



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

New Ideas in Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/newideapsych



Soulmates, compatibility and intimacy: Allied discursive resources in the struggle for relationship satisfaction in the new millennium

Barri Leslie, Mandy Morgan*

School of Psychology, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 6 December 2009

Keywords:

Discourse analysis
Social change
Soulmates
Intimacy
Compatibility
Love
Environment
Holistic

ABSTRACT

In OECD countries unprecedented numbers of adults are remaining single and childfree during their prime decades of fertility. In order to explicate this phenomenon interview-transcripts from thirteen single women and men, plus texts from Internet dating and information sites, were analyzed for the discursive resources being deployed by this second generation of the post-1960s relationship revolution. The efficacy of romantic love assumptions and practices to produce stable enough relationships is questioned. Discourse analysis revealed new discourses of compatibility, soulmates and intimacy are being constructed in the hope of achieving more fulfilling and stable relationships. An historical survey of paradigm shifts over centuries shows the discourse of romantic love is embedded in the individualistic assumptions of capitalism. The newer discourses of relationship deploy holistic assumptions of connectedness, communication, mutuality, cooperation and responsibility which, we theorize, complement a politico-socioeconomic paradigm shift from capitalist discourse to environmental discourse.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction and outline

Many researchers, both qualitative and quantitative have described an ongoing revolution in heterosexual relationships in Eurocentric countries since the 1960s (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Cooper &

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +64 6 356 9099x2063; fax: +64 6 350 5673.

E-mail address: c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz. (M. Morgan).

URL: <http://psychology.massey.ac.nz/staff/mmorgan.htm>

Sheldon, 2002; Giddens, 1992; Hacker, 2003; Jones, 2005; Sternberg, 1988). The typical indicators of this pervasive social change are: falling marriage and birth rates; an escalation in rates of divorce and cohabitation; a rise in the age of first marriage and growing numbers of childfree singles in their prime years of fertility (Statistics NZ, 2003). Women's increasing access to education, sexual choices and financial independence are identified as significant contributing factors as the trend spreads through Asia and other developing countries (Jones, 2005).

Writing from an historical perspective, other researchers (Israel, 2002; Maley, 2003) describe the 1960s spurt in divorce rates as an extension of a continuum of increasing divorce rates which began to emerge in Eurocentric countries in the late 19th Century. The possibilities for leaving unhappy marriages increased for women as their access to education, political power and financial independence increased during the 19th and 20th Centuries. More controversially other researchers have highlighted the growing dominance of the discourse of *romantic love* during the 19th and 20th Centuries. During this historical time the assumption that one should marry for love, and love alone, rather than for money and security became socially institutionalized (Coontz, 2004, 2005).

However through two centuries of saturation in romantic assumptions, the discourse and its practices have proved to be capricious in producing the 'happy-ever-after' marriages promised to those who 'fall in love' (Willi, 1997). Consequently connections between *romantic love* assumptions and marriage breakdown are being suggested (Lewis, 2003). After explicating the complexity of contributing factors, historian Stephanie Coontz (2004, 2005) concludes that the cumulative effect of the *romantic love* era has been to destabilize the institutions of marriage and family. Therefore the power of those institutions to perform their fundamental tasks of nurturing the physical and psychological wellbeing of the next generation is questioned (Poole & Sceats, 2003; Wallerstein, 2000).

This paper posits that out of the widespread and intense social pain produced from decades of instability in relationships, contemporary women and men are striving through talk and text to reconceptualize their needs, rights and obligations as wives, husbands or partners. In their intentional, goal-directed, inventive efforts to solve their relationship difficulties, new discourses of *intimacy*, *compatibility* and *soulmates* are being constructed. Extreme times produce extreme efforts, therefore we find that the concepts and ideas for the construction of these new discourses are being gathered from a wide range of discursive fields, such as feminism, psychotherapy and Quantum-New Age spirituality.

This paper also acknowledges the Foucauldian idea that discourses of relationship are embedded in and complement the politico-socioeconomic discourses and institutions of their era (Foucault, 1982; Shumway, 2003). Therefore we inquire into what change is occurring politically and socio-economically that complements of the new discourses and institutions of marriage and relationship.

In order to make our case we pursue the following line of argument. First we present a summary of discursive theory as a basis for the later explication of historical and contemporary discourses of relationship. This is followed by a justification of the inclusive approach we employ to incorporating knowledge from both quantitative and qualitative research. Then we describe the methodology of our own qualitative research project. As our findings build on the compelling historical analysis of relationship discourses offered by Shumway (2003), a summary and discussion is provided of the three discourses he identifies: *security*, *romantic love* and *intimacy*. We then describe and discuss our analysis of two newer discourses: *compatibility* and *soulmates*. We emphasize the unexpected findings in our research which challenged us to extend our field of inquiry and theorize new discursive explanations.

2. Discursive theory

Foucault defined a discourse as a set of statements or ideas that construct an object, such as 'the self', 'masculinity', 'love' or 'marriage'. The discourse or set of ideas then becomes the framework within which to explain and justify future action (Ramazanoglu, 1993). The cluster of ideas which form a discourse, are coherent and governed by implicit sets of rules for framing knowledge and what is accepted and spoken of as 'truth'. These rules and frames are variable according to the particular historical time and social context (Foucault, 1982).

Discursive or social constructionist theory posits that in historical periods of turbulent social change (such as the post-1960 decades) an active, intentional, process of struggle is occurring in talk and text,

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات