



Love, Affection and Intimacy in Marriage of Young People in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This article illuminates the transition to companionate marriage of young couples in respect to love, romance and intimacy, while at the same time identifying conflicts over the realisation of emotional labour in marital practices. What do young Vietnamese men and women expect regarding intimacy in their relationships? What do they do in order to realise their emotional desires, and how does this influence their spousal relationships? Based on in-depth interviews with 30 couples aged 30 and below in one urban area and one rural area in Vietnam, the article shows the differences between men and women in their desire for love and mutual disclosure, and their involvement in emotion work. There is likely a power imbalance in gender relations because women have to adjust their demands and accommodate their husbands' lack involvement in emotion work. Women show a greater desire for love and intimacy, and engage in more emotion work, but their desires are not always satisfied in daily practice because men seem to be conservative, suppress their feelings and emotions, and hide their inner thoughts. These issues are not likely to adversely affect the young couples' long-term marital sustainability, but they do influence their marital quality because they cause dissatisfaction and disagreements.

KEYWORDS

Vietnam; marriage; gender relations; emotion work; gender inequality; young couples

Introduction

Together with the rise of individualism and detraditionalisation, marriage in the West is said to have transformed from institutional marriage, regulated by social norms, regulations and public opinion, to companionate marriage (Amato, 2004; Burgess et al., 1963; Cherlin, 2004). Companionate marriage is defined as a concept of marriage linked to freedom of choice based on romantic love, emotional closeness and expressions of attachment and intimacy that emphasise individual fulfilment and satisfaction in marriage (Amato, 2004; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Hatfield et al., 2008; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). Nowadays, companionate marriage is considered to have become a global concept and is associated with modernity and egalitarian gender relations (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). Similar changes are supposed to be occurring in marriage and family in non-Western countries, particularly evident in the transition from arranged marriage to love

matches and with respect to increased gender equality (Ahearn, 2001; Straughan, 2009; Thornton et al., 2012). Economic, social and political changes have led to transformations in the perceptions and expectations about marriage and gender roles of Vietnamese people, especially young people who have lived and grown up during a period of significant change in Vietnam. Young people have experienced a clash between the reality of a market-oriented society that has formed their identity and value perceptions, and the expectations of older generations (Phuong, 2007, p. 288). They are aware of the potential costs and benefits of less traditional partnerships (Williams, 2009) and they are also more open-minded to alternatives to marriage than older generations (Minh & Hong, 2011). Nevertheless, young people continue to consider marriage an essential institution for maintaining the family form, which creates a commitment between the two individuals and protects the extended family members from the reputational damage that might result from remaining unmarried, a status still considered to be abnormal (Earl, 2014; Vu, 2018). This article's investigation of the emotion work of young couples will contribute to broadening knowledge about gender relations and emotion work in Vietnam. According to Hochschild (1983, p. 7), emotional labour "requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others", and it "calls for a coordination of mind and feelings". The article examines a dimension of gender relations in marriages of young couples in Vietnam – the emotional relation, or what Connell (1987) terms "the structure of cathexis". It further illuminates the transition to companionate marriage with respect to love, romance and intimacy, while identifying conflicts over the realisation of emotional labour in marital practices. It also reflects similarities and differences between rural and urban couples in the division of emotional work. In particular, the article addresses the following questions: What do young Vietnamese men and women expect regarding intimacy in their relationships? What do they do in order to realise their emotional desires and how does this influence their spousal relationship? The analysis explores the differences between men and women in their discussions about the roles of love and mutual disclosure from the perspective of desires and marital practices.

The research results suggest that men and women have different patterns of individual adjustment and negotiation of emotional relations in their marriages, which reflect unequal gender relations. Young men and women in Vietnam face a dilemma. On the one hand, because of their exposure to Western ideas of love, neoliberalism and economic transformation, they expect to experience love and intimacy. Nevertheless, on the other hand, due to the influence of Confucian ethics that clearly define the normative roles of a husband and wife, men are restricted in their capacity to show love through expressions of mutual disclosure. Instead, they are encouraged to focus on their role as the breadwinner and on protecting their wife from worries and difficulties. Although women desire expressions of love and mutual disclosure, they need to make adjustments in order to adapt to their husbands, reflecting their subordination to men. These gendered practices of emotional labour lead to the continuation of gender inequality in the emotional relations and, accordingly, the marriages of young couples in Vietnam.

