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The Obligated Romantic

Valentine's Day, the holiday dedicated to couples and love and everything else corresponding with the term romance. Red roses, teddy bears, chocolate, lingerie, candles, jewelry ... these examples are only a very short amount of gifts that can be given on the date, February 14th. However, why even go out of your way to buy your significant other a gift on this particular day? Obvious answers are: because I want to, because he/she will love it, I just have to, and so on and so forth. What are these motivations and will they affect a relationship later on?

In the article "The role of social power relations in gift giving on Valentine's Day," written by Robert Rugimbana, a Deputy Director at the Newcastle Graduate School of Business; Brett Donahay, a previous Bachelor of Business student; Christopher Neal, also previously a Bachelor of Business student; and Michael Polonsky, the Melbourne Airport Chair in Marketing at Victoria University, provides insight on why people buy gifts for Valentine's Day. They hypothesized that "in general, males are more often gift givers and females are more often gift recipients" (65) and the motive for males to buy gifts were three particular groups: "obligation, self interest, and altruism" (66) to group together the reasons why gift giving is so prevalent directly on February 14th, particularly in young males between the ages of 18 and 25. They used research on 61 men, in-depth interviewing on various questions regarding gift giving, on Valentine's Day. In conclusion of their work, the main "motive for young males to give gifts on

Valentine's Day was obligation" (69) but "all three motives examined were all found to exist" (70) in their study.

Published in the journal, *Social Behavior and Personality*, the article titled "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Valentines" and written by Shirley Matile Ogletree, the Department of Psychology at Southwest Texas State University, questioned the behaviors and thoughts about "the most romantic day of the year" (129), Valentine's Day. She conducted her first study off of 93 women and 59 men where they had to complete an oral questionnaire on their thoughts based off of importance, romantic quality, and their views of Valentine's Day; women thought higher of the holiday than did men. Her second study was based off of 43 men and 52 women in a beginning psychology class, where they were to complete a Bem Sex Role Inventory, for a comparison on high/low femininity and how many gifts were given without expecting one back. Ogletree found in her second study that men expected something back when women didn't. The results from Ogletree's studies are that "women in both studies were significantly more likely to receive valentines than men" (133). In conclusion to her research, she reflects on the information she's collected, proving her theories correct. But something not expected is that women were likely to give valentines away too, not just men.

Both of these articles spring a singular idea: negative effects of these motivations if the receiver were to find out and what else to do instead of giving gifts. Although, the Rugimbana et al. and Ogletree's research on the emotions and motivations of gift giving on Valentine's Day are well structured and persuasive, I think the effect of that said gift giving can be detrimental to a relationship instead of beneficial because of anxiety and obligation for buying the gift/s.

The first thing I've noticed for both of these papers is that they are generally leaning towards a sociological base: sociologists, human behaviorists, and psychologists. Although, the

particular style and the ways they are written is broad enough for a public audience. This can lead to negative output because the readers only are granted one angle of vision on the dilemma: from a scientist.

Both Rugimbana et al. and Ogletree believe that men are usually the gift givers and women are the receivers of those gifts. Rugimbana highlights the study with narrowing down motivations for gift giving while Ogletree focuses mainly on the women's results. However, their views on this study are slightly different. They both research a fairly similar topic "gift giving" on Valentine's Day, but both stretch out their research by different motives and sociological habits. Rugimbana et al. has more of a sociological point of view on the Valentine's Day subject when Shirley Ogletree is focused more on the psychological view. Shirley Ogletree studies the behaviors and beliefs about Valentine's Day for each gender, male and female, while Rugimbana et al. studies the sociological standards and motivations—based off of society—about Valentine's Day in their separate articles. Ogletree, through her research, finds that women are also a significant gift giver as well but Robert Rugimbana suggests that men are obligated, self-interested, and altruistic about Valentine's Day gifts. Rugimbana et al. doesn't mention women in their research for the motivations, cutting out a significant portion of information that could improve or gender neutralize their research. Ogletree, instead, notes that women also contribute to the statistic of gift giving on Valentine's Day, not just men.

After reading Ogletree's article, the most prevalent use of language is geared towards a college-aged audience. Ogletree uses phrases such as "a day to celebrate love and lovers" (129), "since men traditionally woo women" (130), and even the title of her article, "How do I love thee?" (129) is a direct quote from a poem by Elizabeth Barret Browning, confessing her love for acclaimed poet, Robert Browning. These statements and influential poets can really hook

romanced women into reading this article and see the connection between levels of importance of Valentine's Day and gender. I believe she uses this widespread, emotional *Pathos* text to highlight her studies on this romantic day and try to convince us that Valentine's Day is not just a holiday for romance and couples, it's for friends and families as well. She uses tables of data to represent the men and women who took her questionnaire and, after studying, the tables provide satisfactory answers to Ogletree's hypotheses that "women would receive more valentines" (130) than men and that "individuals who were more feminine ... would have more romantic attitudes and behaviors" (130) towards the "love and lovers" (129) holiday on February 14th of every year.

Between Ogletree and Rugimbana et al., only Rugimbana et al. highlights the actual motivations for gift giving in men. Ogletree neglects this idea and only studies who gives, not particularly why they give. For example, the study used in the Rugimbana et al. article gathered information on college-aged men by holding interviews for thirty minutes. However, Ogletree gathered information by providing questionnaires to college students at an undisclosed Texas university, where they had to provide answers for Valentine's Day by attitudes, expectations of valentines, and one particular question about purposefully wearing red on the occasion. The Rugimbana et al. study had a total of 61 respondents for their research while Ogletree provided results based off of 284 respondents, nearly five times that of Rugimbana et al. Ogletree's number of participants boosts her *Ethos* compared to Rugimbana et al. because it provides a wider range of students and a higher population, making her results more credible and widespread.

However, Rugimbana et al. has a more in depth research technique, which boosts their appeal to *Logos* and *Ethos*. Interview techniques and focus groups are highly more accurate in

the supplying of data for interviews because, for example, the researcher is able to ask more specific questions if the researcher feels that the answer the subject gave was inconclusive to the study, thus supplying more accurate and straightforward data. Surveys are less likely to be reliable in the gathering of information compared to interviews and focus groups because they are more open-ended questions and, if confused, the subject may not understand the question, thus giving false data. This technique can also boost *Ethos* for Rugimbana et al. because it shows that their information gathering was much more personal and more in-depth than Ogletree's questionnaire surveys.

In the Rugimbana et al. article, obligated gifts can be interpreted as detrimental to a relationship instead of strengthening because most of the men give gifts out of obligation rather than self-interest or altruism. Wouldn't this effect of obligation cause the relationship just to be a burden for one of them, possibly both parties? Are they obligated to be in a relationship with this person? Obligation is more out of society's expectations and the individual's benefit than of the emotions and feelings of their significant other, the one whom their affection is supposed to be most dealt to. This belief can be interpreted as selfish or narcissistic and can possibly decline the relationship's strength, especially when obligation doesn't attach interest and care for the other.

In light of what I've thought and read about in the Rugimbana et al. and Ogletree articles, I've come to realize a few things. First off is that Valentine's Day isn't only for couples and significant others; this holiday is also for families and friends as well. As simple as that sounds and as obvious as that is, it's easy to forget when gifts on Valentine's Day are particularly geared towards couples and their intimacy. I would find it highly strange if a child gave their mother lingerie on Valentine's Day. That's left for the boy/girlfriends. Family and friends are worth celebrating and they deserve just as much recognition as a boyfriend or a girlfriend does.

My second reasoning is that Valentine's Day can always benefit a relationship. There is nothing particularly wrong with the motivations behind giving a gift: the receiver is always happy to get one regardless. Gifts are a strong emotional meaning that expresses something that some cannot describe verbally. Even if gifts aren't handed out on the occasion, there are other ways to properly suggest love for someone. A surprising dinner at a nice restaurant, a night spent together watching movies (among other things) or simply talking, can always strengthen a relationship. Material things only mean so much to the receiver.

And that last realization leads me to this: Valentine's Day doesn't truly need to exist. To have one single day out of 364 to dedicate your love to someone isn't highly justified. Some might suggest that Valentine's Day is, in fact, the *only* day to celebrate because it's the only one like it for 12 months, but shouldn't every day be a celebration or recognition for the ones you love? I know I would appreciate random nights out and celebratory festivities all throughout the year and not just one particular day in a cold February. If Valentine's Day wasn't celebrated there wouldn't be a need for anxiety or stress to buy gifts on a specific date, there wouldn't be a need to match society's hype level for the holiday, and the three motivations in the Rugimbana et al. study wouldn't matter. Having unplanned or surprising little shows of affection can prove to the other that you're thinking of them often, that you appreciate all they do, and that you, simply, care for them. The three motivations for gift giving will always remain regardless of the holiday but I figure obligation can dissipate very much if holidays, such as this, weren't celebrated. If there wasn't a romantic holiday dedicated to giving chocolates or teddy bears, there wouldn't be an obligation to buy such things.

Valentine's Day is celebrated all across the world. The holiday holds different values and ideas for each and every person across the planet, and gifts for that occasion will be sold in a

widespread area from grocery stores to gas stations to restaurants. These motivations might not mean anything to the gift receiver but, regardless, gift giving shouldn't be an obligation to prove someone's love based off of the society expectation. The difficulty lies in truly saying/showing someone your love or care for them with your most honest output, not buying their heart over for the whole price of \$10 (more or less) in the form of a stuffed animal or fattening sweets. What else can be done without feeling obligated? *Is there anything?*

Works Cited

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