unrelated to their anticipated income, interest in high-status occupations, or willingness to be a group leader. In concert, these findings suggest that only women have to fight implicit romantic beliefs before they can step out of their "glass slippers" to fully pursue independent careers. Implicit beliefs may act as hidden barriers to women's ability to capitalize on their hard-won advances and opportunities.

Changing the cultural scripts (e.g., in films aimed at children) would help. For example, *Shrek 3* exposes the "passive princess" script as ridiculous. Trapped in a tower with fellow princesses, Fiona urges them to hatch an escape plan. "Good idea—assume the position, ladies!" shouts one princess. The others promptly faint or fall asleep, waiting to be rescued. Until alternative scripts take root, exposing implicit glass slipper beliefs through research may help women to counteract them when deciding about their futures.

THE COSTS OF ROMANTIC IDEOLOGIES FOR MEN

Because boys' fantasy play focuses on adventure (not romance), it is not surprising that men's ambitions are unaffected by implicit romantic ideologies (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). As adolescents and adults, men tend to eschew romance novels and make fun of "chick flicks." Nonetheless, men experience intense feelings of passionate love and conform to gendered romantic scripts. Cross-cultural research suggests that men and women similarly value romantic love and experience love with the same intensity (Sprecher et al., 1994; Fisher, 2004). As teenagers, boys become unexpectedly emotional when they fall in love (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). For example, they may feel disoriented and unable to speak in the presence of their girlfriends; they also report having less sexual power in the relationship than do teenage girls. These results contradict popular stereotypes about teenage boys being more interested in "hooking up" than having committed relationships (Grossman, 2006).

In fact, men may be even more romantic than women. Men tend to score higher on explicit romantic fantasies (e.g., "I think of my lover as magical"; Rudman & Heppen, 2003). They also believe in love at first sight and that love can conquer all obstacles more so than women (Sprecher &

Metts, 1989). A poll conducted by a dating site showed that 72% of men believed in love at first sight, compared with 61% of women (Kerk, 2017). Moreover, both genders put on rose-colored glasses when they fall in love, viewing their partners as especially attractive, intelligent, and kind (Murray et al., 1996). However, men tend to fall in love faster than women, belying the stereotype that women are greater "fools for love" (Harrison & Shortall, 2011, p. 727).

Like women, men experience a conflict between romantic ideologies and their quest for independence, but in a different way. Whereas social norms expect women to "put love above all," men are not supposed to fall too deeply in love, a state that suggests weakness and dependence (rather than masculine autonomy). As a result, strong feelings of love and attachment may cause men to question their masculinity. For example, teenage boys report feeling "like a little girl in a relationship" (Grossman, 2006, p. 41) and worry that it is "effeminate [for a guy] to fall in love so hard it's like the whole world has been turned around" (Dion & Dion, 1985, cited in Myers, 2005, p. 450). Similarly, adult men report strong feelings of tenderness, devotion, and love toward their partners, with the caveat that "they are not like other men," even though they are (Hite, 2006, p. 121). Because men deny their feelings to other men, they are unaware that their peers also experience strong emotions. As a result, the stereotype that romantic love is primarily a female emotion can cause distress and shame for men when they fall in love.

Indeed, men may be more emotionally vulnerable than women in relationships. When couples are instructed to talk about serious conflict or breaking up, men's heart rates and blood pressure increase more so than women's (Gottman, 1993), suggesting that men find thoughts of ending the relationship especially physically taxing and upsetting. One reason men may find breakups more upsetting: They are socialized to conceal vulnerable emotions from their male friends, whereas women can find comfort and support from their female friends (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). In contrast to women's socialized need for intimacy, men are socialized against intimacy. In fact, wives and girlfriends often serve as the main "socially acceptable" outlet for men's self-disclosure. As a result, men in romantic relationships are more likely to have put all of their emotional eggs in one basket. Therefore, losing a romantic partner comes at a greater emotional cost for men than for women, who have other supportive relationships. Consistent with this view, most husbands characterize their wives as their best friends, whereas women are more likely to have a female friend serve this role (Hite, 2006). In addition, both genders report more meaningful interactions with women (than with men), and the amount of time spent with women is negatively related to loneliness (Wheeler, Reis, & Nezlek, 1983).

The dark side of this asymmetry is that men can have a difficult time disengaging from romantic relationships. Although films such as *Obsessed, The Roommate,* and *Fatal Attraction* have popularized the idea that rejected women are unstable, in reality, rejected men do most of the stalking (Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002; Haugaard & Seri, 2003). Stalking, which consists of repeated physical following or unwanted communications, typically coincides with obsessive rumination about the target and feelings of depression, anger, or jealousy (Dennison & Stewart, 2006). Stalking is a serious crime that corresponds with physical abuse (Melton, 2007) and severe mental and physical health problems for victims (Amar, 2006; Davis et al., 2002). Yet it was not until 1990 that stalking was classified as a crime in the United States; even today, the justice system is not always responsive to stalking victims (Logan, Walker, Jordan, & Leukefeld, 2006).

