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**The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Relationship**

An analysis on the new paradigm shift in modern day relationships

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You see it is human nature to want and long for the love and companionship of another; one can fight it, but at the end of the day the underlying need still exists. Humans thrive off the survival of one another and an interdependence that has essentially created civilization. Since evolution humans have evolved and formatted a culture based off values and morals set within societal constraints. Humans much like our ancestral primates instinctually live to reproduce; it's human nature. Whether it be in monogamous or polygamous manner is up for debate.

Monogamy is culturally defined and justified through culture and social etiquette. The following examines monogamy from an interesting perspective:

Monogamy did not "evolve." It exists because of human exceptionalism. Here's what I mean: Geese don't "choose" to mate for life and felines don't "cat around" because they are immoral. They have no choice in the matter. Their mating methods are instinctual. In contrast, human societies have differed widely over views on sex and commitment to monogamy, with more ancient societies and some current cultures permitting polyamory. That's because human cultural norms are not biologically determined, as in animal behavior. Rather, humans have free will. We create, socialize, and enforce moral and ethical codes. In this sense, we are not slaves to impersonal evolutionary forces in our romantic lives. Indeed, the breathtaking refashioning of Western sexual morality just during my lifetime is a vivid example (Evolution News).

Love and lust has been defined and structured by our society and has been changing with time.

Open relationships and same-sex relationships frowned upon in the past, are now embraced in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Broken marriages, divorces, and separations were non-existent and now they have become customary in present day. But what drives this paradigm shift in relationship norms? Is commitment just a thing of the past? What fuels this discontent amongst 21<sup>st</sup> century lovers? The answer is simple. Relationships have always faced the same problems as noted in much of Ernest Hemingway's work, particularly *Hills like White Elephants* and *Cat in the Rain*. Relationships are veiled by deception, lack of commitment and emotional responsibility, and the permeable invasive outside factors like materialism and jealousy. With a constant change in new technology, our culture has become over-stimulated and always available. It has never been

easier to connect to new people with a simple “swipe right” motion. With the availability of romantic partners at the touch of a finger, commitment has lost its value. Through a wide array of research, 21<sup>st</sup> century relationships are found to be quite a contrast to the past. Relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have ditched the traditional patterns of dating and have begun to transform into low-commitment and low-emotional investments. Technology has made the ease of finding a new partner easily accessible. This lack of commitment is not a new idea; again, it has been seen in the past and highlighted through Hemingway’s and other writer’s literary work. Recently it has just become more accepted by today’s progressive, materialistic culture and is continuously formatted by new age technology.

“‘I feel fine,’ she said. ‘There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.’” Is this the line from a 1927 short story, or a 2017 text message? In “Hills like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway makes it almost impossible to differentiate between the two. In this brief story, one can see a modern-day relationship unfold. This story entails all the difficulties one sees in modern relationships today: tangled one-sided responses, mixed messages, and tip-toed discussions such as abortion. Hemingway defines the means of the two’s informal relationship by capitalizing on small clues, such as their luggage, “there were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights” (Carol, 358). Referencing that they traveled a lot allows the audience to infer that they most likely spent endless romantic nights together, without any burdens or constraints up until this point. The couple tries to persuade themselves that this major complication can be simply shrugged off, and they can go back to normal, “we’ll be fine afterward, just like we were before,” (Carol, 356). The American man exemplifies much of the typical American man today; willing to go along with the girl and the relationship, which is until it becomes too difficult and too much effort is required. The American man voices his opinion on the abortion, “it’s really an

awfully simple operation, Jig,” (Carol, 355). By saying it is just a simple procedure he disregards her health and safety. He also refers to the girl as “Jig,” which is a type of dance. It can almost be explicitly inferred that the man only thinks of the girl in terms of adding pure enjoyment to his life, and nothing else; disregarding her as any long-term partner. These two characters also have appeared to be spending a lot of time together, preconceived by the fact they have been traveling through Spain. Hemmingway chooses specifically to refer to the two as the American man and the girl. He avoids terms like “girlfriend” or “boyfriend,” capitalizing again on the lack of commitment found between the two. Due to the lack of effort and strength in their relationship, it appears the man’s opinion is set on ridding themselves of any hardships, such as pregnancy; as its, “it’s the best thing to do,” (356). Hemmingway capitalizes on her emotions by having her ask repeatedly, “You’ll love me?” referring to after the operation (Carol, 356). A loss of self-respect and identity is seen where the girl states twice, “I don’t care about me,” (Carol, 356). She disregards her own feelings in hopes to please the American man, which again we see in today’s time where girls overinvest themselves into men that do not even bother to reciprocate the same.

