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Part I

Childhood and Development
Chicka Chicka Boom Boom could be considered many things: a song, a children’s book, a tropical and fun way to learn your alphabet. It is possibly less frequently regarded as a cautionary tale about youth’s propensity to risk taking, and honestly that’s a shame. Its last page leaves you with a real cliffhanger: the letter A once again climbs up the coconut tree, even after he and all of his alphabet confederates fell out of the tree and injured themselves just a few hours earlier. After seeing A exhibit such unwarranted risky behavior, one can’t help but wonder why A came to be this way. It appears that some children are simply more likely to take risks than others. Previous research has suggested that children are either born to be risky or they’re not, but more recent research proves that children take risks based on a complex set of factors, which can change throughout their lifetime. Children’s risk taking behaviors, for the most part, are driven by the desire to succeed socially and create social identities.

Risk is a very broad topic that can hold many different definitions in different contexts. For the purpose of this essay, risk will be thought of as the amount of uncertainty one has in an action that has a certain possibility for loss, injury or consequence (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2008). This means that a person is considered to be “participating in risky behavior” if there is a possibility that his or her actions might result in them losing something valuable to them, hurting themselves, or any other negative outcome.

With that said, it is also important to note that risk-taking is not necessarily a bad thing, in fact there are many benefits to taking risk-taking in childhood. In addition to the social benefits that will be discussed in detail later in this
paper, children can develop their critical thinking and self-regulation skills by learning from the consequences of their actions (Dietza, Pye, Yochoff, 2013). The likelihood that a child will engage in risky behavior depends on the type of risk they are taking. There are many different types of risks: social risks, health risks, financial risks, environmental risks, and reproduction and fertility risks (Hanoch, Johnson, Wilke 2006) (Wang, Kruger, Wilke, 2009), and a single person may be very likely to take a risk in one category and highly unlikely to take a risk in another.

The Hanoch study proves this by giving participants a variety of potentially risky behaviors in different domains, like smoking, gambling, extreme sports and investments. They are told to rate their risk behavior (how likely they were to participate in the behavior), risk perception (how risky they thought the behavior was in the first place) and expected benefit (how much benefit they would get from partaking in the behavior) for each risk. Based on the results from the survey, the study found that the perceived benefits that participating in each type of behavior had the biggest influence on whether or not the participants would take the risk. Participants were also a lot more likely to take risks in certain categories, depending on the way they value the different benefits that could come from each risk. For example, if a person values the adrenaline rush that comes from doing extreme sports over the possibility of winning a lot of money in a game of roulette, they are more likely to take risks in the extreme sports domain and go bungee jumping than wager a lot of money at a casino.

The development of the brain and its neurological process can be used to explain much of the risk taking behavior we see in children. This approach is from a mechanistic perspective, which considers what is going on physiologically with the subject. Brain scans can explain the reason why children are more likely to take risks, especially as they start to dive into adolescence. It all has to do with the interaction between two brain networks: the socio-emotional network, located in the limbic region, and the cognitive control network, which is found on the outer layers of the brain.

The socio-emotional network develops much more quickly and at a younger age, and is responsible for responding to social situations. The cognitive control network, however, takes a much longer time to respond and isn’t fully developed until a person is in his or her 20’s. This is the part of the brain that would stop a person from partaking in risky behaviors. When a child is in a social situation, the socio-emotional region becomes aroused and the cognitive control network isn’t developed enough to respond, this is when risk taking happens (Steinberg, 2007). This phenomenon is heightened by the fact that this is also the time when children’s social lives are flourishing, and the role of the socio-emotional network is hard at work.
Another study demonstrated the neurological effects on the brain’s centers for risk-taking after making children face social exclusion. After being socially excluded from a group, many subjects were more likely to engage in risky tasks (Peak et al., 2013). This risky behavior as a response to social exclusion can be seen as an attempt to gain more social acceptance. It is also suggested that this response could be an attempt to harm others or as a form of withdrawal, but due to the research supporting the influence socialization has on risk taking behavior which will be discussed later, it seems likely that risk taking behavior following social exclusion is a ploy to regain that acceptance. The responses that the brain produces during childhood, when the socio-emotional network is working overtime without the cognitive control to stop it, leads to an increase in risk taking in social scenarios. Since the average child is taking a lot of risks at this time because of their brain development, risk-taking becomes a prevalent part of their lives and has come to serve as a tool for children to form their social identities.

Looking at the issue of risk taking through a developmental standpoint can explain how a child’s risk taking tendencies are further advanced, from just a simple function of brain development to a tool to climb the social ladder. Their social interactions and life experiences also contribute to their tendencies to take risks. In accordance with the Hanoch study, the perceived benefit that drives risk-taking behavior is often defined by social experiences, or the benefits of social acceptance. Since social acceptance is typically of great importance throughout adolescence, risky behavior in this domain is common.

Much research has been done observing children and the risks they take with regard to how it relates to their social environment. In a 2007 study, researchers had participants fill out a questionnaire on how risky they thought certain behaviors were. This questionnaire revealed several things about how humans use risk to navigate their social worlds. Much of their risk taking centered around within group competition, where a subject tries to rise to the top of their own group of peers, and between group competition, which is when the subject attempts to surpass other groups of peers, socially (Wang, 2007). Although this study was done on adults, the findings regarding socialization apply to children as well, the differences between gender is in line with studies done on children because the socialization that causes these differences takes place largely throughout childhood.

In order to gain acceptance from the group, children, especially boys, are expected to engage in more risky behavior, like rough playground play or not wearing a bike helmet in order to “look cool.” (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2008). This behavior is all a product of within group competition, and plays a major role in developing a social identity. One explanation for why this risky behavior is so valuable in social situations is related to the inhibition
of children. Risk taking can result in a lack of inhibition in social situations. Disinhibited children frequently have less anxiety in social situations, which results in these children having a larger social circle than children who are more anxious in social situations and do not take risks. (Dietza, Pye, Yochoff, 2013)

The trend of using risky physical behavior to obtain higher social status is something primarily seen in boys. There are significant gender differences between boys and girls when it comes to risk taking in regards to social status, which can be attributed to the developmental differences between the two. In the Christensen and Mikkelsen study, which observed and interviewed children on a playground to understand their risk-taking behaviors, it was found that although boys generally are more likely to take physical risks that might result in injury, girls were more likely to take risks in their relationships and interactions with other people, meaning they were more likely to speak their mind and discuss their feelings. It was not that they would not take risks that might affect their health and well being, but they were more likely to stand up and express their feelings that they did not want to be hurt or “roughed up,” and during play, they were more likely to use defensive maneuvers to ensure that they did not get hurt.

What this study found was that adolescents, both girls and boys, are more likely to take risks than the rest of the population, but do not blindly throw themselves into risky situations. Rather they evaluate each risk using their own specific values and criteria. Both boys and girls take risks to fit into social groups, but the type of risks differs based on this criteria. This is also in line with Hanoch’s claim that the perceived benefit of the risk is what drives a child engage in that behavior. Lasenby-Lessard et al. suggest that children have three main processes that guide their risk taking behavior: perceived vulnerability, danger and severity (2010). Differing appraisals of these processes between boys and girls account for much of the differences in risk taking between the two. When girls evaluate a risk, they think of it in terms of whether or not they will get hurt. Boys evaluate their risks based on how much they will get hurt. (Hillier and Morrongiello, 1998) Boys are more likely to perceive the benefits of typical risk-taking behavior as more desirable than the possibility of not being injured. Boys also perceive their injuries to be less severe than girls, and attribute those injuries to bad luck, rather than viewing it as a consequence of the risky behavior.

There are several explanations as to why boys and girls have this fundamental difference in the appraisal of the benefits and consequences associated with a risk. From an evolutionary perspective, life history can be used to explain a person’s risk taking behaviors. Throughout evolutionary history, men have had shorter life expectancies than women. Because of this, they tend to have a
higher sense of urgency and take more risks (Wang, 2007). It could also be explained by the physiological differences between men and women. Since men typically have higher levels of androgen, a hormone that promotes sensation seeking, their innate desire to take risks is increased (Social Issues Research Centre, 2004 and Zuckerman, 1991).

A third approach to looking at the differences in boys and girls and their perceptions of risks is to consider the social pressures that are on them to conform to stereotypes, even from a very young age. These gender roles are instilled in children by their parents by encouraging behaviors that fit either stereotype, like encouraging girls to play with dolls or allowing boys to go outside and engage in rough play. Marie-Axelle Granié (2010) conducted a study to examine parents’ gender stereotypes in relation to the types of risks their preschool aged children engaged in. Parents filled out several questionnaires that assessed the amount of risks their children took, the extent to which their children fulfilled gender stereotypes and the extent to which the parent fulfilled gender stereotypes.

The results of the study proved that gender stereotype conformity had an impact on risk taking behavior. Many of the actions and attitudes that boys were expected to partake in to achieve social acceptance were more risky. Girls, on the other hand, didn’t have an increase in feminine stereotyped behaviors, but rather a decrease in “masculine” behaviors. Both boys and girls begin to avoid exhibiting behaviors attributed to the opposite gender at an early age, but boys have more pressure to only display what is considered masculine behavior (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974).

What fuels this adherence to gender stereotypes is, for a large part, due to the way that parents raise their child. The questionnaires in the Granié study confirmed that when raising a girl, parent’s main focus is risk prevention, whereas with boys, risky behaviors are often seen as innate and unchanging. This is because these gender-stereotyped behaviors are instilled in children at such a young age, as early as 4 years old, that parents believe these are biological differences when they truly are socially constructed. This study also highlights the influence peer groups being separated by gender. Since girls and boys tend to form groups of friends consisting of the same gender, the boys and girls are not exposed to each other as much, and as a result do not share as many similar traits Marie-Axelle Granié (2010). Children’s upbringing by their parents as well as the social pressures they receive from their peer group all influence the differences in risk taking behaviors between genders.

The reasons why A climbed up that tree are numerous, and much more would have to be known about A in order to truly understand why they did it. Sign A up for a brain scan, gather some demographic information and hand out
some questionnaires, because all of these things really need to be taken into account before truly understanding why any one person may or may have taken a risk in any given situation. Overall, social pressures are one of the key components of a child’s risk taking behavior. Both the way the brain responds to socialization and the development of a child’s social identity shape the way that children take risks. Each risk is driven by the perceived benefit that will come from doing so, and in many cases for children, fitting in socially is worth it. It is very possible that A climbed up that tree one more time, even after everyone knew it was dangerous, because he felt that the benefit of him looking cool in front of the rest of the alphabet was worth potentially falling off again. At A’s stage of neurological development, his cognitive control network was not developed enough to stop its socio-emotional network from showing off. “Will there be enough room” for that part of his brain to develop? More than likely yes, but in the meantime, this gap in reasoning will help A grow his social circle and be the most popular letter in the alphabet (it is still behind E as far as relative frequency in the English language...a possible explanation for increased risk taking.) At the rate A is going, things are looking pretty good.

**Natalie Kirst** is a Strategic Communications student at the University of Missouri. When she isn’t strategizing about communication you might find her looking at cute pictures of animals, running around aimlessly or planning parties that she isn’t going to throw. While Natalie cherishes any opportunity to be creative, her favorite creative outlet is coming up with verbally abusive songs about her roommate’s cat, Todd, and singing them to him as he sits there emotionless, due to the fact that he cannot understand English. Besides Todd, her other dislikes include winter and soup, and that’s about it. She likes almost everything else.

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of preschoolers’ injury-risk behaviors.” *Accident Analysis And Prevention* 42(2), 726-733.


Dr. Cristina Yang, of ABC’s Grey’s Anatomy, is many things; soft is not one of them. Cristina Yang is a fighter, fiercely competitive, a perfectionist, and exceedingly jaded. The fact that one of the most gifted up-and-coming cardiothoracic surgeons in the country cannot seem to make friends, keep relationships, or open up to people leads one to believe that there is more to the story. As Yang’s layers are slowly revealed, they shed light on the fact that her rigid character could stem from her experiences as a child.

Late in season five, Cristina Yang begins to shed some light into her fierce need to be the best. A tumultuous week of fighting with her boyfriend and attending trauma surgeon, Owen Hunt, is concluded by him accusing her of putting her need for competition above the care of her patients. He attempts to make a point by insinuating that she did not even take the time to learn the patient’s name. Yang delivers an uncharacteristically exposing response that sheds light on how underlying grief may be at the root of her need to excel in cardiothoracic surgery. She tells the story of her father’s death as a result of a car accident. She detailed how at a ripe 9 years old, she kept his chest closed with her bare hands until she felt his heart stop beating. She says, “That’s why I do this. It’s also why I win all the contests.”

The article "Youth Mental Illness and the Family: Parents’ Loss and Grief," published in the Journal of Child and Family Studies addresses the effects of grave loss on a child, especially during formative years. A study aimed at providing insight on consequences of parental loss and subsequent grief and identifying therapeutic needs was conducted. In relation to Cristina Yang, this article aids in explaining some of her behaviors. As a child Cristina Yang
witnessed her father’s gruesome death after they were both involved in a car crash. This article explains the way people who experienced grief as children are affected by it in their adult lives. Coping mechanisms for both children dealing with loss and for their parents vary from outward exhibits of aggression to deep internalization. In Cristina Yang’s case it is the latter. She suffers greatly, she loves greatly, and yet seems to have the reoccurring problem of expressing her emotions As the character developed over the seasons, the information she disclosed about her need for supremacy was little to none. It was not until the 5th season that she spoke about her father’s death and the flame that it lit within her. This study also helps explain Yang’s relationship with her mother. Although it has never been blatantly discussed, it has been implied that the rift in the Yang mother-daughter relationship was spurred by the death of Christina Yang’s father. Yang’s mother is a protective and overbearing woman with whom she has little contact. In fact, at one point Yang tells her best friend, “I don’t have family. You are my family.” The article suggests possible causes of less than stellar parent-child relationships like the one between Christina Yang and her mother. These causes include the surviving parent becoming the target of blame, the feeling of an absence of support, and a parent’s experience with an overwhelming wealth of emotion as well as a sense of loss in regard to his or her child.

Another curious distinction is the age at which a child experiences loss. In the article “Investigation of Bereavement Period Effects after Loss of Parents on Children and Adolescents Losing Their Parents,” published in the International Online Journal of Primary Education, author Demet Karakartal among other things, examines specifically how differently the effects of loss are felt when a parent is lost during childhood or adolescence versus as an adult. The author’s study concluded that a parent’s loss during formative years is felt dramatically longer more intensely. As a result, children who have experienced loss face psychological problems and stunted social developmental growth. The study also helps explain the immediate effects versus long-term effects, specifically in regard to social relations. This is especially noticeable in those whose parent(s) died suddenly, without warning versus those who witnessed the timely, prolonged of a parent such as in the case of an illness. Cristina Yang meets the criteria of the children and adolescents observed in this study. She suffered the sudden loss of her father at nine years of age and, as expected, never fully recovered. She is very slow to open up to people. Throughout the various seasons of Grey’s Anatomy she has made comments about the fear of losing those closest to her.

Along with coping with the loss of her father, Yang deals with a strained relationship with her mother. At a certain point it is inevitable to wonder if the two are related. The article, “A Child in the Face of a Parent’s Death: Aspects of Children’s Loneliness,” is interesting in relation to Cristina Yang because it
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Brenda Smith-Lezama

helps explain her relationship with her mother, rather than her feeling of loss towards her father. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of the death of a parent on children’s feeling of loneliness within their own families. The study found that the youngest children demonstrated less intense feelings of loneliness. It is believed that this is because they do not yet understand the irreversibility of death. Although Cristina Yang was only nine years old at the time of her father’s death, the way she tells the story of his death makes it seem as though she was very aware during his last living minutes. She describes using her hands to keep his chest closed until she felt the heart stop beating. At that point she knew her father was gone forever. As described in the study, bereaved families face loneliness, withdrawal and distancing among surviving family members, especially immediate family members. After the death of her father, Cristina Yang’s relationship with her mother deteriorated. Although it is not the typical strained relationship in the fact that they do not face many major disagreements, they do not have much contact. Holidays, major life events, and other celebrations are not spent as a family.

The effects of loss and grief can be rooted in in many different places. The manner in which a loss is experienced, the age at which it is experienced, and the time in which loss occurs are all factors in play. Each factor, coupled with one’s life circumstances lead to a manifestation of grief that is vastly different. The change in one variable will greatly change the result. As a result, grief should not be analyzed as one general concept. Rather, grief should be broken down into what leads to it and analyzed that way.

References


Batman: A Tale of Childhood Trauma

JACOB MOORE

Batman is an altruistic vigilante that protects Gotham City. Batman is called “The World’s Greatest Detective” because he is able to both prevent and solve crimes at an astounding rate. Various detectives in Gotham, e.g. police officers, FBI agents, lawyers, are never able to match Batman’s ability to solve crimes. Batman has years of training with the League of Shadows, an almost endless supply of money, and top-secret firepower that aid in his pursuit of justice. Nonetheless, it is Batman’s obsession with justice that truly makes him The World’s Greatest Detective. Due to his obsession, he spends all of his time trying to stop injustice. He trains, does reconnaissance, background information, and much more to protect Gotham.

If you are not familiar with Batman’s origin story, you may be asking yourself: how did Bruce Wayne transform into Batman and become obsessed with justice? Bruce’s transformation into Batman took place throughout his youth, but it started because of traumatic event in his childhood. When Bruce was eight years old, he witnessed his parents being shot and killed by a mugger while they were walking home from a theater in Gotham. Bruce was traumatized by the event and wanted to avenge his parents. He vowed to rid the city of evil that had taken his parents. This manifested into years of training which would eventually lead him to become Batman. Bruce’s traumatic childhood led him to become Batman and become obsessed with justice.

Addiction is very similar to obsession, involving many of the same neurotransmitters (el-Guebaly et al.). Although childhood trauma caused Bruce Wayne to become Batman, it could affect a regular person, i.e. not a multi-billionaire in a comic book, very differently. Can childhood trauma cause
someone to be more likely to abuse a substance(s)? Or, to what degree does childhood experience shape and alter one’s personality? What separates childhood and adulthood trauma in its likeliness to lead to addiction?

**Childhood Trauma**

What is considered childhood trauma? The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) states that children can experience trauma in two ways: (1) acute traumatic events - from a single traumatic event acute traumatic events or (2) chronic traumatic situations - multiple traumatic events over time. The former can involve “(1) experiencing a serious injury to yourself or witnessing a serious injury to or the death of someone else, (2) facing imminent threats of serious injury or death to yourself or others, or (3) experiencing a violation of personal physical integrity” (NCTSN). The latter, chronic traumatic situations, involves traumatic events over the course of childhood e.g. physical or sexual abuse of a child, bullying, and witnessing domestic violence at home (NCTSN). Understanding what is defined as childhood trauma is pertinent for both testing and researching the effects of childhood trauma.

**Testing for Childhood Trauma**

The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) is a survey covering multiple types of trauma (e.g. physical or sexual abuse, illness, and divorce) and it is most common method to test for childhood trauma (Pennebaker and Susman). To test for the CTQ’s reliability, 398 adolescent psychiatric patients were given a CTQ and 190 of the patients had additional interviews with their primary therapist (Bernstein, Ahluvalia, Pogge, and Handelsman). The CTQ was then compared with therapists’ ratings to see if the CTQ was both reliable and able to predict the specific type of childhood trauma. The relationship between the CTQ and the therapists’ ratings were highly specific, and the CTQ was sensitive to specific types of trauma. (Bernstein et al.). Since the CTQ has been tested and proved to be reliable, it can be used in studying the effects of childhood trauma.

Another method used is the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study. The ACE assesses eight adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) including abuses, domestic violence, and other problems within a household (Anda et al.). The ACE differs from the CTQ it terms of depth and length of the questions. The ACE is more general than the CTQ and only asks yes or no questions. The ACE is a good test to establish that childhood trauma occurred and fairly
short, but it does not reveal the severity of childhood trauma as well as the CTQ does. The CTQ asks multiple yes or no questions, but it also has the participant rate the amount of trauma they had due to a specific experience. If Batman were to take a CTQ, I believe he would have an extremely severe case of childhood trauma. Batman cannot be tested to figure out how his adverse childhood experiences shaped his personality, so I will discuss multiple studies revealing some link between childhood trauma and substance dependence.

**Childhood Trauma and Personality Changes**

What causes personality disorders, genes or the environment (i.e. nurture vs. nature)? An individual is said to have an addictive personality if he or she possess a certain set of personality traits that make him or her predisposed to addiction. Because addiction can cause untimely death and disease, it has been a topic hotly debated. Some believe addiction is primarily caused by genetic factors; meaning, if someone is genetically predisposed, he or she will likely become an addict in the future. Others believe it is caused by cultural impact, like in the case of Batman: witnessing his parents death at a young age caused him to have social-anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression which led to his obsession. Akin to most of human development and evolution, culture and genes are not mutually exclusive and can influence one another, as well as the overall development of humans.

Genes can predispose someone for addiction or other personality disorders, but a healthy childhood environment could make this less likely. On the other hand, someone could not have genetic precursors for a personality disorder, but if they experienced childhood trauma they may be more likely to abuse substances. It is a mixture of genes and our environment that shape our personality. Interestingly enough, our environment can actually change the genetic expression of genes, causing polymorphisms of regular genes that may lead to an array of personality disorders. Childhood trauma is linked to multiple changes in brain structure and function and stress-responsive neurobiological systems (Anda et al.).

Childhood is a crucial time in brain development and social skills. When a child experiences a traumatic event, it may cause alterations in one’s personality. This could manifest itself into depression, anxiety, or other personality traits that make one more susceptible to substance abuse. Bruce Wayne’s personality was altered because of a traumatic event, which led him to increased risk taking and obsession (both are considered traits of an addictive personality). Although his traumatic event caused him to become Batman, the change
in his personality made him very vulnerable to addiction.

Children are constantly learning new information and have a high capacity of neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the development of brain synapses that help children learn new material. Adults, however, have a decreased rate of neuroplasticity so that adult brains can operate to prevent loss of previously learned information (Chambers, Taylor and Potenza). The neuroplasticity capacities for children also make them more susceptible to changes in their personality. This is a main reason why childhood trauma, instead of trauma occurring in adulthood, is more likely to cause addiction vulnerability.

**Childhood Trauma and Addiction**

The GABRA2 gene has been linked to alcohol addiction, and early life stress in rodents has shown to alter GABRA2 expression in adult rodents (Enoch et al.). GABRA2 variation due to childhood trauma was hypothesized to influence addiction vulnerability in humans. This study recruited 577 African-American males with a history of substance abuse and 255 control subjects. A CTQ was administered to all of the subjects and ten GABRA 2 haplotype-tagging single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) were genotyped. The SNPs for GABRA2 are the cause of GABRA2 being expressed differently. The research then compared the results of the CTQ’s with the control and experimental group, as well as the different SNPs for GABRA2. It was found that subjects with heroin, alcohol, or cocaine dependence had experienced significantly more childhood trauma than the control subjects (Enoch et al.). Additionally, the results showed that children experiencing more severe trauma were far more likely to have polysubstance dependence. There was a variation between common GABRA2 haplotypes and the GABRA 2 haplotypes of those with an alcohol addiction (Enoch et al.). Variance in GABRA2 coupled with childhood trauma was found to influence addiction risk as well, especially in cocaine dependence (Enoch et al.). While genetics definitely play a role in addiction, this study has shown that our environment and childhood experiences can directly change our genes (or, the expression of our genes).

In another study, 169 college students were tested to determine the relationship between traumatic childhood events and substance abuse. The participants were given a Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory-3 (SASSI-3), which detects the presence of substance-use disorders regardless of the participant’s truthfulness in completing it (Calmes et al.). In addition, demographic questionnaire was given to the students to gain information regarding childhood trauma, ethnicity, age, and gender (Calmes et al.).
Over 75% of the subjects reported adverse childhood experiences, but only 17.6% had a high probability of having a substance abuse disorder (Calmes et al.). They found that the relationship between traumatic events and the development of substance dependence was small or medium. However, as the number of different types of traumatic experiences increased, the probability of the student being classified on the SASSI-3 as a likely substance dependent increased (Calmes et al.).

Some issues with this study are the small sample size and how they tested substance dependence. They did not gather an experimental group (students who reported substance abuse) and a control group of non-abusers, but rather had one sample and used a questionnaire to determine a student’s substance abuse disorders, or lack-there-of. This type of study may lead to false conclusions because it tries to determine the likelihood of someone experiencing childhood trauma leading to addiction instead of the likelihood that substance abusers were maltreated in childhood. An example of how this is problematic is if a child experiences abuse at home and his or her household has a step-parent. The stepparent, more of than not, is the abuser. (van Ijzendoorn et al.). This does not mean that stepparents are more inclined to abuse children, but given a specific circumstance (abuse in a household with a step-parent) that the stepparent is the likely culprit. This is why it is better to test reported substance abusers for childhood trauma rather than testing childhood trauma’s likelihood of causing substance abuse.

Stress endured in childhood has been associated with alterations in gray and white matter of the brain (Huang, Gundapuneedi, and Rao.). This study wanted to understand the underlying mechanisms of childhood maltreatment and long-lasting impairments in behavioral, cognitive, and social functioning (Huang et al.). They gathered 32 teens in this study, and 19 of the 32 were considered maltreated as a child or experienced trauma before the age of 10. The 13 other teens were the control group with no reported child trauma or maltreatment.

The teens were followed up every six months over 3.5 years. Five of the experimental group teens and one in the control reported major depression (Huang et al.). Four of the teens in the experimental group and one in the control developed substance abuse disorders (Huang et al.). On top of these follow-up interviews, the researchers used brain-imaging techniques to measure both changes and the integrity of white matter (matter that connects various regions of the brains) in the teens over the course of the study. The imaging scans showed that the maltreated kids had connectivity problems in several areas of the brain (Huang et al.). One of these regions with connectivity problems, the SLF (superior longitudinal fasciculus), is involved in planning behavior (Huang et al.). Another region with problems, the CGH-R
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(right cingulum-hippocampus projection), helps connect the emotional processing regions of the brain with those involved in abstract thought (Huang et al.). The teens that suffered from addiction showed the greatest loss of white matter in the CGH-R region, suggesting that addiction could be linked to one’s inability to regulate emotions more generally. One issue with this study is the small sample size, but the length and depth of the study provided insight on the effects of trauma on the developing brain.