Men are also more prone to physically harming intimate partners, often in reaction to female rejection (see Chapter 11). Among murder victims, 33% of female victims are killed by a male intimate partner, whereas only 4% of male murder victims are killed by a female intimate partner (Rennison, 2003). Labeling intimate partner violence as *crimes of passion* represents an insidious way in which traditional romantic ideologies support these behaviors. It implies that the perpetrator, overcome with jealousy or heartbreak, "couldn't help himself" due to strong, romantic passion (as opposed to a premeditated act). While the term is not officially recognized in law, lawyers use the crime of passion defense to gain jurors' sympathy. Ironically, people hurt the ones they love with more impunity than they hurt total strangers, even though the former constitutes a gross betrayal of trust in addition to a heinous crime.

Why would people view abusive behavior as less immoral when the perpetrator is "in love"? The ancient Greeks used the term *theia mania* (or "madness from the gods") to describe the sudden overthrow of reason associated with falling in love, and the connection between love and madness has survived to present times. As the Spanish proverb states, "Love without madness is not truly love." Sexual arousal can cause people to "throw caution to the wind" and behave in morally questionable ways (Ariely & Lowenstein, 2006). At its extreme, passionate love can cause people to sacrifice everything that society deems important—their families, their careers, their dignity, and even rationality itself (Aron & Aron, 1997). Indeed, people in love can exhibit symptoms that appear under the clinical diagnostic headings of mania, depression, and obsessive–compulsive disorder (Tallis, 2005). If men are thought to be literally out of their minds when they stalk or abuse the women they love, then they cannot be held responsible for their actions. This logic was long used to justify treating domestic violence as a private matter, rather than a serious crime (Lemon,

2001). Chapter 11 reviews relationship violence, committed most often, with severe injuries, by men.

In sum, both genders are constrained by traditional ideologies of romance. Men are socialized to be bold and assertive, but also to treat female partners with chivalry and solicitous protection. At the same time, men are pressured to not be "too emotional" or dependent on the woman they love, even though she is likely to be their chief source of social support. Moreover, she may expect her partner to express his feelings as freely as she does and feel disappointed when he does not. As a result, navigating romantic relationships can be challenging for men, especially in cultures in which the "old rules" seem not to apply as women increasingly attain financial independence. The next section specifically considers the perceived conflict between traditional romantic ideologies and the quest for gender equality, popularly mistaken as a conflict between feminism and romance.

FEMINISM AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Popular stereotypes promoted by media portrayals characterize feminists as radical man-hating lesbians (Bell & Klein, 1996; Misciagno, 1997). Negative beliefs about feminists occur for at least four reasons. First, feminists described how traditional gender roles within heterosexual romantic relationships foster gender inequality long before social scientists conducted the research described in this chapter. For example, Simone de Beauvoir (1952) argued that marriage functioned to imprison women in the home, thereby keeping women "in their place" (see also Firestone, 1970; Hite, 1987; Millett, 1970). It is easy to caricature such criticisms as hostile toward men and heterosexuality (which is why we have been so careful to distinguish heterosexual romantic love from traditional ideologies about romance). In reality, feminist women are less likely than nonfeminist women to express hostility toward men (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009). Moreover, there is no correlation between being a feminist and being a lesbian (Rudman & Phelan, 2007). The mistaken perception that feminists generally reject both men and heterosexuality feeds the "man-hating lesbian" stereotype.

Second, when feminists voice their concerns, they violate gender prescriptions that women should be nice, polite, and meek. As Chapter 5 showed, female anger or assertiveness risks backlash. Although feminists desire equality, any challenge to male privilege is miscast as an attempt to control men, breeding the "feminazi" caricature. Civil rights are not a fixed pie, meaning that men are not in competition with women for equal rights and protection under the law. Nonetheless, men who endorse hostile sex-

ism have a zero-sum perspective, believing that women's gains correspond to men's losses (e.g., on the job market; Ruthig, Kehn, Gamblin, Vanderzanden, & Jones, 2017). In reality, gender equality correlates positively with a nation's economic success (World Economic Forum, 2015). When nations maximize their use of talented individuals, including women, their economies do better, and a rising tide lifts all boats.