*Cat in the Rain*, another short story by Hemingway criticizing American relationships provides exact insight into the veil of materialism and use of materials to hide from relationship dissatisfaction and discontent. Two Americans visit a hotel in Italy surrounding a famous tourist attraction featuring an idolized statue. Their room faces the sea, a public garden, and this war monument, but the couple remains in their room. It’s raining and the American wife is looking out the window and sees a cat under a table that is trying to keep dry. She tells her husband that she is going to get it and her husband warns her to not get wet. She does not find the cat and then complains to her husband that she just wants a cat to pet and long hair to which her husband tells her to “shut up, and find a book to read.” (Biblioklept). She continues to complain and says that

she wants “a bun at the back of her neck, and a cat to stroke, and a table with her own silver, and some new clothing.” In the end, she ends up getting the cat from the maid, but nonetheless her relationship remains dull and unfulfilled except by the occupation of materialistic objects she yearns for.

These two stories share a commonality; a lack of unfulfilled relationships. They both feature discontent American couples abroad in beautiful areas like Spain and Italy; but unsatisfied with their surroundings and their partners. This American attitude towards always needing more, or never having enough easily transfers to relationships. Partners become items and based off the same consumerism needs make love an exchange of goods. Partners become easily disposable as the next one is right at the swipe of a fingertip. The following are statistics on the app *Tinder*:

*Tinder* has a total of 50 million users and grows each day. 10 million of these users are daily active users. The app has been downloaded a total of 100 million times. *Tinder* is responsible for 10 billion matches made. A total of 1.4 billion swipes are made daily. The percentage of *Tinder* users that are single is 54%, divorced 3%, already in a relationship 12%. The percentage of millennials using the app is 79%. The average time a user uses the app is 35 minutes a day.... These are the recent statistics as of March 2017 (Smith, Craig).

These facts support how prevalent an app like this is today. *Tinder* is not the only dating app out there; other apps are used just as much like *Bumble*. Everyone is using it; but not everyone is using it the same way or for the same intentions. A group of scientist at Queen Mary University of London, Sapienza University of Rome, and Royal Ottawa Health Care Group studied the behavior of *Tinder* users. And this is what they found:

It was found that women generally swipe right only for men they're seriously interested in, while men are less picky. That ultimately leads to a frustrating experience for everyone. For the study, the scientists created 14 fake profiles of male and female *Tinder* users and set them loose in New York and London. The fake users liked everyone — thousands of people — within a 100-mile

radius. The researchers were interested specifically in how many "likes" each profile would rack up (i.e. how many matches they'd make) and how many messages they would receive from users they'd matched with. Results showed stark gender differences. The fake men only matched with others 0.6% of the time. The fake women, on the other hand, matched with others 10.5% of the time. Interestingly, most of the matches for the fake women and fake men came from men, suggesting that homosexual men are more willing to swipe right than heterosexual women are. As for messages, just 7% of male matches sent a message, compared to 21% of women. In other words, men aren't so choosy about who they swipe right for — but they're rarely invested enough in the person to send a message. By contrast, women only swipe right when they're really interested in someone (Lebowitz, Shana).

This study concludes that men using media like this for relationships, are not really using the media for a relationship per say. Through the study they are shown to swipe right to indicate a match far more than their counterpart of women. Women are shown to be more emotionally invested from the very beginning, and look for that long-term partner even if they are unaware of their unconscious intent.

Despite the pursuit of finding a significant other changing, the actual act of “dating” has changed significantly as well with the time. Here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the word “date” means the number you add to the upper right hand on your assignment, not a thing you do with someone you like. Millennials these days feel so preoccupied with other commitments like getting an education, hanging with friends, work, and establishing themselves-that they don't have time for a relationship. To even hear the word date, it seems like a foreign language. Elizabeth Welsh a 25-year-old who graduated from college in 2005 and now lives in Boston sheds light on the following in a published interview, “Going out on a date is a sort of ironic, obsolete type of thing...dating is a joke. Going out on a date to dinner and a movie? It's so cliché — isn't that funny?” (Wilson, Brenda). The culture of today's relationship is so sexually engrossed. Blame it on exploitative media and advertisements that are so commonly engraved into our daily lives, or blame it on something else but it's what is happening. A study was conducted examining the link

between objectification from the media that mirrors the same objectification of partners in a relationship:

This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining whether exposure to mass media is related to self-objectification and objectification of one's partner, which in turn is hypothesized to be related to relationship and sexual satisfaction. A sample of undergraduate students (91 women and 68 men) enrolled in a university on the west coast of the United States completed self-report measures of the following variables: self-objectification, objectification of one's romantic partner, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and exposure to objectifying media. Men reported higher levels of partner objectification than did women; there was no gender difference in self-objectification. Self- and partner-objectification were positively correlated; this correlation was especially strong for men. In regression analyses, partner-objectification was predictive of lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, a path model revealed that consuming objectifying media is related to lowered relationship satisfaction through the variable of partner-objectification. Finally, self- and partner-objectification were related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction among men. This study provides evidence for the negative effects of objectification in the context of romantic relationships among young adults (Zurbriggen, Eileen L., Laura R. Ramsey, and Beth K. Jaworski).