Conclusion

Maybe Batman’s response to his childhood adversity is one of the reasons Batman is considered a great superhero and loved by many. He experienced severe trauma, but it was this trauma that changed his personality and shaped him into Batman. Unfortunately, when a child experiences trauma he or she does not become Batman. Understanding how early life experiences affect personality development, especially with regards to substance abuse, could help determine potential substance abusers. Being able to intervene when these substance vulnerability red flags occur could protect potential abusers from becoming addicts. The data collected in these studies shows that there is a relationship between childhood trauma and substance abuse. The degree at which childhood trauma shapes personality development is not completely understood, and more studies need to be done to determine the role of adverse early life experiences on personality development. Future studies need to have more diversity in terms of demographics to determine if childhood trauma shapes one’s personality across cultural borders. If it does not, it may not be the trauma that is causing personality changes and potential substance addictions.

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Jealousy: a formative emotion in adolescent friendships

Meghan Hatcher

Feelings of jealousy have no doubt existed between people throughout time, though the reasons for that emotion remain difficult for researchers to pinpoint. In his book *A Separate Peace*, author John Knowles creates a world any adolescent can relate to. Gene Forrester is an adolescent boy studying at an all-boys boarding school in New Hampshire. While at school, he befriends a charismatic, gifted athlete named Finny, and the boys quickly become best friends. But Gene harbors feelings of jealousy and rivalry toward Finny due to his athletic skill and popularity with the other students. The boys form an exclusive club at the school and conduct initiation rituals by forcing would-be members to jump from a high tree branch into a river. Gene unintentionally endangers Finny’s life during the initiation by shaking the tree branch, making him fall and shatter his leg. This accident tragically ends Finny’s promising athletic career. After the accident, Gene realizes their friendship has always been marred by negative feelings and jealousy. Jealousy is an aspect of almost all human relationships, particularly those occurring during adolescence, and it is an emotion that can destroy friendships. Jealousy is generally thought to occur when one member of a relationship fears losing the friendship. The specific reason jealousy arises in friendships and how humans respond to it is less obvious, however, though research has been conducted to try to answer this question.
Causes of Jealousy in the Individual

The causes of jealousy within an individual are varied and depend on a variety of factors and personal experiences. In his book *The Psychology of jealousy and Envy*, researcher W. Gerrod Parrot defines jealousy as an emotion that typically arises when someone fears losing a relationship or has lost a significant relationship in the past. Jealousy usually involves at least three parties: the two people engaged in a relationship and the person considered to be a rival to the relationship. These three parties form the emotional triangle that gives rise to jealousy. Mullen (1991) evaluated the factors contributing to jealousy across time and believes that the emotion is an inevitable aspect of love. Mullen argues that over the course of recent centuries, jealousy has culturally evolved from a sign of defending one’s honor during the Renaissance period of the 17th century to a symptom of immaturity in the current century. In the modern era, jealousy has been socially constructed as an emotion grounded in passion rather than rational thought and one that should be suppressed. Mullen asserts that jealousy is thought to give rise to unstable behavior and therefore should not be acted upon. In keeping with Mullen’s assertions about the behavior jealousy can lead to, Gene Forrester’s expression of jealousy in the novel leads to a momentary hostile, violent act that seriously harms Finny.

Research shows that people do not enjoy feeling that someone they love may disappear from their life. Parker, Low, Walker and Gamm (2005) assert that members of a friendship do not invariably welcome outsiders into the relationship, and outsiders can actually become sources of conflict within a friend pair. This unwelcoming aspect of some friendships helps explain why feelings of jealousy can arise when one friend believes an outsider may threaten the quality or survival of a friendship. From a mechanistic, or causal, perspective, perhaps it is this feeling of potential loss that makes people behave in ways that are contrary to actions that maintain healthy, positive friendships.

Parrot (1991) discovered that there is an aspect of some relationships that can make them even more prone to feelings of jealousy. Relationships in which one person is providing formative attention to the other can give rise to jealousy when that attention is threatened by an outside source. Formative attention is attention that helps an individual define his or her own self-concept and validate aspects of his or her personality (Parrot, 1991). Without this kind of attention, an individual experiences immense feelings of loss, insecurity and a loss of identity. For instance, perhaps two friends named Adam and Roy share a ritual of playing tennis together three times a week. If Adam suddenly begins playing tennis with Dave instead of Roy, that lack of formative attention may prove damaging if it severely alters Roy’s concept of how athletic or in shape he is. Perhaps even more basic is the idea that at the heart of every
human being is a “need to be needed,” as Parrot describes. Relationships and encounters with others are what help us define who we are and our value as individuals. When these relationships are threatened, human beings can become jealous and desperately seek to maintain the relationship at any cost. Jealousy is now increasingly seen as an emotional response indicative of personal or interpersonal instability and insecurity (Mullen, 1991).

Parker, Low, Walker and Gamm (2005) found that adolescents who report lower self-worth are more vulnerable to feelings of jealousy in friendships because they are more prone to distrust friends and question their peer’s commitment to the relationship. The study also found that expressions of jealousy could often manifest in subtle aggressive behaviors. Perhaps Gene’s low self-esteem and doubt in Finny’s faithfulness contributed to his display of aggression toward Finny by shaking the branch. Parker and his colleagues’ study emphasized the need for further research into the various behaviors individuals engage in when they experience feelings of jealousy.

Much of the research that evaluates why jealousy initially arises is done through studies of adolescents that involve questionnaires in which a pair of friends is asked to evaluate their feelings of jealousy when presented with a set of 15 scenarios involving their best friend. Participants were asked to rate how jealous a particular scenario makes them feel on a scale of one to five. Multiple researchers acknowledge a gap in the study of actual observed behaviors between friends. Deutz, Lansu and Cillessen (2014) studied the role of friendship jealousy and satisfaction in a group of 9-year-old dyads. Friendship satisfaction was defined within the study as they way adolescents think a friendship is going and how happy they are with it. Researchers analyzed interactions between best friends in a questionnaire format and an observational setting. The observational setting involved a 30-minute play session involving the friend pairs in which they were asked to complete cooperative, competitive and joint problem-solving games together. Deutz and her colleagues predicted that increased feelings of jealousy in a best friendship would be associated with negative perceptions of friendship satisfaction.

Results of their study found that best friendships between two girls experienced heightened concern for the status of the friendship, which led to increased feelings that the relationship may be threatened and increased friendship jealousy (Deutz, et al., 2014). The amount of reported jealousy between two friends can be used as a reliable predictor of conflict, balance of power, disconnectedness and disharmony, as well as a predictor of negative, dominant behaviors (Deutz, et al., 2014). More research is needed to begin answering the question of how friend dyads perceive the role of jealousy within the relationship, either as a positive or negative response. Some research suggests there is a positive aspect to jealousy within marital relationships, that the emo-
tion may prove one spouse deeply cares for the other and the relationship is considered important enough to protect (Guerrero and Eloy, 1992). However, further research is needed to determine if this perception applies to platonic friendships as well.

Development of Jealousy within Adolescent Friendships

Friendships occurring in adolescence have been shown to be an integral aspect of human development. In a review of research on childhood friendships, Thomas J. Berndt analyzed perspective shifts in the last 50 years on the significance of childhood friendships and their impacts on development. In the 1950s, childhood researchers largely ignored childhood friendships, and for decades, researchers didn’t focus at all on negative aspects that can arise in adolescent friendships (Berndt, 2004). Berndt’s review reveals a perspective shift in the way childhood friendships are thought to affect an individual’s development of important attitudes, like attitudes toward schoolwork and socially relevant behaviors such as drug or alcohol use. When applied specifically to adolescent friendships, children have an expectation that friendships will contribute positively to their happiness. However, analysis also reveals that adolescents acknowledge some negative aspects in the quality of their friendships, particularly feelings of rivalry between friends (Berndt, 2004).

Regardless of the negative or positive aspects of adolescent friendships, the level of support perceived by members of the relationship increases from early adolescence to late adolescence (De Goede, Branje and Meeus, 2009). The same study analyzed average levels of perceived power, support and negative interactions in friendships between individuals ages 12 to 20 years old. Researchers defined support as feelings of companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturing, affection, admiration and reliable alliance. Negative interaction is defined as an intensity of conflict and growing antagonism in friendships, and power is defined as the level of dominance an adolescent attributed to their best friend (De Goede et al., 2009). Friendships become more stable, intimate and positive throughout adolescence as the relationship becomes marked by a greater number of positive interactions and fewer negative ones. More positive relationships among friends become increasingly important as adolescents develop their sense of identity (De Goede et al., 2009).

The study by De Goede et al. looked at interactions between best friendships, believing that those friendships are the most intimate in an adolescent’s life, and asked 930 individuals to consider a set of scenarios while thinking of their
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Researchers tested for potential gender differences in the development of friendships and found that for girls, higher levels of initial perceived support were related to lower initial levels of perceived negative interactions. For boys, higher initial feelings of perceived support were related to higher levels of perceived power within friendships. Negative interactions were more common in friendships between boys, possibly due to the competitive nature of boys’ friendships and issues of dominance among friend groups (De Goede et al., 2009).

Gene Forrester’s friendship with Finny seems to illustrate the research finding that states that rivalry and negative interactions often arise in friendships, particularly between adolescent boys. Though Gene and Finny did experience a close bond and multiple positive qualities in their relationship, including providing support to one another and companionship while at school, feelings of jealousy and rivalry nevertheless developed in Gene’s persona and impacted the ways he interacted with Finny. Ultimately, Gene’s development of jealousy toward Finny led him to act out against his friend in a way that threatened Finny’s wellbeing.

Effects of Jealousy on Adolescent Friendships

In a 2008 study, Culotta and Goldstein observed that friendships between young girls reported more jealousy than relationships between boys. Feelings of jealousy between friends lead to increased anti-social behaviors like conflict and destructive communication (Culotta and Goldstein, 2004). Culotta and Goldstein found no gender differences in acts of physical aggression resulting from jealousy. Researchers discovered that jealousy often gives rise to manipulative or aggressive behavior of another person within a friendship. This type of aggression could be seen in two forms: physical aggression, acts that inflicted physical harm on another person, or relational aggression, involving harming someone through manipulation of their social relationships. These negative behaviors increased the likelihood that one member of the friendship will look elsewhere for a relationship, thus setting off a cycle of jealousy and negative interactions between the friends, leading ultimately to the end of the friendship.

Considering once again the ultimately destructive nature of Gene and Finny’s relationship in A Separate Peace, Gene exhibited feelings of jealousy toward Finny that led to negative interactions between the two friends. At the climax of the novel, Finny stands on a tree limb before making a dangerous leap into a river. In a moment of aggression, Gene subtly shakes the branch causing Finny to fall and break his leg. Throughout the novel, Gene confronts the truth
that he shook the branch on purpose, with the intention of harming Finny. This type of antisocial behavior may have arisen out of feelings of jealousy Gene had toward Finny for his popularity with their fellow classmates and his superior athletic ability.

Jealousy is an emotion that exists at some point over the course of most human relationships, especially in friendships that occur during the formative years of adolescence. It is an emotional response that arises when one member of a relationship perceives that the friendship may be threatened by a third-party. From a developmental perspective, it seems that feelings of jealousy and acts of aggression that often result will typically subside as an individual matures into adulthood. Jealousy is often a response to feelings of insecurity occurring when an individual believes his or her sense of self-worth and identity is being jeopardized. These feelings can cause immense damage and negative interactions in the context of a friendship between peers, including outbursts of intense physical aggression as was seen between Gene and Finny in *A Separate Peace*.

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**References**


Part II

Personality Types
A Laughing Matter: Ultimate Explanations for the Evolution of Humor

ERICA MIKRUT

I love inside jokes. I’d love to be a part of one someday.
— Michael Scott, from NBC’s The Office

Self-proclaimed workplace comedian Michael Scott strives for nothing more than to be friends with everyone he meets. He believes the best way to achieve this goal is through humor. Unfortunately, his nontraditional puns usually have the opposite effect, leaving others laughing at his absurdity, rather than being impressed by his wit. Although Michael aims to form a tightknit group dynamic at Dunder Mifflin built around his comedy, he more accurately succeeds in forming a camaraderie among his employees that is founded on their having a fool for a boss. Michael also attempts to connect with others using his sense of humor in his quest to find a mate. He relies on humor to stimulate conversation and charm women that he finds attractive, thinking laughter is the key to their hearts. However, rather than creating a flirtatious rapport, Michael’s humor deters the formation of meaningful interpersonal connections.

Despite unintentionally ostracizing himself from people he so desperately wants to associate with, Michael’s use of jokes demonstrates humor’s capability to create divisions among groups of people—in this case, Dunder Mifflin employees. Humans can use humor as a social assortment device through affiliation, such as when employees are able to relate to one another by sharing
jokes about their boss; through ostracism, like Michael’s inadvertent alienation from his peer group through inappropriate joke-telling; and as a device in sexual selection, such as when Michael presents his sense of humor, or lack thereof, as an attribute to try to impress women. Humorous behavior’s flexibility with regards to its application—as a means of affiliation, ostracism, or sexual selection—suggests that it has several ultimate explanations, or functions that have arisen due to changes over the span of many generations, that have guided its evolution into the social assortment device it operates as in today’s society.