Third, hostile sexists reject female empowerment and view feminists as shock troops in the "battle of the sexes" (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Promoting negative feminist stereotypes serves their purpose, which is to lead many women to shun labeling themselves as "feminists" (e.g., Buschman & Lenart, 1996; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Williams & Wittig, 1997). As a result, even women who believe in gender equality avoid embracing a feminist identity (Leaper & Arias, 2011; Meijs, Ratliff, & Lammers, 2017). Willingness to say "I am a feminist" more strongly predicts activism than believing in gender equality (Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2010). Thus, anti-feminist stereotypes undermine women's participation in collective action aimed at gaining greater equality and civil rights.

Finally, male allies are vital in the quest for gender equality, but men may also be deterred from embracing feminism due to negative stereotypes. Male feminists are stereotyped as likely to be gay (Anderson, 2009) or feminine in appearance (Gunderson & Kunst, 2018). In a series of studies, researchers found that women liked male feminists more than men did, but both genders stereotyped them as more likely to be feminine, weak, and gay, compared with nonfeminist male counterparts (Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2013). It was not because of a gay male feminist stereotype (although it clearly exists); rather, it was because people assumed that a male feminist's friends and colleagues would be predominately female (rather than male). That is, feminist men were stigmatized merely for being associated with women, an indisputable sign that women are still viewed as second-class citizens. Thus feminism remains urgently needed. Male role models with "masculine credentials" may have the power to destigmatize male feminism; for example, National Basketball Association stars LeBron James and Dwyane Wade (among others) have partnered with a #LeanIn campaign to support women's rights (Chattal, 2015a). Similarly, male celebrities and educators have launched campus initiatives (LiveRespect) and a media series ("Man Enough") to change the masculinity norms that prevent men from championing gender equality (Baldoni & Porter, 2018; Porter, 2018).

In sum, viewing feminism as incompatible with heterosexuality (and not just with traditional ideologies of romance) may be particularly damaging to people's willingness to identify as feminists, which hinders gender progress. In the next section, we review research that examines the sources of these popular beliefs about feminism, as well as whether these

beliefs have any merit. Of importance, the evidence suggests that, far from detracting from heterosexual romantic relationships, feminism actually enhances their health, stability, and well-being.

Feminism and Romance Are Popularly Perceived to Be Incompatible

Because feminism challenges traditional gender roles, many people may view feminism as incompatible with romance. If so, heterosexuals may shy away from feminism because they see it as a roadblock to romantic relationships. To test this hypothesis, Rudman and Fairchild (2007) examined the correlation between feminist orientations (i.e., feminist identity and attitudes toward feminists) and beliefs that feminism provokes heterosexual relationship conflict. As expected, women and men alike rejected feminism if they perceived it to be troublesome for romance. For example, people who agreed that "Feminism can cause women to resent men," "Feminism can add stress to relationships with men," and "Most men would not want to date a feminist" were less likely to identify with feminists, to report positive attitudes toward them, and to endorse women's civil rights (e.g., support for equal pay and the Equal Rights Amendment).

In an additional study, Rudman and Fairchild (2007) asked people to judge photos of plain and pretty women. Consistent with the unattractive feminist stereotype, plain women were rated as more likely to be feminists than pretty women (Goldberg, Gottesdiener, & Abramson, 1975). The unattractive feminist stereotype was wholly explained by beliefs that plain women lack sex appeal and are likely to be lesbians, suggesting that people believe that "unsexy" women (i.e., women who cannot rely on men to provide for them) instead turn to feminism. These unfavorable beliefs can lead young adults to view feminism as antithetical to love because it reduces their own romantic desirability.

But Is Feminism Actually Good for Relationships?

Does feminism actually conflict with romance? To find out, Rudman and Phelan (2007) investigated whether feminist women, or men with feminist partners, experience troubled relationships. Feminism was measured as agreement with the statement, "I am a feminist," combined with how warmly people felt toward feminists and career women. Comparable items (e.g., "My partner is a feminist" and partner's attitudes toward feminists and career women) were combined to assess partner's perceived feminism.

Among heterosexuals currently in a relationship, results showed that women paired with feminist men (as opposed to nonfeminists) reported better relationship health (greater relationship quality, stability, and sexual

satisfaction). In other words, irrespective of women's own feminism, having a feminist male partner benefits romantic relationships. In addition, for a sample of older adults, men paired with feminist women (as opposed to nonfeminists) reported greater sexual satisfaction and relationship stability. Thus men also benefit from having feminist partners.

In short, the popular perception that feminism harms heterosexual relationships is false. In reality, male and female partners paired with feminists directly benefited from healthier relationships. Men report greater relationship stability and sexual satisfaction when they have feminist female partners. Further, women paired with male feminists report particularly happy and stable relationships, whether they label themselves as feminist or not. Nonetheless, women's feminism indirectly improves their relationships because feminist women tend to select feminist male partners, which, in turn, predicts a better relationship.

