Love Letters Lost?

Gender and the Preservation of Digital & Paper Communication from Romantic Relationships

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• How and why do people attach different meaning to digital or handwritten communications as mementos of romantic relationship stages?

• Are there differences in the ways that men and women interpret meanings attached to these items as nostalgic memory objects, and in views towards the increase in digital communication in relationships?
BACKGROUND

• Digital communication norms (e.g., Baym 2010; Gershon 2010; Pascoe 2010; Turkle 2011; Gardner and Davis 2013; boyd 2014)
• History of love letters (e.g., Wyss 2008)
• Gender and kinship keeping via material culture (e.g., Janning and Scalise 2013)
• Technology and its impact on communication and emotions for different demographics (e.g., Turkle 2011)
• Social networking sites and social relations (e.g., Thelwall 2009; Thelwall et al. 2010)
• Nostalgia and location of objects (e.g., Hepper and Ritchie 2011)
• Long-distance dating experiences (e.g., Merolla and Stafford 2007)
• Material culture impact on meaning-making and social roles (e.g., Nippert-Eng 1996; Spillman 2002; Epp and Price 2010)
• Gender roles in couple relations (e.g., Campbell et al. 1994; Rutter and Schwartz 1998; Witt and Wood 2010)
METHODS

- Qualtrics Survey Design
- Measures
- Sample
- Data Analysis
- Limitations
RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

• Relationship status (N=785)
• Number of romantic relationships (N=747)
• Sexual orientation of relationship referenced (N=412)
• Year romantic relationship started (N=618)
Some people debate whether digital communication has replaced handwritten communication. In your opinion, do you think letter, note, and card writing, in handwritten form, is fading in romantic relationships? (N=331)
Attitudes about Handwritten V. Digital Romantic Communication (* = only men included this response):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Digital Communication</th>
<th>Handwritten Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ease</td>
<td>Sacred because it is rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to converse in real time</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(constancy)</td>
<td>Tactile/Tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saves trees*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inexpensive*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is as meaningful as handwritten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
<td>Cheesy, hokey, “old-fashioned”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>Challenging regarding penmanship*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reinforces instant gratification</td>
<td>Not necessarily more meaningful than digital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEN’S AND WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES

• **Saving Mementos (N=419):** Women are slightly disproportionately more likely to save objects generally, and objects and communications from romantic relationships specifically, than men.
TYPES OF COMMUNICATIONS SAVED FROM THE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

- Letters
- Cards
- Handwritten notes
- Emails
- Texting Conversations
- Facebook Msg Conversations
- Captured Snapchats
- Other

% Within Female
% Within Male
TYPE OF SAVED COMMUNICATIONS REVISITED MOST OFTEN

- Letters
- Cards
- Handwritten notes
- Emails
- Texting Conversations
- Captured Snapshots
- Facebook Message Conversations
- Other

Male | Female
FREQUENCY OF LOOKING AT SAVED COMMUNICATION

Male | Female
---|---
Daily or Almost Daily | 0.0% | 0.0%
Once or Twice a Week | 10.0% | 15.0%
Once or Twice a Month | 20.0% | 15.0%
A Few Times a Year | 40.0% | 45.0%
Once a Year or Less | 50.0% | 40.0%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To feel nostalgic</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I accidentally find it doing other things</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To remind myself of the good parts of the relationship</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am cleaning</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I organize objects or files where the item is located</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To celebrate anniversaries or other special occasions</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To remind myself of what to avoid in a relationship</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LOCATION OF STORED RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION

Storage Location

- Physical Location In/Under/Behind
- Physical Displayed
- Digital Computer or Email
- Digital Phone
- Books, Files, Journals

Male  Female

0%  10%  20%  30%  40%  50%  60%
DISCUSSION

• Implications for gender and relationships
• Implications for nostalgic meaning attached to digital communication
• Future research: age, long distance relationships, relationship stage differences, experiences v. preferences