Michael’s ability to adapt humor for specific situations reveals its varying functions. A plausible explanation for humor’s versatility is that it evolved for a specific reason—as a means of social assortment—but humans have been able to modify this channel of communication to prove advantageous in a variety of situations, creating a multifaceted tool. Regardless of its use, humor forms underlying connections between people based on mutual understanding. These connections can result in the inclusion or exclusion of individuals, depending on one’s ability to comprehend the humor. The more knowledgeable an individual is, the more likely one is to understand humor and the more likely one is to use this knowledge as an advantage in social competition. Thus, humor has evolved to become a social adaptation designed to systematically distribute knowledgeable individuals into distinct social groups, with the most humorous individuals placed at the top of the hierarchy with the greatest fitness, or ability to thrive in a given environment.

One ultimate explanation for the evolution of humor is that it exists to maintain group cohesiveness. Knowledge is the key to achieving this unity. Flamson and Barrett (2008) suggest that humor is an encrypted form of communication, where what makes the joke funny is not the punch line itself, but the relationship between the remark and the unstated background information necessary to understand the connotation of the joke. Receivers who share common understanding of the unstated knowledge are able to form meaningful connections with the senders of these humorous messages simply by realizing they are “in” on the joke, and therefore share similar inclinations and attitudes. The sender and receiver do not necessarily need to be fully aware of the implicit knowledge they share to affiliate with one another. Understanding a joke produces a sense of delight in an individual, prompting a positive internal affective signal that notes this similarity in intellect and results in an affirmative evaluation of the opposite party. The difficulty of acting as if one understands a joke, when in reality one does not, makes the subsequent effect of humor—laughter—an honest signal. For example, Michael often joins in while his employees are laughing just to feel included, but the group can easily tell that he has no clue what they are laughing about. Humor acts as a test of similarity in knowledge by judging recipients’ reactions to a joke,
and Michael’s lack of both knowledge and honest laughter prohibit his affiliation with the group. However, passing this “test” encourages affiliation with likeminded individuals, which is strengthened by repeated humorous interactions to create social kinship among groups.

Provine and Fischer (1989) argue that laughter is thirty-times more likely to be facilitated whilst in a social context. The study followed 28 subjects, males and females from an introductory psychology class, who were asked to keep a weeklong log of their laughing episodes. Each time a laughing episode occurred, the subjects were asked to record the time, the number of episodes, the activities being performed during the episodes, as well as the episode’s nature (e.g., “A” for alone, “A—M” for alone with a media stimulus, “S” for socially, or “S—M” for socially with a media stimulus). Laughter rarely occurred outside of social or media-stimulated situations. Social laughter was also found to be five times more likely to occur than solitary laughter. Both of these research insights suggest that laughter is predominantly a social signal and that the benefits experienced as a result of affiliative humor are heavily reliant on the presence of others.

There are also several beneficial proximate results that affiliative humor and laughter trigger in accord with group formation. Proximate results are changes that can be seen or experienced within an individual’s lifetime. Alexander (1986) states that laughter is strongly linked to positive emotional and physiological effects within individuals; however, these effects are only beneficial when they arise in social contexts. Being able to evoke laughter in others allows for positive consequences, such as a boost in confidence or the ability to cope with unusual situations, and ties the physiological effects of humorous experiences with the social setting in which they were stimulated. Alexander further argues that group-unifying humor produces positive feelings because the harmony attained promotes cooperation, allowing groups to be more successful in instances of social competition and achieve a higher level of overall fitness. Another proximate function of affiliative humor is the alleviation of stress. One is able to feel in control of a stressor, whether it is internal or external, by focusing humor on the ironic aspects of the stressor and minimizing its negative impact. By verbally sharing this relation between unfavorable circumstances and irony or amusement, humans use humor to associate with others who have felt the same way or have shared similar experiences (Metzger 2014). Humans can also use humor as a relational technique through the management of new environmental factors, providing them the ability to strategically react to changes in their surroundings rather than experiencing the costs of failing to adapt (Miller 2000). These positive physiological and social proximate effects experienced from humorous interactions, which promote social bonding behaviors to increase both an individual’s fitness and a group’s efficiency in social competition, reinforce the notion that humor has
evolved as an inherent social assortment behavior through affiliation.

Another ultimate explanation for the evolution of humor is that it is a social assortment tool that exists to exclude individuals from groups. While understanding the implied meaning behind jokes draws likeminded people together, the lack of understanding can have the opposite effect and isolate an individual. “Others” who do not possess the mutual necessary knowledge suffer a cost of being unable to experience the proximate benefits that result from affiliative humor. The understanding of the unstated knowledge of a joke creates an exclusivity defined by those who get the joke and those who do not. In this way, jokes are evidently a deliberately oblique form of communication, functioning to discern members of the group from outsiders (Flamson and Barrett 2008). The fitness of out-group members decreases because their separation from the group presents an obvious hindrance in their ability to reproduce with any member of that group, while the fitness of in-group members increases. Thus, humor demonstrates the extremely knowledge-dependent nature of humans and the positive correlation between levels of knowledge and fitness within social competition contexts.

When humor is used to intentionally ostracize an individual, it can be described as “hostile wit” (Alexander 1986). Gervais and Wilson (2005) explain that these jokes are meant to be antagonistic, and the laughter that accompanies them is volitional, as opposed to the involuntary, stimulus-driven laughter that is linked to positive emotional and physiological effects. The forced laughter of the in-group members alienates the out-group members and is intended to socially sort individuals by lowering the status of out-group members and solidifying the elevated status shared among in-group members (Alexander 1986). For example, Michael often makes cruel jokes to cause Toby, an employee Michael openly dislikes, to feel excluded. In the episode “Goodbye, Toby,” Michael intentionally ostracizes Toby by singing a parody of “Goodbye Stranger” by Supertramp as a sarcastic heartfelt gesture to mark Toby’s departure from the company. Alexander (1986) hypothesizes that hostile wit is used with the intent to affect the victim’s reproductive abilities negatively by restricting his or her access to significant resources provided by an elevated perceived status that results from group membership. Affiliative humor allows others to also attain this superior status by associating with those who are regarded as funny, while isolation humor decreases an individual’s perceived status when they are distanced from the “comedians.” Hostile wit reiterates the notion that status level is dependent on possessing the key knowledge necessary to understand a joke. A low level of knowledge and, consequently, lowered social status make it more difficult for an individual to be effective in social competition. One’s social status is therefore an integral part of their fitness because of its implications regarding between-group relations and reproductive success. The proximate results of status adjustment
accomplished using isolation humor prove to be beneficial to the fitness of humorous, knowledgeable individuals, suggesting ostracism as yet another fundamental explanation of humor’s evolution into a multifunctional social assortment mechanism.

Humor’s existence can also be fundamentally explained as an adaptation that evolved within humans to aid in sexual selection. Whether an affiliative or an isolation approach to humor is used, it is hypothesized that a positive correlation exists between humor, intelligence and mating success (Camargo et al. 2013). According to Miller’s (2000) positive manifold theory, mental capabilities, such as humor, have evolved to communicate one’s genetic fitness to potential mates and relate directly to one’s reproductive success. In a study of 400 students from the University of New Mexico, Greengross and Miller (2011) found that a good sense of humor is sexually attractive to both males and females because it is an indication of underlying genetic fitness and desirable traits in a mate, such as intelligence, mental health and creative unpredictability. This is important because general intelligence is one of the most sought-after traits by both sexes and extremely hereditary. Humor, with regards to sexual selection, is referred to as an ornamental trait because it increases an individual’s likelihood to attract mates by inferring positive genetics rather than directly providing an individual with survival advantages. Humor acts very much like a peacock’s tail, another ornamental trait, in that its purpose is to increase fitness by generating more procreative opportunities, but not to necessarily increase the individual’s likelihood for survival (Li et al. 2009). Through joke telling, an individual is communicating to potential mates that their offspring would inherit the socially beneficial traits and strategic behaviors associated with humor (Miller 2000). The appeal of potential mates who possess these genes is supported by studies that have found women favor men who make them laugh more (Provine 2004). For example, Michael often uses “That’s What She Said” jokes in the presence of his longtime love interest Jan. Jan, annoyed and less than amused with his vulgar comedy, shows Michael disdain by rolling her eyes and ignoring him, decreasing Michael’s fitness in terms of reproductive probability in the process. Highly humorous individuals, particularly males, indicate individuals who are more likely to find a mate as opposed to individuals with a poor sense of humor, like Michael (Greengross and Miller 2011).

In addition to revealing attractive underlying traits, humans use humor as an indication of compatibility when mate-seeking. Again, when a sender tells a joke and the receiver laughs, this suggests that the pair has a shared understanding, creating an unspoken cognitive connection. These connections become useful during sexual selection because humor works as an assortment device in the sense that it surveys levels of intellect in a joker’s surroundings and uncovers the most well-suited matches to his or her own mind (Flamson
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and Barrett 2008). The discovered mutual understanding signals to the joker that the receiver has similar knowledge and interests, and would likely be a compatible match. For example, Michael realizes his coworker Holly would be a well-matched mate when she laughs at and reciprocates his Yoda-imitation jokes. Here, humor is again acting as a fitness indicator, suggesting to potential mates the genetic quality and level of intellect the owner possesses (Miller 2008). Humans discovered humor’s capability to reveal who likeminded individuals are and began using jokes as a tool to weed out incompatible prospective mates, increasing reproductive probability by only focusing efforts on promising procreative opportunities (Flamson and Barrett 2008).

Within the realm of sexual selection, humor can be used as a method to identify compatible mates through a test of intellect or as a demonstration of mental capability, an advantageous fitness attribute, to attract potential mates. In both instances, humans use humor as a means to socially sort others in a way that increases the probability of their reproductive success, making sexual selection another possible ultimate explanation for the evolution of humor.

It is evident that humorous individuals possess an advantage over those who do not evoke laughter in others. Humor increases both individuals’ and groups’ wellbeing and chance for reproductive success through positive between-group interactions. Humor can be used as a means of affiliation, isolation or an aid sexual selection, but it maintains the consistent function of placing individuals in the social hierarchy based on knowledge level and status competition. Thus, humor has evolved to serve its ultimate function as a social assortment device. It enables humans to sort the fit, the humorous and the knowledgeable, from the ill-adapted, and to achieve optimum fitness by associating with likeminded individuals. In the words of fearless comedic leader Michael Scott, “Comedy’s very much alive,” and, under closer inspection, it is doing a lot more than provoking a few laughs.

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References


Achievement Levels

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In Parks and Rec, a popular TV show on NBC, viewers are introduced to a variety of characters with differing skills sets and passions. Two of these characters are Leslie Knope and April Ludgate. Leslie Knope is a self motivated and high achieving human who’s claim to fame in the office is her never ending need for success. Fellow employees would say that Leslie works too hard too willingly in order to accomplish what she does. April on the other hand is an apathetic intern who regularly naps at her desk and avoids all work at all times. Although April’s character in this show is revered she is what society would consider an underachiever. The question I would like to answer is how two seemingly similar individuals—women in the workforce—come to have such differing work ethics?

For the sake of this paper I would like to define the terms of underachiever and overachiever as the purposeful act of not reaching/overly reaching the standard of achievement set by society. As active humans we face these two generalizations of people on a daily basis—possibly at work, in school, or just while running errands. Many of us will find ourselves in the middle of the two extremes wondering how they came to be. I myself have wondered what affects achievement levels and work ethic; in a recent Huffington Post article parents overwhelmingly said that they not only felt—but had been told—that work ethic is built during childhood through parental influence. However, many news articles from the national post, NBC, and Psychology Today have been broadcasting research that says even siblings who grow up together in similar environments not only differing personalities but also differences work ethics. With this being said are the concepts of over and underachievers too subjective? How does society define the standard of work that is required to be met before someone becomes one or the other? Is there an actual way to measure the purposeful act of not achieving what is expected or is this just
our way of defining individuals so we can place them in ‘boxes’ that are easy to understand? As stated earlier the answer for differing work ethics is a topic that is still being studied and strong links to genetics may change the way our society views the concepts of work ethic and motivation.

Dr. Richmond and Dr. Cinns were curious about finding a “work-a-holic” gene that correlates with high work ethic and overachievement after a study in rats indicated that depleting dopamine levels led to rats working less willingly in order to receive food. This led to Dr. Richmond and Dr. Cinns to conduct a study on rhesus monkeys in which they found that the suppression of certain genes temporarily caused a boost in ‘work’ efficiency and caused the monkeys to be more focused. The gene they found to be most successful was the gene involved in reward learning. The scientists injected the monkeys with a piece of DNA known as the “anti-sense expression vector” into a part of the brain known as the rhinal cortex. The vector suppressed the dopamine reward response gene for several weeks, reducing the ability of the rhinal cortex to detect the dopamine being released (Richmond). In turn as the monkeys successfully completed tasks they never understood the meaning of the reward they were potentially edging towards. Because of this lack of understanding their interest in the tasks never waned and ‘procrastination’ never set in. Although this research hasn’t led to “any gene-suppressing injections for chatty office workers or inattentive students” or discoveries of a “magic pill” that could turn an underachiever permanently into an overachiever it has led to important discoveries in biomedicine for those with mental disabilities that are debilitating for work ethic and productivity such as OCD or Depression.

The research done on rhesus monkeys prompted several other studies conducted at Vanderbilt that observed decision-making and the role of dopamine in humans in regards to motivation. The first study was known as the Effort Expenditure for Rewards Task model and focused on differences within neuronal responses to dopamine within individuals with or without mental instabilities. The second study more so focused on all individuals and assessed the extent to which dopamine plays a role in the reward response in regards to the protection of earnings. Both studies found that there was a correlation between the dopamine reward system and the amygdala, which controls emotion—and more specifically fear. The studies came to the conclusion that emotions played a key role in the way an individual responded to a reward based stimuli. This was further developed in another study completed at Vanderbilt published by the Journal of Neuroscience which used brain mapping techniques to find that ‘go-getters’ who worked for rewards have higher releases of dopamine in the areas of the brain known as the striatum and ventromedial prefrontal cortex—the main areas for emotion regulation and reward prediction (Bialleck). On the other hand ‘slackers’ had a higher release of dopamine in another area of the brain known as the anterior...
insula, which plays a role in emotions and risk perception. This finding suggests that dopamine that gets released into the insula can be associated with underachievement due to the emotional response that is stimulated because of the area in which dopamine is released. Although the answer is not entirely clear these studies show a linkage between the role in which Dopamine levels in different areas effects the learning of effort related behavior and potentially between differences in motivation levels throughout the lifespan as dictated by epigenetics.

Epigenetic linkage is a concept in biological sciences that connects the two concepts of nature versus nurture. With epigenetics it is becoming more and more clear that genes and the environment are constantly in play with one another quite possibly to the extent that the environment may actually be able to turn genes ‘on’ and ‘off’ (Brendtro). The earlier studies of epigenetics focused on the caregiving aspects of parents and how that in turn creates certain ‘types’ of offspring. Michael Meaney of McGill University found that a nurturing environment as well as those with moderate stress and challenges led to more resilient and emotionally stable offspring. Environments that have neglect and stress led to overly anxious and emotionally impulsive offspring. Overall the study further developed the concept that behavior is a function of a person within that specific environment. Later studies delved further into studying the neuroplasticity of the brain—looking at how new experiences may create new changes in gene expression. Paul McHugh of John Hopkins University focused his studies on motivation and learning styles. In his research he found three types of brain functioning models: Bottoms Up in which brains are neurologically different from the ‘norm’ such as individuals with Autism. There were also Top Down brains that were individuals who coped less strategically compared to the ‘norm’ due to challenging life circumstances. Lastly there were Temperament brains that resulted from a mismatch between brain and development. These three types of brain developments challenged the idea of ‘underachievement’ being an actual brain disorder and instead potentially just a variation in temperament (Brendtro). Studies that could connect the dopamine findings of the Vanderbilt study with these epigenetic concepts may help narrow down the scope of how someone becomes an underachiever or an overachiever. Potentially deciphering the difference between a learned behavior and a predisposed behavior in regards to motivation and achievement.

So does one ‘learn’ to become an overachiever versus an underachiever? Dr. Jill Smits gives us an overview on the development of overachievers in her article “The Field Guide to the Overachiever.” She states that overachievers have a fear of failure and a measured self worth that is based on success. Overachievers tend to seek out more of themselves and more out of others due to a fear of judgment that seemingly is developed from childhood. Children who
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have had very active childhoods and were rewarded by the level of success they had within multiple commitments transitioned into the ‘overachievers’ we later see as adults. Presumably if the individual follows the “go-getter” dopamine pattern of the Vanderbilt study then this reward-to-work mentality leads to a continuous cycle of overachievement and dedication. Dr. Smit’s explanation can be reflected in Leslie’s character. Many episodes showcase her high involvement and reward-motivated drive as a child. Her need of approval is also demonstrated especially as it relates to her relationship with her mother.

On the other hand April finds no need for peer or parental approval. As stated earlier underachievers are individuals who do not reach the standard goal as set by society. In the study “Underachievement Syndrome: A Psychological Defense Pattern” Dr. Sylvia Rimm studies the link of underachievement as a psychological defense pattern associated with self worth. Underachievers have a predisposed sense of self-defeat which could be linked to the Vanderbilt study as an emotional response to prevent failure from happening by not starting to even try. This further extends to a personality type that impacts identity, esteem, and sometimes-mental health. In the clinical report “Underachievement in Exceptionally Gifted Adolescents: A Psychiatrist View” Dr. Grobman studies groups of 14-15 year olds listed as “underachievers” and their developmental history as well as their current lifestyle state. The report found that their pasts consisted of several environmental mismatches such as inadequate parents, social immaturity, childhood neglect, misperceived strengths, or over controlling parents. This led to self-doubt and anxiety with a lot of the patients reporting a need for control in all aspects of their lives. These circumstances later played out as creating their own rules, which seemingly was perceived as underachievement. These individuals were less likely to preform expectations that were set out by others and more like to only preform those that they decided on their own.

With all of this being said the concept of over and underachievement is still very subjective; some may say that all of the categorizations that have been created are human instincts requiring a label that neatly organizes everyone into a ‘box’. Doctors David Albert and Joyce Reed would agree to this statement and study what they call the ‘myth of under and over achievement’ as merely a construct of our society—and in fact—a construct that may be created by the westernized practice of constant change. In their critical discussion they discuss the notion of the need for constant improvement (which in some cases is beneficial) as it pushes our self-limited capabilities—hinting at the idea that maybe we as humans often have poor judgment on our own capabilities. Under the right circumstances everyone can find themselves doing more than they thought capable of. In this sense we do not ‘overachieve’ but instead we merely make more of our capabilities and limit our self-limitation. As time
Achievement

Poonam Sheevam

goes on this cycle continues itself and expectations arise; unfortunately others begin to set that level of achievement for us and reaching it becomes stressful perhaps even tiresome.

This success can invite pressures that are unwelcome, scary, and invasive—and soon the ‘overachiever’ retreats not wanting the unappreciated attention or a distraction from a goal that was not self-set. As Dr. Albert states “have you ever been in a group of people where you chose not to function at your highest level because you did not want to stick out in the crowd” (52 Albert). Would this be something our society considers underachievement as it does fit underneath the previously stated definition. If this is the case then performance would just be something that we do to gain approval in order to compare ourselves to the achievements of others. In Dr. Reeds words “overachievement and underachievement are not two sides of the same coin, but instead the same side of a counterfeit one” (51 Albert).

The trauma that individuals face in their pasts directly affects motivation in multiple ways. In our society motivation is the key to active performance and a lack of motivation can result in subpar achievement. It can come and go as the course of our lives continue to ebb and flow through different experiences. Low performance is often measured by the inability to step outside of our comfort zones; the memories of failure and the fear of failure result in a psychological response telling individuals to ‘play it safe’. Instead of the concept of ‘underachievers’ and ‘overachievers’ we instead have a group of conditions—motivation, perseverance, trauma, reaction, courage, etcetera—which change along a spectrum that directly impact an individuals ability to preform as well as what another individual (or group of individuals) expects. By accepting this theory there is not a group that is labeled ‘overachievers’ or ‘underachievers’. Instead we have individuals working more closely or further away from this hypothetical performance level and the dichotomy between ‘over’ and ‘underachievers’ becomes mute.

Poonam Sheevam was born a very quiet yet content child. She brought joy to her parents not only because she was a delight but also because she trained with little efforts on various basics, such as potty training—Poonam’s parent’s describe her as a self learner and a self starter. Poonam has three younger siblings and would like to think she has served as a role model of some sort to them. Throughout her life Poonam was dedicated to academics and accomplishments. She was always discipline with her academics and learned the skill of balancing her time at a young age as she balances multiple extra circulars such as dance, figure skating, cross country and work along with the rigid curriculum of a college preparatory school.

She is now a senior studying health sciences with an anthropology minor at the University of Missouri-Columbia. But Poonam isn’t just a student
Achievement

Poonam Sheevam

at Mizzou; she’s so much more than that. As a member of many campus organizations, such as Tour Team, Circle of Sisterhood, Alpha Chi Omega, PHA Executive Board, Dance Marathon, and ASB, it’s clear that Poonam is an involved, ambitious woman. She’s brilliant, outspoken, and has passion that will take her to the ends of the earth someday. She is a leader and an empowered woman, and is never afraid to do the right thing, while it may be unpopular. She is also a daughter, a sister, a dear friend, a lover of wine, and a dark chocolate fanatic. She excels at all things except singing along to songs on the radio because she can’t remember the words for the life of her. According to her lifelong friend and sorority sister Mary, Poonam is “funny and can easily make you laugh. She is a crazy whirlwind of intelligence, ambition, passion, love, and fun, and having her as a friend is a very cherished privilege.” Poonam blushes at the thought of her friend saying such nice things as it makes her slightly uncomfortable, but there it is—the ode of Poonam.

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Perfectionism: Personality or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder? The Complications of Defining the Undefinable

Colleen Kennedy

In the shared loft in L.A. shown in the television comedy New Girl, a family of four roommates coexist peacefully, sharing one bathroom, one living room, and one kitchen. Four very different personalities merge to create the beloved tight-knit atmosphere in the loft, but only ONE personality enforces cleanliness and order. Schmidt, one high-energy “neat freak,” maintains bathroom organization and kitchen cleanliness. His perfectionist passions extend to personal hygiene, self-presentation, and overall apartment upkeep. Schmidt represents the classic stereotype of “OCD clean.” He exacts perfection both in his appearance and surroundings. The question is, where do these spic-and-span tendencies stem from? Do personality traits determine cleaning differences in neat-freaks and slobs, or does Schmidt’s “OCD clean” lifestyle result from genetic disorder? The distinction between personality and disorder blurs as perfectionism and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) closely correlate. Neat-freak tendencies including organization, repeated washing, and vigorous cleaning appear frequently as symptoms in OCD individuals. Does Schmidt “qualify” as an obsessive compulsive individual, or does his perfectionism stem from personality and upbringing? The question, alas, cannot always be accurately answered. Gaining a multidimensional view of obsessive compulsive disorder and defining the differences between disorder and personality serves to improve general understanding and treatment strategies.
for obsessive compulsive individuals. HOWEVER, a blurred and overlapping spectrum of perfectionist severity makes it impossible to entirely separate personality and disorder.

Further complicating any attempt at differentiating disorder from personality, the term “perfectionism” takes on differing meanings and implications depending on the context. In an attempt to create a more clarified spectrum of severity, “personality perfectionism” and “OCD perfectionism” will represent the two ends of the spectrum of cleanliness between personality and disorder tendencies, respectively. Before exploring the different dimensions of obsessive compulsive disorder, the characteristics of OCD exemplified in the affected individual should be understood. Obsessive compulsive disorder is defined as a disorder of the brain and behavior involving obsessions and compulsions, causing severe anxiety and interrupting daily life of an individual. Although neat-freak tendencies often overlap in personality and in the disorder, the drive behind the tendencies helps provide a spectrum of severity important for treatment and understanding.

First off, obsessive compulsive individuals experience a repeating series of behaviors that occur in two connected stages. Starting the connected stages, the obsession invades the mind of the individual. Any unwarranted/uncontrolled thoughts, sensations, feelings, or desires represent the obsessions that affect the individual’s mental state. The obsession then drives the compulsion, the action or modification in behavior resulting from the unwanted and uncontrollable mental state (NIH and Taberner). Individuals with OCD suffer from the inability to control or repress their particular obsessions and the resulting repercussions. In Schmidt’s case for instance, feeling disturbed by dirty dishes or clutter to a point where the feelings disrupt “normal activity” would be an example of obsessive interference. An OCD individual suffers from the disturbances unless he or she “fixes” the situation, thereby completing the compulsion. When Jess, the optimistic and helpful-to-a-fault roommate, attempts to change Schmidt’s neat-freak ways, the entire ecosystem of the apartment succumbs to chaos. Schmidt’s unavoidable perfectionist tendencies impact both the loft and its inhabitants. If Schmidt represented the “typical” obsessive compulsive individual, he would be personally unable to resist cleaning after experiencing the obsession. The defining line between personality and disorder is impossible to define for the population at large. The tight correlation between the two demonstrates the importance of understanding the multiple dimensions of the disorder. When objectively viewed, Schmidt’s “symptoms” could be the result of OCD or a perfectionist personality.

One important nuance to note in the “spectrum of severity” is that both personality perfectionists and disorder-driven perfectionists desire the cleanliness. The differentiation lies in the extent to which an individual will priori-
tize organization and cleanliness. For instance, an obsessive compulsive individu- 
al would pass up any other opportunity in order to complete the compul- 
sion. Perfection is priority. In contrast, a “normal” perfectionist might choose 
spending time with friends over immediately taking care of dirty dishes. The 
stimuli of clutter and disorder provoke a desire to clean/organize in both 
groups — the difference lies in the impact of the stimuli on the individual’s 
mental state. OCD demands immediate action, whereas personality perfec-
tionism lends more leeway in the decision making process. That being said, 
diagnosis of OCD depends on the appearance of both obsessive thoughts and 
the “follow-through” compulsive actions. Both obsessions and compulsions 
must invade multiple facets of an individual’s life. Obsessive compulsive dis-
order impede more than one “sector.” For instance, associated symptoms 
of cleanliness and order would need to dominate both Schmidt’s social in-
teraction at work and home. His perfectionist passions would outrank social 
interaction and other parts of his daily life. (NIH) (Taberner)

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, obsessive compulsive 
disorder affects approximately 2.2 million adults in the United States. Typi-
ically the disorder emerges between childhood and early adulthood — most 
individuals with the disorder receive a diagnosis by age 19. Although a wide 
and diverse variety of OCD symptoms exist, the symptoms of cleaning, order-
ing, checking, and washing appear frequently in affected individuals and ex-
hibit multiple similarities to personality perfectionism (NIH). Commonly used 
terms such as “OCD clean” or “perfectionist” portray the unavoidable overlap 
of cleanliness resulting from obsessive compulsive behaviors and “normal” 
neatness. Even the term “obsessive” creates additional overlap and discrep-
ancy between personality and disorder. Obsessive gets thrown around in con-
versation much like “neat-freak” and “perfectionist.” An individual can “ob-
sess” over his or her room organization without truly experiencing the clinical 
definition of an obsession in which a stimuli, such as clutter, causes unwar-
ranted feelings or thoughts. Sayings such as “obsessing over the details” or 
describing an interest or passion as an obsession cause the lines between OCD 
obsessions and “normal” obsessions to blur. Similar to the varying degrees of 
perfectionism, varying levels of obsession exist in society with both varied 
and overlapping meanings. The unclear meaning behind terms like obses-
sive and perfectionism further develop the interwoven relationship between 
personality traits and disorder.

A wide spectrum, from slob to neat-freak, exists classifying varying levels 
of neatness standards in the population. As far as personality differences 
go, cleanliness and organization seem to be common nature in some, and 
foreign, unappealing concepts in others. That being said, the differences be-
tween neat-freaks and obsessive compulsive perfectionists are not arbitrary, 
but the differences lie more in the severity of the tendencies. An important
distinction between an individual with “personality perfectionism” versus an individual with OCD perfectionism exists in their mental and emotional processes. For instance, an obsessive compulsive individual receives relief from his or her anxious mental state after performing the compulsion of cleaning or ordering (NIH). The individual does not necessarily enjoy the activity, but rather craves the mental relief the activity entails. A “neat-freak” relishes in the cleanliness of his or her surroundings and performs the tidying tasks in return for the “ultimate reward” of a pristine environment. Mental relief does not drive the individual with personality perfectionism. Additionally, the individual’s routine is NOT impeded with obsessive thoughts until the cleaning is completed. Only the obsessive compulsive individual experiences a series of connected and inter-dependent behaviors leading to the resulting cleanliness (NIH). Overall, although many correlations exist, neat-freak behaviors do not categorize individuals as obsessive compulsive, but neat-freak behaviors can function as symptoms of OCD. No definite cut-off exists between personality and disorder as far as symptoms are concerned; however, better understanding the influence of OCD on the individual’s mental process aids in determining the necessity of treatment. An individual who experiences heightened stress and anxiety resulting from inescapable perfectionist tendencies could need professional assistance, whereas a so-called “perfectionist” doesn’t experience distress. (NIH) (Taberner)

Better understanding the symptoms and specific characteristics of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder also shows the overlap and similarities between personality perfectionism and disorder perfectionism. OCD encompasses a diverse spectrum of symptoms that range from emotions to motor behaviors. Currently the Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale groups and measures the severity of symptoms associated with the disorder. Clinician-rated, the scale remedies discrepancies in determining severity of symptoms by using a specific ten-item symptom list with each item rated from 0–4 (Goodman). In the study “Symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder,” researchers examined the symptom categories currently used to organize the varying types of obsessions and compulsions in the Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale symptom list in two groups of patients.

The results of the study stressed the idea of OCD as multidimensional and not distinctly defined by set obsessions and compulsions. Of the symptoms examined, four factors including obsessions and checking, symmetry and ordering, cleanliness and washing, and hoarding, arose consistently in each data set (Leckman). Each of these symptoms stressed in the study more closely correlated with one or more of the compulsion categories. The results portray that obsessions and compulsions are not arbitrary symptoms and therefore cannot be entirely separated. In theory, Schmidt’s need for organization would likely be followed by “combined compulsions of ordering and arranging, counting
compulsions, and repeating rituals with obsessions of symmetry” (Leckman). In accordance with the study, neat-freak tendencies frequently result in cleaning compulsions. The connection between certain obsessions and compulsions strengthens the perception of OCD symptoms as multidimensional and complex. The associations of the four factors found in the study could potentially help with future treatment response when determining how to manage obsessive compulsive symptoms. (Leckman)

To look more specifically at the association between perfectionism and the disorder, Martinelli’s study, “Perfectionism dimensions as predictors of symptom dimensions of obsessive-compulsive disorder,” constructed three categories for considering the relationship between OCD and perfectionism. These categories include: OCD dimensions and overall perfectionism, OCD severity and various dimensions of perfectionism, and finally, associations between OCD phenotypes and perfectionism dimensions. The goal to understand the relationship between perfectionist tendencies and OCD symptoms drove deeper investigation into the unique associations. The study focused on the dimensions of perfectionism such as “concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, personal standards, parental criticism, parental expectations, and organization” in correlation to the presence of OCD symptoms such as washing, ordering, and obsessing (Martinelli).

According to Martinelli’s research, various theories linked obsessive compulsive disorder and perfectionism since the early 1900s with the notion that perfectionism plays a central role in the development of the disorder. Early theorists suggested that perfectionism resulted in the need to do everything just right — to a point where perfection reached the level of obsession. Since that early theory, the theories ranged from categorizing perfectionism as a characteristic of the disorder, to the idea that perfectionism contributes to OCD tendencies, to perfectionism as a direct cause of the disorder (Martinelli; Frost et al., 2002). The wide range of theories supports the undefinable relationship between perfectionism and OCD. Like many mental illnesses, OCD is complex, multidimensional, and altogether lacking one specific set “requirement” of precursors, symptoms, and severity.

Martinelli divided the study into categories testing the varying theories of the relationship between perfectionism and OCD. The first category in the study, focusing on the general association between perfectionism and OCD symptom type, demonstrated that higher perfectionism beliefs appeared in non-clinical obsessive compulsive individuals with greater washing, checking, and ordering symptoms. This suggests that the presence of “personality perfectionism” influences, or at least correlates with, the type of OCD symptoms affecting an individual (Martinelli). In Schmidt’s case, his perfectionist tendencies could influence his cleaning and organizing behaviors. Schmidt’s
controlled approach to cooking with his girlfriend Cici gives an example of perfectionism influencing potential OCD behaviors. He nearly succumbs to hyperventilation when Cici double-dips and refuses to wash her hands before chopping up vegetables. Disorder and lack of sterility wreak emotional distress on Schmidt. (Matinelli)

The second category looked specifically at the severity of obsessive compulsive symptoms in relation to perfectionism dimensions. These “dimensions” represent the different expressions of perfectionist tendencies. The research used six subsets of perfectionism to look at the effects on OCD severity. Although the source does not include many details on the direct OCD relation, the results are considered important for future treatment plans for obsessive compulsive individuals. “These results further suggest the need for research on the role of specific perfectionism dimensions to increase understanding of OCD etiology and address implications for OCD treatment” (Martinelli). In short, higher levels of perfectionism correlated with worse treatment outcomes in OCD patients. The patients showing high perfectionist tendencies demonstrated more difficulty in overcoming their compulsions. (Martinelli: Chik, Whittal, and O’Neill 2008).

The final category in the study addressed the associations between OCD phenotypes and different dimensions of perfectionism. The study determined that certain types of perfectionism link to specific obsessive compulsive behaviors. For instance, perfectionist anxiety correlated with checking symptoms in the study. Perfectionism also linked to the symptom of ordering. Overall, the research results portrayed the associations between perfectionism and OCD as connected and highly interdependent. Obsessive compulsive participants with perfectionist tendencies frequently displayed symptoms similar to perfectionism behaviors.

The results of Martinelli’s study support the idea that personality perfectionism and disorder perfectionism intertwine to create a complicated spectrum. The results portray the difficulty of determining the directional impact of perfectionism on OCD. Do perfectionists have a higher risk for developing the disorder due to preexisting personality similarities? Or perhaps OCD causes symptoms of perfectionism to manifest in individuals. The complexity of the relationship between perfectionism and OCD further complicates any attempt to separate personality and disorder (Martinelli). The current study of perfectionism and the disorder gives confirmation of the unique and complex connections between OCD and perfectionism dimensions — the results support movement toward greater phenotypic specificity of symptoms, exploration of different types of symptoms in their relation to the disorder. (Martinelli).

Although perfectionism doesn’t necessarily categorize an individual as obsessive compulsive, strong associations portray the importance of understanding
the connections for future improvement of treatment and understanding. Perfectionism could exist as a risk-factor or influence symptoms and severity in individuals with OCD. Or perhaps, perfectionism functions as an entirely independent personality trait in other individuals. In New Girl, Schmidt could classify as an obsessive compulsive adult or simply a high-anxiety neat-freak. The true diagnosis escapes confirmation without complete understanding of the mental state of Schmidt as he vigorously accomplishes self and apartment cleanliness. Although society greatly strives to separate and categorize, personality perfectionism and disorder perfectionism escape complete differentiation. The two groups overlap, and in many cases, one group influences the severity or persistence of the other. It is better to look at perfectionism and OCD in the context of a spectrum of severity.

Colleen Kennedy currently enjoys her studies at Mizzou as a Biology and Spanish double major. With that combination she hopes to eventually work for a time in a foreign country and balance out all of the science classes with language in the meantime. She is the new Vice Master Alchemist in the national chemistry fraternity Alpha Chi Sigma (even though chemistry is her least favorite subject of all time). She participates in Mizzou’s club running team, and is a slave to her “healthy” addictions to exercise and caffeine. Colleen loves spending time outdoors and having an active lifestyle. Her interest in the topic of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder stem partly from past summers in medical research.

References


Genius, Billionaire, Playboy, Philanthropist: Why Someone Who Seems To Have It All Might Still Have Depression

Carole Trickey

Though fictional, Tony Stark does not fit the role model superhero mold and is incredibly, outwardly self-confident to a fault. He is often described, among other things, as a stubborn, arrogant, narcissistic, argumentative, irresponsible, sarcastic, dominant, womanizing, self-destructive, genius who “doesn’t play well with others.” Given that Tony is found somewhere between the life of the party and a know-it-all, does it make sense that people should think that Tony is suffering from a mental illness? Not necessarily at first glance. However, ultimately, no matter how big his party or how much “light” he tries to make out of a difficult situation, his true feelings about himself and others do show through.

Tony deals with a plethora of challenging situations and complicated feelings such as his poor self-image, survivor’s guilt over losing his friend and his complicated feelings toward his father. He uses coping mechanisms such as emotional avoidance, self-deprecating humor, self-inflicted isolation and alcoholism. Tony has everything people seem to want from life: fortune, fame and good looks. People like to believe that this type of privilege shields you from anything. How can someone who has everything have to be depressed? And why? The short answer is that depression is undiscriminating and often has unclear or mixed origins because people react differently to different situations.
Part One: Defining Depression

We create our own demons.
— Tony Stark

Defining what depression is is imperative to explaining why even the most successful people can have it. Depression, as a mental illness, is more complicated to identify than, say, a broken arm. You might see a friend of yours with a cast on their arm, indicating that they broke or sprained their arm or wrist. Your friend’s doctor might have x-ray machines to identify why your friend’s arm hurts or why it’s bent at a funny angle. When diagnosing mental illness, it’s neither as easy to pick out nor as easy to fix. What may add up for one person being depressed might be different for another.

This is different, however, from depression as a mood. Though a depressed mood or “low mood” may be one of the symptoms of depression as a diagnosis, depression as a diagnosis has many more elements to it.

According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-IV), the criteria for depression is more complicated than just checking off boxes or running a test. It includes (but is not limited to) depressed mood or irritability, decreased interest or pleasure, significant weight change or change in appetite, change in sleep, change in activity, fatigue or loss of energy, guilt or worthlessness, poor concentration and thoughts of death or suicide on a daily basis (DSM-IV 356). For a proper diagnosis, at least five of these nine symptoms must be present nearly every day, last more than two weeks and somehow disturbs the person’s social, occupational or educational life.

In a depressive episode, however, criteria is more specific. This covers six different “functional domains” or areas in a person’s life that are most indicative of a depressive episode. This ranges from different types of relationships to work or school to stress levels while the amount of impairment ranges from moderate to severe (DSM-IV 356).

In Tony’s case, at least five depressive symptoms were present before his life-threatening capture and torture at the hands of a terrorist organization in Afghanistan. In particular, Tony originally showed issues with guilt and worthlessness, substance abuse, moderate impairment in his family relationships, severe impairment in his work and peer relationships, issues with concentration, emotional avoidance and self-criticism (such as sarcastic comments) and an overall depressed mood (Mullen, Blanco, S. Vaughan, R. Vaughan, and Roose). In one study, high emotional avoidance and low amount of coping strategies was correlated positively with self-criticism. (Besser). None of Tony’s symptoms disappear completely. Some, in fact, worsen and
many more signs of a depression appear after Tony’s return to the United States. In addition to his original signs, when Tony returns after his capture and escape, he experiences a decreased interest in most of the activities he used to enjoy. He also has a change in sleep and activity, becomes more isolated and begins to use his technology excessively, though this could be a sign of his dedication to creating the Iron Man suit.