Additionally, Rudman and Phelan (2007) tested whether feminist stereotypes are accurate. Are feminist women (compared with nonfeminists) more likely to be single, lesbian, or sexually unattractive? No. In fact, feminist women were more likely to be in a romantic relationship with a man than nonfeminist women. Otherwise, there was no correlation between women's feminism and their sexual orientation or their sexual appeal. These findings contradict negative feminist stereotypes (Goldberg et al., 1975; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). How does feminism improve a woman's chances of being in a relationship, or being satisfied with the one she has? It seems likely that women with more positive attitudes toward men (as feminists have) would be happier in love (Anderson et al., 2009). Moreover, feminist women avoid partnering with men who embrace masculinity as aggression and power over women, which suggests that feminism "may serve as a protective factor against involvement in unsatisfying, or even violent, romantic heterosexual relationships" (Backus & Mahalik, 2011, p. 318). On the contrary, feminists of both genders may be likely to insist, from courtship on, that their union be a 50:50 partnership. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, "If you want a marriage of equals, then date as equals" (Lamont, 2020).

Finally, it is worth considering why feminists have received such unflattering media portrayals and stereotypes. Anti-feminist stereotypes bear a striking resemblance to stereotypes about women who challenge male dominance by being successful and powerful: Both demonize women on sexual dimensions. Recall from Chapter 5 that powerful women are stereotyped as frigid, "castrating bitches" and, therefore, as unsuitable sexual partners. The similarity of these attacks to feminist "lesbian-baiting" suggests a common purpose: to disenfranchise women and make them feel anxious that men will not love them if they are overly ambitious, assertive, or independent. Whenever women challenge patriarchy, they risk sexual-

ized derogation, implying that they will wind up lonely spinsters if they do not toe the line. As a result, heterosexual women may understandably curb their personal ambitions or refrain from embracing their collective power when they believe these actions put their relationships and emotional lives at risk. Thus negative feminist stereotypes are a powerful tool in the arsenal of sexists, who would prefer to keep women meek and dependent on men for social status and financial support. In truth, feminism and romance are essential partners, not enemies, but the stubborn popularity of negative feminist beliefs is a sign that the work of gender egalitarians is far from over.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter considered a specific aspect of the intersection of male dominance and heterosexual independence: how traditional romantic ideologies perpetuate prescriptions for male assertiveness and female passivity. From adolescence to adulthood, romantic socialization promotes patriarchy by encouraging men to take the initiative and women to acquiesce. Moreover, cultural romantic scripts are riddled with benevolent sexism, which harms gender equality. Rooted in a historical past in which knights courted ladies, romantic scripts flourished during a medieval period when there was a strong need for benevolence to counter overtly hostile sexism. In the modern world, the trappings of traditional romance ostensibly place women in high esteem. In reality, traditional romantic ideals prescribe that women suppress their own career ambitions and independence.

Men also suffer from cultural romantic scripts, not least because traditional romantic scripts proscribe men from directly expressing intense feelings of love and devotion for fear of being judged as "unmanly." Masculine cultural scripts take an even more stringent line against expressing tender emotions in male friendships, which can make men overly reliant on female partners for emotional sustenance. As a result, men may be particularly vulnerable to being emotionally devastated, behaving badly, and suffering from social isolation when female partners leave them.

For women, romantic socialization creates a perceived conflict between romantic desirability and personal achievement. The glass slipper effect (the tendency for young adult women to implicitly associate male partners with chivalry) conditions women to rely on men for protection and provision, rather than to seek power directly. In addition to undermining career ambitions, traditional romantic ideologies can lead women to reject identifying as feminists because they see feminism as incompatible with romance. As a result, women are less likely to take collective action to advance gender equality. In reality, feminism benefits heterosexual roman-

tic relationships by leading women to choose more satisfying partners: men who identify as feminists.

Heterosexual men and women rely on each other to fulfill basic needs (e.g., for love, sexual gratification, and reproduction). Romantic love represents one of the most rewarding experiences two people can share. However, a childhood steeped in antipathy toward the other gender is poor preparation for intimate adult partnerships. Traditional romantic scripts may enable women and men to overcome childhood hostility by idealizing one another as loving caregivers or heroic protectors. However, these ideals reflect cultural scripts that reinforce inequality and restrict individuals' behavior by prescribing men to be bold, assertive, and unemotional and women to be modest princesses waiting for their princes to rescue them. Traditional gender-typed "love roles" limit people's ability to express their full human capacities and diminish their ability to form more perfect unions. Fortunately, heterosexual romantic love flourishes without relying on traditional romantic ideologies that restrict the emotional and professional lives of either partner.