Cultural and Theoretical Background

Marriage patterns in Vietnam follow models that have been imported from the both the West and China. Confucianism was imported from China during the period of Chinese domination from 111 BC to AD 938 and was the dominant political and social model from the 15th century to the 19th century. Confucian ethics came to inform Vietnamese ideas on hierarchy, gender relations and the family (Barbieri & Belanger, 2009), including expectations that families in Vietnam are male-centred and that women's status is subordinate to that of the men in the family (Hy, 2003). Women did not, for instance, have the right to choose their own husband in a Confucian society (Rydstrom, 2003). The Vietnamese interpretation of Confucian ideas and practices did not, however, retain the rigidity of the original, but took on a unique form in response to the specific historical and cultural contexts of Vietnam. Thus, although men are more highly valued than women in Vietnam and in Confucianism, women occupy more important positions in Vietnamese culture than in traditional Chinese society, a reality that is reflected in Vietnam's strong tradition of worshipping the Mother Goddess. Even during the heyday of Confucianism in Vietnam, *Luat Hong Duc* [Hong Duc Law promulgated under the Le dynasty at the end of the 15th century] had terms protecting the rights of women, including the right to initiate divorce under certain circumstances, which was completely at variance with traditional Chinese practice.

During the period of French colonialism (the 1920s), Vietnam was exposed to Western notions of love and romance (Tran, 2018). Then, after 1945, when Vietnam's socialist state was established under the leadership of the Communist Party, there was an effort to improve gender equality in Vietnam. The first constitution of Vietnam (in 1946) recognised equality between men and women. In 1959, the Marriage and Family Law ended polygamy and arranged marriage. After Doi Moi (the Reform) in the mid-1980s, Vietnam had greater social and cultural exchanges with the West, which increased contact with contemporary gender values and ideas of marriage (Vu, 2018) and exposure to Western romantic ideals (Tran, 2018). According to Earl (2014), in post-reform Vietnam, neo-Confucian patriarchy remains a salient layer in the cultural landscape; however, traditional idealised femininity and heterosexual family life are also challenged by "new" ways of living. Grosse (2015) indicates the limitation of focussing on only cultural heritage (Confucianism which preserves gender-conservative relationships) or political direction (Communism with more focus on gender-equal norms, practices and institutions). Instead, he suggests considering the influences of the socioeconomic aspects of modernisation on gender values and relations in Vietnam.

Although the government made considerable efforts to improve gender equality in the family (e.g. introducing the Gender Equality Law in 2007, and the Domestic Violence Prevention Law in 2008), marriage in Vietnam is still challenged by gender inequality. Many studies have found inequality between men and women in Vietnam in many aspects of marital life such as the division of domestic labour, money management and decision making (Huy, 2004; Knodel et al., 2005; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism et al., 2008; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2010; Thanh, 2009). This gender inequality is underpinned by strong assumptions about gender, family and nation. For example, Shohet (2017) argues that "love" in Vietnam entwines relations of care, romance and affection that have survived shifting social and political contexts (under Confucian,

colonial, socialist and marketising regimes), positioning women as the moral bedrock of the nation. A happy and harmonious family is the domestic ideal in Vietnam. Women, as the moral bedrock, are expected to play an important role in maintaining that happiness and harmony (Rydstrom, 2003). Women do this by demonstrating their *tinh cam* (sentiments, emotions, feelings), which embraces the capacities of “self-denial”, “endurance”, “holding oneself back” and “respect”. Women are expected to practise *tinh cam* in order to support their husbands (Horton & Rydstrom, 2011, pp. 549–556). Similarly, research by Earl (2014) indicates that maintaining the stability and harmony of the family has become women’s responsibility. According to Earl (2014), life in post-reform Vietnam has resulted in changes to gendered norms in which a woman’s love is now expected to be divided between conjugal love (i.e. maintaining her husband’s sexual interest) and maternal love (i.e. producing and raising children). Romantic love plays a role in imposing these responsibilities on women even as it seems to promise their liberation. On the one hand, women are expected to serve their man as an expression of love and the maintenance of family harmony; on the other hand, they are “liberated” to the extent that they can have free choice regarding their marriage partner based on romantic love (Earl, 2014).