Due to the media emphasizing on an overly sexually stimulated culture, many relationships are formed on this norm that sex before establishing a relationship is healthy. However, the following dives into depth on sex before a relationship and its effects on the mental toll of those who engage in such acts:

Because most of our relationships start with sex before they turn into something substantial, it can be rather difficult figuring out where exactly that line between the two is located. Are you dating? Or are you just having sex? Sure, you're not just having sex, you're hanging out as well. But are you sure you're not friends with benefits...Are you together or are you officially together? Apparently, there is now a difference—exclusivity isn't always promised. With all these different levels of togetherness that we've invented, it's no surprise that many times we'll find ourselves with a person and not know how to introduce him or her to friends or family (Jeffrey R. Ambrose and Stacey L. Palm).

This exact suppression of emotion that is needed for living in this hookup culture teaches millennials and young adults not to feel at all. The constant intimate time spent in these non-exclusive relationships and the ease of moving on to the next person after finding it does not

work out creates a void in both men's and women's lives. It also breaks both partners' ability to trust and be vulnerable which is essential in a healthy relationship. To reiterate the facts that men and women today stray away from commitment and more importantly tying the knot here are the following statistics on relationships taking it to the next level:

An American Association of Retired Persons study on habits of singles between the ages of 40 and 69 found the following: About a third of men (32%) and women (34%) say they are not sure whether they should marry when or if they find themselves in a committed, exclusive relationship. Another third of men (34%) say they would cohabit, compared to about a fifth (21%) of women. Almost a third of women (31%) say they would get married versus one in four (25%) men (Jeffrey R. Ambrose and Stacey L. Palm).

These statistics reinforce the lack of commitment in moving a relationship to the next level such as moving in together, or better yet marriage. The lack of commitment is evident. But what initiates this lack of commitment? Croydon, an average 36-year-old male, shares, "The central dilemma of relationships is the fact we have two separate needs...on the one hand we crave passion and excitement, and on the other we have this desire for lasting attachment, for a soulmate. But the intimacy we yearn for is the very thing that kills the romance" (Newman, Rebecca).

Is it just human nature that propels this lack of commitment, or is it the constant change of new technology? Again, statistics show that technology is interfering heavily with relationships nationwide. A survey was conducted and the findings showed:

42% of cell-owning 18-29 year olds in serious relationships say their partner has been distracted by their mobile phone while they were together (25% of all couples say this) ...18% of online 18-29 year olds have argued with a partner about the amount of time one of them spent online (compared with 8% of all online couples) ...8% say they have been upset by something their partner was doing online (compared with 4% of all online couples) (Lenhart, Amanda, and Maeve Duggan).

Technology has become key components in the lives of many couples, including the “66% of adults who are married or in committed relationships (Lenhart, Amanda, and Maeve Duggan).

It’s hard to deny that our phone, social media, and everything else in between does not have an impact on our relationships. Although, this is not to a disadvantage entirely. A study done on college students found that more voice calls between those couple sin relationships displayed a greater sense of commitment:

This study examines the associations between mobile phone use and relational uncertainty, love and commitment, and attachment styles. A survey of 197 college students revealed that greater use of mobile voice calls with a romantic partner was associated with lower relational uncertainty and more love and commitment. Also, the higher the avoidance, the less the participants used voice calls, and an interaction effect was found between avoidance and anxiety on voice call use. However, there were no significant results in relation to the use of text messaging. Overall, more mobile calls in romantic relationships are associated with positive relationship qualities (Jin, Boraе, and Jorge F. Pena).

The use of technology is a win-lose tool in relationships. It brings individuals together but also can push them away. It helps commitment by assisting in communication, but also lures the option to opt-out of commitment through a simple break-up text, rather than face-to-face. It provides an easy alternative to meeting new people but also gives easy accessibility to move on and find someone new to have a relationship with.

What about the aftermath? What sort of toll do these low-commitment and low-investment relationships have on those involved? What happens if one of the two actually feel something? What happens when things get messy in such an ambiguous undefined relationship. The following examine show infidelity is emotionally experienced and produces different reactions between men and women:

Infidelities--sexual, emotional, or both--afflict many long-term romantic relationships. When a person discovers a partner's betrayal, a major decision faced is to forgive the partner and remain together or to terminate the relationship. Because men and women have confronted different

adaptive problems over evolutionary history associated with different forms of infidelity, we hypothesised the existence of sex differences in which aspects of infidelity would affect the likelihood of forgiveness or breakup. We tested this hypothesis using forced-choice dilemmas in which participants (N = 256) indicated how difficult it would be to forgive the partner and how likely they would be to break up with the partner, depending on the nature of the infidelity. Results support the hypothesis that men, relative to women: (a) find it more difficult to forgive a sexual infidelity than an emotional infidelity; and (b) are more likely to terminate a current relationship following a partner's sexual infidelity than an emotional infidelity (Shackelford, Todd K., David M. Buss, and Kevin Bennet).