### Part Two: The Disengagement and Adaptation Theory

So you’re a man who has everything and nothing.
— Dr. Yinsen

As often inferred about depression, it is common for people who are pursuing unreachable goals (Nesse). When someone makes a commitment to a goal and an obstacle gets in their way, they often aggressively double their efforts. However, if the obstacle cannot be overcome, depression acts as an adaptation meant to prevent the person from diverting even more time to another failure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Domain</th>
<th>Moderately Impaired</th>
<th>Severely Impaired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Relationships</td>
<td>Quiet, negative and oppositional</td>
<td>Withdrawn, won’t talk, brusque, angry, aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School &amp; Academics/Work</td>
<td>Grades/work performance deteriorating, missing/cutting class or work, decreased effort, moderate academic or work stress</td>
<td>Failing performance, missing school or work, oppositional, argumentative, high academic or work stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td>Decreased socializing or extracurricular activities, more time on computer</td>
<td>Isolated, discontinued extracurricular activities, excessive computer time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Level, Anxiety</td>
<td>Minimizes or denies issues, projects onto others or blames others</td>
<td>Withholds feelings, won’t talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal Ideation</td>
<td>Vague/occasional</td>
<td>Frequently considered, has a plan or prior attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Self Harm</td>
<td>Occasional thoughts but no attempts</td>
<td>Cutting, other self injury</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This type of failure is very similar to how people avoid pain and seek pleasure. Succeeding is pleasurable while failing is painful. While some people think that if you strive hard enough for what is desirable, you can avoid the negative outcome. This reward for success seeking is traditionally associated with a higher “fitness,” or a potential for offspring. However, too many failed attempts will decrease someone’s fitness overall due to wasted resources, inducing depression to disengage the person from their fruitless pursuits.

But how exactly does this relate to Tony Stark? He has his own company and has successfully run it since he was 21 years old. He has plenty of money, so it has nothing to do with his health, wealth or reputation.

On the contrary, Tony doesn’t appear alone in the “lonely at the top” mentality due to a noted increase in depression in very high achievers in “creative domains, entrepreneurship and public life” (Nettle). Due to high pressures, Tony’s depression more than likely has more to do with his father’s reputation than his own.

Howard Stark established Stark Industries and was an impressive, popular figure in the public eye. I mean, the man helped fight Nazis with his company during World War II. It’s a little more than a tough act to follow. Add that to the fact that Howard Stark and his wife (Tony’s mother) Maria died suddenly in a car accident (when Tony was only 17 years old) and you suddenly have a legend for the masses. Tony, after being confronted with the challenge of being the better version of his father and support his company, was forced to either change the situation or accept it as it was.

Though this evolutionary theory seems to be supported with anecdotal evidence, there are also a few potential issues. Adaptations tend to have four key components that include lack of a genetic element, suggestion of a positive effect on the adaptor, is prompted by a specific action or event and that the adaptor is less fit when they do not have the adaptation (Nettle). For this to be true about depression, there would be no tie to heritability, depression would affect people in a positive way, depression would be reactionary to specific events and that people without depression are less likely to have as many offspring, and therefore, are less likely to pass on their genes.

This is supported by what we currently know about the origins of depression. Twin studies have shown that the genetic components that lead to depression account for 37 percent of the risk (Roetker, Page, Yonker, Chang, Roan, Herd, T. Hauser, R. Hauser and Atwood). In addition, a certain type of allele carrier who experienced childhood neglect or abuse showed a higher risk for mood disorders (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill). Chronic depression, in itself, seems to harm the adaptor more than help due to the lethargy, lack of motivation and the decrease in social attractiveness (Nettle). However, depressive
episodes, or shorter bouts of depression seem to increase overall fitness when the adaptor is otherwise unable to disengage from their goal.

### Part Three: Response to Trauma

He left a part of himself in that cave.
— Obadiah Stane

Another theory for the cause of depression is a response to trauma. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) defines a “traumatic event” as an event that involves actual death, threatened death or, at the very least, serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others. Events such as war, terrorism, general violence, or vehicle accidents would apply (DSM-IV 356).

For Tony, his parent’s sudden death is a likely source of trauma. As mentioned in the previous section, Howard Stark was well loved by the public at large for his strides in weapons technology. In private, however, Howard Stark was an alcoholic and an emotionally neglectful father. Add this to the permanent abandonment and death of both of Tony’s parents when they died suddenly in a car accident when Tony was 17 years old.

In addition, Tony’s capture and torture at the hands of terrorists (obviously) adds to his trauma. During his captivity, he undergoes a lifesaving surgery to prevent shrapnel from entering his heart. He also witnesses a stockpile of his own weapons being used by the very terrorists who captured him, innocent civilians harmed with those same weapons and the death of the man who saved his life.

With two, separate traumatic events, it’s unsurprising that the amount of depressive symptoms that Tony shows increase and worsen, as mentioned in part one. For a regular American, lifetime rates of trauma are between 30 and 90 percent (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill). Because all traumas are filtered through a personal view on whether or not there was at least potential serious harm, the reaction can vary from person to person. What one person finds traumatic, another may not find threatening at all. This leads to some potential issues with defining trauma as well as establishing it as a theory for depression. In addition, though emotions are a universal experience, there is no evidence to support the theory that everyone has the ability to become depressed (Nettle). Even when trauma is sustained, the risk of depression post-trauma is only between 6 and 20 percent (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill).
As seen with Tony, some trauma can actually cause personal growth (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill). After taking meaning from his escape and near-death experience, Tony decided to dedicate his life to righting the wrongs he saw in Afghanistan. This growth was further helped by Tony’s social support system, discussed in the next section.

Part Four: Social Support (or lack thereof)

[To Pepper Potts]: I don’t have anyone but you.
— Tony Stark

Depression has shown to decrease social attractiveness (Nettle). As a result, depressives tend to have fewer social connections and tend to work harder to keep any type of support system intact. So, people with depression have fewer friends and value them more because they are seen as less worthwhile friend. What does that have to do with depressive symptoms improving or worsening?

The answer is that people with depression have a tendency to fall into a self-defeating cycle. A social support system tended to have an overall positive effect on the symptoms of depression, with one study that showed that higher levels of support resulted in reduced risk of an additional depressive episode (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill).

While people without depression may understand the concept of a “low mood,” the chronic element of depression can frustrate them. They think that their friend is a worthwhile one, but needs time to think or wallow rather than it being a long-lasting problem. Eventually, they may decide that the issue has gone on long enough and that their friend is consciously choosing to not try to fix their own problems. The depressed person’s friend doesn’t appear to be consciously selfish. Its true that people who suffer from depression tend to have lowered ability to be empathetic and pick up on social cues (also called Emotional Intelligence), a higher death rate and poorer overall health, even when asymptomatic (Nettle). That’s even before mentioning that people with depression have a tendency to be more difficult to get along with and can often appear irrational. Three different studies showed that higher levels of neuroticism and introversion, as well as lower levels of openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness are more strongly associated with people who have depressive symptoms (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill). As a result, people with depressive symptoms may find others more hostile towards them and this tends to lead to a loss in social support (Nettle).
While many people strongly disliked Tony for his personality and disrespectful attitude before his capture and escape in Afghanistan, the actual hostility towards his newer depressive symptoms is incredibly visible. At first, his friends, namely James “Rhodey” Rhodes and Pepper Potts (who is also his personal assistant) attempt to engage him in what happened and ask him about his “new heart.” However, when Tony’s actions change, especially when he attempts to shut down the weapons section of Stark Industries as an attempt to right the wrongs he saw, they aren’t sure what to do.

In one situation, Tony approaches Rhodey to show him his newest idea (the Iron Man suit), but is rebuffed because Tony refuses to engage the weapons section of his company. Rather, Rhodey insisted on telling Tony that “what you need is time to get your mind right. I’m serious.” Only later on, when Tony reveals his Iron Man suit in person, does Rhodey again show support for his friend.

When Tony asks Pepper Potts to go to help him uncover information about under-the-table weapons trading that has been going on in his company behind his back, Pepper refuses. She insists she would help him with anything, but that she “cannot help [him] if [he’s] going to start all of this again” and quits. When Tony confronts her for standing by him through everything until he tries to protect people, Pepper finally relents. She agrees to help when she sees that Tony is not actually irrational. Had Rhodey and Pepper not eventually shown support for Tony, Tony’s depression could have worsened.

Though Tony’s depression worsens after his traumatic experiences in Afghanistan, Tony shows a desire for social support throughout. He has very few friends and colleagues (as well as the limelight), but he actually attempts to reach out to very few people. Every time Tony meets someone he is interested in (without his Iron Man suit), he tends to do one of two things: attempt to hire them or flirt with them. Tony craves the attention and affection and his womanizing ways give him the temporary perceived social support that he desires. A study supports this theory and showed that perceived social support was more important than any tangible support (Kwako, Szanton, Saligan and Gill).

Conclusions

So, what do all these theories mean for people with depression? As with many other mental illnesses, depression is an area with very few definitive answers. Mainly, that no two depressions are perfectly alike. Because much of depression is filtered through each individual’s experience and ability to
cope, the depth and breadth of the causes of depression and have not yet been understood.

Just as no two depressions are the same, no two have the same cause(s). Though people in certain demographics with certain life stressors have an increased chance of developing it, depression is impartial to people’s success. If there are multiple reasons that someone develops depression, not all of them are necessarily weighted equally.

Depression is also not a direct, heritable disease that is always chronic. There appears to be a spectrum of risk rather than people who carry this trait and those who do not. Life experiences affect people in different ways and trigger the changes for either a short or longer period of time.

Ultimately, for people who are depressed, none of this research will actually change the cause of their depression. They will likely still be depressed. However, some of this may support recovery and an overall focus on the importance of social support in the treatment of mental illness.

Carole Trickey has always been a fan of smartly written characters and relating literature to everyday life, rendering this assignment particularly ideal for her. She has wanted to be a writer and storyteller since she was very young and, as a result, is now a journalism and strategic communications student at the University of Missouri Columbia. Though she now considers Columbia, Missouri her home, she will never let anyone say Saint Louis is better than Kansas City.

References


Infatuation or: Your Typical Workplace Comedy Romance

ELIZABETH ARNOLD

Introduction

In the annex of an office building in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Kelly Kapoor loudly praises romantic comedies and obsesses over boys. To fans of The Office, Kelly’s moments of romantic obsession are teaming with comedic gold. In her scenes, Kelly holds a mirror up to society that reflects society’s expectations rather than its reality. Women are perceived to feel love more quickly than men, while men actually feel and express their love first (Harrison & Shortall 2011). Kelly, like many other people looking for a modern relationship in the United States, searches for love and a relationship rather than a romantic partner that she could have a lasting relationship with. Because of this she develops an infatuation with Ryan, who she finds cute and believes to be romantic, and is unable to clearly see his egocentricity that allows him to leave her in pursuit of selfish desires without a second thought. Fortunately for women, The Office’s take on dry British humor uses Kelly’s character to critique society for its use of stereotypes rather than to expose a sad truth.

Infatuation describes a strong romantic feeling for another person that often involves an increase in sexual arousal as well as obsessive thoughts such as self-doubt and worry (Langeslag, Muris, & Franken, 2013). The feeling of infatuation in a relationship is compared to a feeling that Langeslag, Muris, & Franken call “attachment,” which indicates a deeper connection between people that results in a feeling of stability, which infatuation lacks. Studies suggest that attachment is a long-term feeling while infatuation is usually felt
Infatuation towards the beginning of a relationship and fades over time. However, it is possible for infatuation to last throughout a relationship, but the thoughts of a person experiencing infatuation may not remain fixated on their partner (p.739-740).

Infatuation generally holds an insignificant part in relationships because it fosters a passion that can make people territorially protective of their partner as well as more sexually aroused, which does not provide as stable of a foundation as attachment love. Love functions uniquely from culture to culture so that the role of love in a relationship and then the function of a relationship in society differ from one country to the next. In contemporary Western culture, there is a shift towards the nuclear family and a marriage built off of mutual love. In its early stages this love often resembles infatuation, which can blind a person to their partner’s faults, but if the love endures the relationship is easier to sustain.

**Infatuation**

If I get to stay and Ryan is laid off, I will kill myself, like Romeo and Juliet... the Claire Danes one.

— Kelly Kapoor (The Office, Season 3, Episode 8)

One flaw of the modern person seeking love is that, especially when desperately searching, he/ she can get distracted by the idea of finding someone to simply love. Occasionally infatuation develops, which can cause a person to notice neither the lack of compatibility in a relationship nor faults of their partner. When the infatuation fades that person either sees the faults of their partner, who suddenly finds himself/herself compared to an ideal that he/she cannot live up to, or the love transforms into attachment love.

McClanahan et al. (1990) theorized that infatuation was the cause behind the cliche that love is blind. Under this theory, a person feels infatuation so strongly that they over look issues of compatibility (p. 434). McClanahan and her fellow researches found that infatuation causes people to overlook compatibility issues and allows people to view faults and issues of compatibility in a more positive light when noticed (p. 441-443).