Connell (1987), in her work on gender and power, outlines three key dimensions of a “structural model” of gender relations, including emotional relations. Even though both husbands and wives invest in their marriages as relationships that are structured “around one person’s emotional attachment to another” (Connell, 1987, p. 112), this does not necessarily make for equal relations. The complexity of close emotional relationships includes expressions of affection, love and sexual attraction. Nevertheless, the emotional reciprocity that contributes to the solidarity of heterosexual couples is an “erotic reciprocity” founded in a system of “hegemonic heterosexuality [that] is based on unequal exchange”. In other words, a man and a woman in a heterosexual relationship are not only different but also unequal (Connell, 1987, p. 113). Connell (1987, p. 109) suggests that the main axis of patriarchal power structures is “the general connection of authority with masculinity”. Connell considers forms of “hegemonic masculinity” as the dominance of men over women and she labelled women’s subordination to men “emphasized femininity” (1987, pp. 186–187). Emphasised femininity is characterised by compliance with female subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. Connell understands this power imbalance as an expression of patriarchy, clarified as structures of power in which men are positioned as the dominant sex class and women as the subordinate group (Connell, 2002, p. 58). In the Vietnamese context, gender inequality is reinforced both by Confucian cultural models of the family and by romantic love models of the couple relationship. As an investigation of the gender relation in marriage of young Vietnamese couples, this article focusses on emotional relations (called “structure of cathexis”) as a dimension of the gender structure (see Connell, 1987; 2002; 2009).

Sample and Methodology

To provide a comprehensive reflection of gender relations in the marriages of young couples, this research was conducted in a rural area (in Thai Binh province) and an urban area (in Hanoi city). Both areas are in the Red River Delta, located in the north of

Vietnam, which is considered to maintain a stronger commitment to East Asian social and cultural patterns and the continued predominance of Confucian culture than the south of Vietnam (Jayakody & Huy, 2009). Hanoi is the most developed city in the Red River Delta, where industrial development is evident, but the economic mainstay of Thai Binh province is agriculture.

Thirty couples (15 urban couples and 15 rural couples) were selected from the lists of local couples aged 30 or under that were provided by marriage registrars at the two research locations. The researcher contacted the couples in order to ask for the agreement of both wives and husbands to participate in the research. Sixty separate in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 wives and 30 husbands, which allowed them to talk about their marital expectations and satisfaction without being influenced by the presence of their spouse. The average length of marriage was 2.9 years for the urban couples and 3.4 years for the rural couples. The average number of years of courtship of the urban couples and rural couples was 2.6 and 2.2 respectively. In terms of occupational status, 28 of the 30 urban participants were in full-time paid employment, and 24 of the 30 rural

Description of the Sample

	Hanoi		Thai Binh	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average age	28.6	26.8	27.9	26.1
Average age at marriage	25.7	23.8	24.5	22.8
Average number of years of courtship	2.6		2.2	
Average number of years of marriage	2.9		3.3	

participants were employed or self-employed. There were six single-income couples (two in Hanoi and four in Thai Binh) in which wives performed home duties. Pseudonyms are used in this article to ensure the anonymity of respondents.

Love: Expectations and Expressions

Love appears to have become an important motivator for marriage across not only Western countries (Allan & Crow, 2001; Wiik et al., 2010) but also many Asian countries, such as Singapore and Japan (Straughan, 2009; Tokuhiko, 2010). According to some scholars, this is an indication that Western family beliefs and values are influencing countries outside the West (Jayakody et al., 2012, p. 10). Thornton et al. (2012, p. 20) identify changes in non-Western marriages, including shifts from arranged marriage to love matches. Indeed, Quah (2008, p. 14), in her study on families in Asia, indicates generational changes in which senior Asian generations usually regard love as a Western notion and believe that love “is either constructed day by day over a lifetime or replaced by a sense of responsibility and obligation”. Educated young people, by contrast, have increasingly begun to make their own choice of spouse, with love as a decisive motivation for their choice. The study by Tran (2018) on romantic love in Vietnam indicates that romance formation in Vietnam is influenced by exposure to Western ideas of love and

romance, as well as economic transformation, which results in new forms of desire, and association with neoliberalism.

According to Giddens (1992), romantic love in modernity is associated with freedom and self-realisation. Tran's (2018) study indicates that romantic love contributes to the construction of Vietnamese modernity such that people now expect romantic love, which emphasises personal compatibility through emotional intimacy. Consistent with Tran's study reflecting young Vietnamese people's emphasis on choosing a spouse who satisfies both customary marital roles and the need for emotional fulfilment (Tran, 2018, p. 516), all of the couples in my study stated that they had married their spouse for love. Many drew on an ideology of egalitarian and companionate relationships to further claim that love, affection and mutual disclosure were the bedrock of their marriage. Nevertheless, consistent with Connell (1987), an imbalance in the emotional dimension of their relationship is evident in this research. The following discussion explores how young couples retained love after marrying, reflecting the gap between the expectations and realities of love in marriage.

Jamieson (1998, p. 10) suggests that love is usually associated with caring (for example, watching over, looking after, practically assisting or feeling attachment and fondness), and that without care, it is unlikely that mutual open intimacy will be sustained. In my research, love associated with caring sometimes reflects gender differences. While many young women in Vietnam consider marriage an essential institution for emotionally and legally binding couples and ensuring security for the future (see also Vu, 2018), they also expect love and romance in their marriage. Women talked about expressing their love both by looking after their husband and by being romantic. As Quynh (a housewife in Hanoi), married for two years, said: "I care about him. I cook the dishes he likes or give him surprise gifts. Giving presents makes us feel as romantic as unmarried couples, and it means that we still care about each other". Women devoted time and concern to family and expected to receive affection expressed in romantic gestures. On the other hand, men talked about retaining and expressing their love for family in their own way, by supporting their family financially, which restricted their investment in emotional labour. Men expressed their love through practical caring that was evident in striving to earn money as the breadwinner of the family instead of romantic gestures.

Retaining romantic love was mentioned most often by the urban couples, but how they did so varied. For example, Ms Thu and Mr Tung, a couple in Hanoi, had been married for two years. Thu was a university lecturer, and Tung was an engineer. They regularly contacted each other throughout the working day just to express their love and care for each other. Thu gave examples:

We usually phone or chat with each other when we have free time at work. He thinks it's a way to express our care for each other. When he arrives at work, he sends me a message just to ask what I have had for breakfast.

When asked about her perception of marriage, Thu said it was an essential base for raising children. Nevertheless, she also expected to receive expressions of love from her husband. While Thu considered these affectionate expressions important, she also acknowledged that they are often difficult to maintain. She recalled:

Recently, my husband has been very busy and sometimes stressed with work, and he has become less romantic . . . I told him about how he has changed. He agreed that he might be worrying too much about his work and that he must make adjustments.

Thu's husband acknowledged these changes in his expression of care; nevertheless, he also emphasised the external causes. The pressure from his new job consumed his attention, while reducing his expressions of love for his wife. In emphasising this cause, the couple also retained traditional models of gender roles, respecting the husband's role as the breadwinner. Tung focussed on his role in providing financial support to his family since the birth of their baby, which came into direct conflict with the requirement to express love and affection. Nevertheless, Thu and Tung seem to think this has been resolved. Thu said that Tung has consciously tried to be more loving and affectionate again, while Tung mentioned his attempts to be more affectionate again once his work situation improved. Thu has possibly done most of the adjusting here, by accepting Tung's reduced attention as normal and sympathising with his situation. As Tung explained:

After the wedding, it was a wonderful time because we spent most of our time thinking about each other. However, since we had a baby, earning money has become the main responsibility and priority . . . Since my wife complained about the change in me, I have tried to spend more time with the family.

Their example reflects gender differences in expressions of love and romance. Men, considered the financial backbone of the family, usually talk about expressing love for their wife by earning money for the family or helping their wife to do housework or hard work, and talk less about their involvement in emotion work.