Despite the act of cheating emotionally and physically, the aftermath plays a much larger part.

Infidelity wreaks havoc on the other partner's emotional stability:

We sought to identify emotional reactions to a partner's sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. In a preliminary study, 53 participants nominated emotional reactions to a partner's sexual and emotional infidelity. In a second study, 655 participants rated each emotion for how likely it was to occur following sexual and emotional infidelity. Principal components analysis revealed 15 emotion components, including Hostile/Vengeful, Depressed, and Sexually aroused. We conducted repeated measures analyses of variance on the 15 components, with participant sex as the between-subjects factor and infidelity type as the within-subjects factor. A main effect for sex obtained for 9 components. For example, men scored higher on Homicidal/Suicidal, whereas women scored higher on Undesirable/Insecure. A main effect for infidelity type obtained for 12 components. For example, participants endorsed Nauseated/Repulsed as more likely to follow sexual infidelity and Undesirable/Insecure as more likely to follow emotional infidelity. Discussion addresses limitations of this research, and highlights the need for an integrative theory of emotional reactions to infidelity (Shackelford, Todd K., Gregory J. LeBlanc, and Elizabeth Drass).

In addition to feelings of insecurity and depression, additional feelings that one may suffer after the "break-up" include, "intense feelings of sadness and despair." Psychological research shows that, "the emotional response to the breakup of a romantic relationship strongly resembles reactions to what would appear to be more traumatic losses, such as the death of a loved one or the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness" (Student Life: Relationship Breakup). These common emotional reactions consist of: denial, grief and despair, fear, anger, self-blame, jealousy, confusion, and relief. One does not need statistics to prove this. Look at any real-life situation, literary work, or even a comical portrayal of some movie featuring a girl eating a tub of ice

cream after a break-up. This trend can be seen in the poem, "Singles Cruise," by Kathryn Maris. It reads, "The orbiters went to self-help groups/ and/or analysts and/or wrote letters to advice columnists/because they could not detach from their objects of unrequited affection/they became the predominant clientele for future singles cruises/unilaterally sustaining the singles cruise business," (Maris, Kathryn). The poem summarizes how single people after a break-up, divorce, and unrequited love, form a cycle. They turn to self-help groups and advice columnists as they too experience the cycle of emotions including: denial, grief and despair, fear, anger, self-blame, jealousy, confusion, and relief. There are thousands and thousands of works out there reflecting these same traits and emotional patterns. Take "A Pity, We Were Such a Good Invention," by Yehuda Amichai, for example. His poem reads, "They dismantle us/each from the other/as far as I'm concerned/they are all engineers/all of them," (Amichai, Yehuda). This portion of the poem is so strong and relates back to how outside factors and forces penetrate relationships. Whether it be other people, materialist needs, or technology-something is always pushing from the outside "dismantling" a relationship. These two poems support the emotional baggage that break-ups bring on. One does not need to look far to find a literary work or even movie or song, that expresses this romantic strain of a break-up or difficult relationship. Movies, television shows, and modern day music exemplify this perfectly.

21<sup>st</sup> century relationships have transformed significantly than what they used to be. Through a constant stimulation and veil of materialism relationships have come to deteriorate right before lover's eyes. Whoever said money can't buy happiness was right. Hemingway demonstrated this through his work and portrayal of unsatisfied couples. In fact statistically, materialistic items will never transfer into happiness amongst couples. The following findings were drawn from research conducted by Jason Carrol, a Brigham Young University professor:

1,734 married couples from a national survey had the couples evaluate their relationships with their spouse. Part of the evaluation was a question that asked how much the couple values “having money and lots of things.” Couples who say money is not important to them score about 10 to 15 percent better on marriage stability and other measures of relationship quality than couples where one or both are materialistic. “Couples where both spouses are materialistic were worse off on nearly every measure we looked at,” said Carroll, (Materialistic Couples Have More Problems, Poorer Quality Relationship).

If anything, materialistic possessions essentially create problems in a relationship. They can lead to high stress, emotional unfulfillment and a lack of satisfaction, that then can lead to a messy divorce. For the sake of your relationship, if you are lucky enough to be in one, put down your phone, get off *Tinder*, and go spend genuine time with your partner. Ask them about their day and go enjoy that Italian war monument outside your hotel. Go forth and take on commitment; stop building ambiguous relationships. Work through the hardships that in the end ultimately build your relationship. And if you feel up for the challenge-take your partner out on a real date.

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