McClanahan’s study initially asked male students at the University of Maine to fill out an attitude survey. Each student was later introduced to an attractive female “confederate” who he would supposedly work with later on in the study. The researchers filled out an attitude survey for the confederate with answers opposite of what the student indicated. The student was given
the fake survey from the confederate and was also asked to fill out a questionnaire. The student was then asked to take a vitamin. The vitamin was a placebo and the students were randomly divided into two groups based on how the effects of the vitamin were described to them. One group, the “misattribution” group, was told that the vitamin would have side effects that could cause them to exhibit symptoms of having crush on someone—nerves, blushing, and arousal. The other students, the “no misattribution” group, were told that the vitamin had no side effects. Students were divided again into two groups, “infatuation induction” and “no infatuation induction,” and asked wait in a room with the confederate. This means that one fourth of the men were no misattribution and infatuation inducted, another fourth was no misattribution and had no infatuation induction, the third group was misattribution and infatuation induced, and the final fourth was from the misattribution group and was not infatuation inducted. The infatuation induction men were examined for infatuation. To do this the researcher left him and confederate in the waiting room to talk. The confederate was given a set of topics to talk about with him. The no infatuation induction students were used as the control. The researcher left the room for just a few minutes while the student and confederate read one another’s questionnaires, which they filled out after the attitude survey, without talking. The questionnaires contained the same information that the confederate and student discussed in the infatuation group. This control served to see if interaction caused romantic attraction. All of the students were then asked to fill out a survey to indicate how they felt about the confederate since they would supposedly work with her more in the future. The students were also instructed to fill out another attitude survey test, but they were asked to duplicate her answers to the questions. Finally the researchers gave the students a final measure to indicate attitude, different form the original attitude survey (435-440).

McClanahan’s experiment revealed that the results of students with misattribution did not vary significantly. However, the students that underwent infatuation induction and had no misattribution exhibited more signs of love and were less aware of the differences, and viewed the differences they saw positively, between themselves and the confederate (440-441).

Relationships founded on infatuation often cause problems later on because if the infatuation fades the person who felt infatuation suddenly sees all of the faults that were previously invisible. It is as if one person had been dreaming a pleasant dream and was suddenly awakened to a bleak reality. Kelly demonstrates this in her desperate attempt to find love. She quickly falls for a suitable man where the definition of “suitable” has few strict requirements. She finds herself infatuated and obsessed with Ryan. He initially fawns over Kelly as ardently as she does for him, but quickly awakens to reality. This leaves Kelly determined to make their relationship work as Ryan hesitates.
He makes several attempts to flee and Kelly never fully realizes how badly Ryan treats her. She remains, to the end, in a state of infatuation with Ryan.

Kelly’s situation parallels the group of McClanahan’s subjects with no misattribution that went through infatuation induction. Much like the participants, Kelly is unable to see most obvious faults and differences. She even justifies Ryan’s faults when confronted by them. While infatuation can cause a kind of blindness, it could be positive as well as negative. The negative consequences would surface when the person that feels infatuation realizes the other’s faults and cannot learn to love or cooperate with them. However, if the person learned to cope with his/ her partner’s faults or never awakened to them, then infatuation could strengthen the person’s tie to the relationship. Maybe, like Kelly, infatuation could even drive him/ her to make the relationship work no matter what trials it faces.

**Gender Roles**

I guess in most romantic comedies, the guy you’re supposed to be with is the one that you’ve never really thought of in that way. You might have even thought he was annoying, or possibly homosexual.

— Kelly Kapoor (*The Office*, Season 6, Episode 16)

Society misconceives the investment that women have in a relationship. People tend to believe that women fall in love more quickly than men and act clingy. However, Harrison and Shortall show that men tend to fall in love and say, “I love you” before women in a relationship even though people generally believe that women fall in love more easily. To obtain this information they conducted a survey of college students. This survey asked questions about when an individual can tell they are in love in a relationship, when they say, “I love you,” and who says, “I love you” first. Because there were not enough homosexual participants for the statistics to be significant the results reflect the experiences of heterosexual couples. When asked 64% of the males and 18.5% of the females reported that they said, “I love you” first in their latest relationship. This is contrasted by the fact that 75% of participants answered that they believed women usually say, “I love you” first and 88% believe that women fall in love first. These results suggests that society perceives women to be more emotionally invested in a relationship earlier on when it is actually men that first realize and act, or speak, on their emotions.
The results of Harrison and Shortall’s study remind us that characters like Kelly Kapoor make fun of society’s stereotypes rather than the habits of specific members. There are women who say, “I love you” first and who feel love before men. A woman like Kelly may even exist. However, Kelly reflects a stereotype that does not accurately represent the female population. Szymanowski and Stewart-Richardson (2014) examine gender role conflict, specifically in relation to pornography use. In their study they define gender role conflict as the result of gender roles that set limitations in a way that is reductive and harmful (p. 65). For example, gender roles dictate that the man should pay for the date, which insinuates that the woman does not have the ability to pay or has less money because she either does not work, is not as intelligent as her male counterpart, or holds a lower position in her workplace. Szymanski and Stewart-Richardson suggest that this negativity spurred by gender roles can lead to violence towards women and feelings of entitlement (P. 65).

Harrison and Shortall’s findings on the relationship between gender and love in a relationship reflect a small amount of gender role conflict. The belief that women feel love first in a relationship is a stereotype to the point that it is nearly a gender role for women to feel more attached first. This stereotype could lead a man to feel sexually entitled or believe that sexual harassment is warranted. While an examination of gender roles and gender differences helps to better understand romantic relationships, it is important to also study several cultures and ethnicities to understand the role of group membership and gender group membership (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002).

Culture & Marriage

Jim!!! Oh my god, I have so much to tell you. Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes had a baby, and they named it Suri! And Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie also had a baby, and they named is Shiloh! And both babies are amaziiiing!

— Kelly Kapoor (The Office, Season 3, Episode 7)

Cultures place different values on love in terms of a relationship. However, most cultures agree that love is not the most important component of a marriage (Coontz, 2005). This holds true for infatuated, or passionate, love. Langeslag, Muris, & Franken’s “attachment” love that endures in the face of a potential decrease in sexual attraction is found to have a higher value to couples across cultures as opposed to infatuation (Sprecher & Toro-Morn).

Sprecher and Toro-Morn conducted a study to examine the role of gender
differences in terms of beliefs about a relationship and the variation of gender differences across cultures. In their research before conducting the study, Sprecher and Toro-Morn found relationship values to differ greatly between Chinese and American cultures, which lead them to decide to take samples from universities in the United States and China. This study improves upon previous research in that they studied two cultures simultaneously while most studies only examine one. As a result, it is important to keep in mind that this study still only represents two points on the spectrum of cultural variation.

Among the many aspects of gender differences in relationships between cultures, Sprecher and Toro-Morn study the cultural emphasis on love’s role in marriage. To conduct this study, a survey asked questions about the importance of love in a marriage if the other person had all of the qualities one sought in a partner, if a marriage is worth sticking around for if the love fades, if it is possible to make a marriage work where there is love but the passion is gone, and if marriage should be emotionally and physically filling. The study found that in the U.S., both genders agreed in terms of these questions. Both genders believe that love and sexual attraction are important going into a marriage, love is important in sustaining a marriage but not to the same degree as it is important in starting a marriage, loss of sexual attraction is not a good enough reason to end a marriage if love is still present, and emotional fulfillment is more important than physical fulfillment. However, women rated the significance of love to begin a relationship and the importance of emotional fulfillment over physical fulfillment more highly than men, which suggests that these issues are more important to women than men even though both genders agree that they are important.

From the sample of Chinese students, the study shows that love is important for starting a marriage more than sustaining it, love similar to infatuation is less important than attachment love, and emotional fulfillment is more important than physical fulfillment especially in sustaining a marriage. The exceptions are that, while both men and women agreed that emotional fulfillment is more important than physical fulfillment, the men tended to rank physical fulfillment as more important than the women indicated. The study concludes that the largest difference is between men and women between different cultures rather than between men and women of the same culture. Though the variation was still small as the studies of the two cultures yielded similar results. This suggests that genders are not as different as society perceives them. The fact that most people say that passionate love is not necessary to sustain a marriage offers one possible explanation as to why infatuation usually fades into attachment through the course of a relationship. If people do not place a high value on the aspects of infatuation versus attachment it is likely that the characteristics of attachment will prevail. However, some people feel both infatuation and attachment, finding the importance in both. For Kelly Kapoor,
though, her romantic ideals keep infatuation’s passion of high importance so that her infatuation for Ryan will never likely fade. Across the nine seasons of *The Office* her love for Ryan remains intensely passionate.

**Family**

Here’s the deal. I really wanna go, but I’m not gonna go if Ryan doesn’t go, because it’s kind of a waste of time. That came out wrong. It would be awesome if you could try to get him to go, because I’d really like to be there to support Jim.

— Kelly Kapoor (*The Office*, Season 6, Episode 2)

In many cultures a wedding is a union of two people and their families. This does not mean that the couple’s families also sign legally binding contracts, but the family is an important extension of the individual, which necessitates that their families come together to form one large family. It is historically rate for in-laws to be insignificant in a coupling, with exception of groups like the Na (Coontz, 2005). Nevertheless, in Western culture there is a shift to the nuclear family where couples do not remain in close proximity to a set of parents.

Coontz studies many aspects of marriage including the ways that it has changed through time, the way it varies across cultures, and its relationship to the family. The Na, a group of people from China, do not use marriage to structure society, unlike most cultures. The Na are centered on sibling relationships so that brothers and sisters raise children together. Incest is still taboo though. To get pregnant women have quiet affairs through late night visits with a man in another family, but her siblings help to raise the child. The father has no further role in the child’s life. While there is no extended family added in through in-laws siblings form close relationships that endure longer than romantic relationships (32-33).

The Na’s sibling centered home life is contrasted by the nuclear family, another family structure that does not place value on the in-laws, common in Western countries like the United States. Stone (1997) examines kinship and the change of domestic cycles overtime. Stone starts by examining different arguments about the woman’s role in the house. It used to be widely believed that women should act as caretakers because of their biological predisposition to have children, but some more modern arguments suggest that the woman’s biological rule ends after childbirth and either parent could work as caregiver (p. 2-3).
In western culture there is no longer a practical necessity for women to stay at home with the children. However in other cultures like that of the !Kung San gender roles are deeply embedded into society and the way it functions making it almost necessary for a woman to remain the primary caregiver after the birth of her child. In this culture women provide the most food as foragers while men are hunters. Women’s job of gathering is more conducive to watching a child, so the child accompanies the woman until it is ready to work as a hunter or gatherer depending on gender. The kinship of the !Kung San is known as bilateral, which is similar to the primary form of kinship in the U.S. except the !Kung San live in small communities with the parents of both members of the couple while the U.S. nuclear family typically has an equal connection to and distance from both sides of the family. Marriage in the !Kung San involves the man, typically older than the woman who is usually first married before puberty, moving in with the girl’s family and hunting to provide food for the girl and her family while the parents arrange the marriage. The parents are in charge of the wedding because the bride and groom are thought too young and immature to take on such an important job. In addition the bride typically disagrees with marriage and the partner that her parents choose for her (Stockard, 2002).

The !Kung San, unlike much of the U.S., do not place importance on the role of love in a relationship. A marriage serves the family as much or more than the individual in groups like the !Kung San where there is an exchange of wealth or goods and the extended family is involved. In the U.S. with the nuclear family, in-laws might spend time together but they typically do not exchange goods and services. In this way a marriage in the U.S. is more self-serving because it removes the child from the home without providing the parents with anything. In fact parents often help pay for the wedding of their child. Then under a nuclear family structure the child no longer remains to help the parents and sustain a community and close relationship with their family as do other cultures such as the !Kung San and Na.

In an arranged marriage, like that of the !Kung San, attachment love is more important than infatuation. Attachment allows the couple to feel secure and supportive of one another. While infatuation may bring a couple closer with an increased sexual interest and sense of possessiveness over the other, attachment love allows for a lasting relationship. Since infatuation typically fades the loyalty of attachment love is what keeps a couple together in a partnership. The phase of infatuation provides fun and excitement for the couples that experience it, but does not make a marriage successful.

Kelly and Ryan’s relationship exemplifies the modern relationship that is likely to break into a nuclear family. They are focused on their careers and their love for one another and place much more significance on their relation-
ship with one another than with their families. Part of Kelly’s romanticized notions of love places value on making a relationship work above all else. For her this means following Ryan where he wants to go and he wants to pursue money. This represents the way real families are split into nuclear families, tethered together loosely by phone lines and e-mails. In modern society it is possible to keep in contact with family while living far away, but it is not the same as collaborating with your family to make a living while raising and providing for the family.

Conclusion

Infatuation is a type of love that usually occurs at the beginning of a relationship. Society tends to stereotype women as more eager to love and express their love in a relationship, however studies show that men are actually the first to feel and express their love (Harrison & Shortall). Studies of multiple cultures suggest that men and women are more similar than society thinks in terms of what they want in a relationship (Sprecher & Toro-Morn). Love and relationship ideals change across cultures, but within cultures men and women tend to have similar beliefs on how to make a relationship work. As societies are structured differently each culture has a different role for marriage in society. In the U.S. marriage mainly serves the individuals in a couple, but in groups like the !Kung San marriage benefits the entire family of both individuals as the families combine resources and form a small community that works together.

*The Office*’s Kelly Kapoor exemplifies the stereotypical infatuated woman who is over protective and over emotional. However, research shows that her stereotype applies to men just as much as women. As a stereotype, Kelly does not represent the majority of women. Men are more likely to feel and express love in a relationship and are just as likely to exhibit infatuation like Kelly.

Elizabeth Arnold studies English and French at the University of Missouri. While she prefers to write fiction her emphasis area indicates creative nonfiction as her calling. She finds inspiration in the writings of some of the modern era’s happiest writers including Charles Baudelaire, Virginia Woolf, and Oscar Wilde. She hopes to eventually work in publishing and write her own novel. Maybe one day that dream will become a reality and she will have enough money to hire someone to publish and edit her books thus avoiding the necessity to refer to herself in the third person.
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