Gender values and relations in Vietnam are influenced not only by Confucianism and Communism but also by aspects of modernisation such as urbanisation, rising living standards and technical advancement (Grosse, 2015). These might change Vietnamese people's expectations, including those about the expression of love. Together with an improvement in economic conditions, gifting now seems to have become popular and important in Vietnam. Couples usually give their partner gifts on special days such as Valentine's Day and Women's Day. Young people considered gifting an expression of love and romance. Nevertheless, this is sometimes restricted by economic constraints, particularly in the rural area. For example, Mr Hiep (a motorbike repairer in Thai Binh), who has been married for a year, considered a good marriage to be one in which the wife and husband sympathise with each other and take care of their children and family together, and a good husband to be one who is faithful and takes care of his family. While Hiep appeared to fulfil these expectations, he did not consider himself a good husband because he could not give his wife any gifts on special days. Since gifting on special days has become popular in Vietnam, it has placed an additional burden on relational maintenance. Hiep recognised the necessity of gifting but could not respond well to this expectation because of financial constraints, as he was the only money earner in the family. The social pressures that respect a husband's role as breadwinner encourage men to focus more on providing financial support for the family than on fulfilling romantic desire through gifting. Hiep said:

Actually, I'm not satisfied with the way I show love to her. I think lack of money influences this. Sometimes I want to give her some gifts but I can't because I don't have much money. We need money for the essential needs of the family.

Similarly, another rural respondent – Ms Thuy, in a single-earner marriage – reported that they needed to spend money on basic needs such as caring for their children instead of gifting, even though she would like to do this, because of their economic situation.

The Gap between Expectations and Realities of Love

The participants in this study all emphasised the importance of love and romance, but there were gender differences in their discussions of marital satisfaction. When men expressed dissatisfaction in their marriage, it was usually related to insufficient income or their wife's behaviour towards them or their extended family. None of them expressed dissatisfaction about sustaining love or romance. Conversely, women expected to receive love and emotional expressions from their spouse. Emotional fulfilment significantly influenced women's satisfaction with their spouse and marriage. Consistent with Hall and Adams's (2011) research suggesting that a gap between expectations and reality can increase marital dissatisfaction, this study found that differences between expectations and practices of affection influenced the satisfaction of women. While men seemed to be satisfied with what they had, women were not. Women's experiences seemed to be more diverse and complex. As suggested by Grosse (2015), apart from Confucianism and Communism, modernisation influences gender values in Vietnam. Exposure to Western cultural values in relation to marriage and gender roles means that young women tend to increasingly demand expressions of romantic love instead of only conjugal love for maintaining their husband's sexual interest (see also Earl, 2014). Some wives in this research retained their expectations of romance from before their marriage and felt disappointed when these were not met after marrying. This was most common among women who were in the first years of marriage, and could be because during this time, some women were shocked when their emotional expectations of marriage differed considerably from the reality. Ms Thanh, a woman in Hanoi who had been married for two years, said: "I like to receive flowers from my husband, but he seldom does it. He isn't as romantic as I expected, and sometimes I feel sorry for myself about this".

Some other women, also in the first two years of marriage, made similar comments. Ms Xuyen (a grocery seller in Thai Binh) complained that her husband was less romantic, saying:

People are usually sentimental and use sweet words when they are in love [dating]. However, now I find we aren't as emotional and romantic as before marriage, and I feel disappointed. I complained to him, but it hasn't really improved.

Similarly, Ms Xinh (a housewife in Hanoi) talked about being shocked by their boring life after marriage, saying that:

When we were in love, we were very romantic, but after getting married we weren't as romantic as we had been before, so I was shocked. I was disappointed when everything was

the same day after day . . . He does everything, such as cooking, washing and he cares about me and our daughter. However, I wish that sometimes he would surprise me by saying or doing something romantic.

By contrast, women who had been married for longer periods of time seemed to have adjusted their expectations, accepting fewer expressions of affection in their marriage. Ms Minh (a female lecturer at a university in Hanoi), married for five years, said:

Women are usually lost in daydreams. I thought I would have a lover who would always be romantic and care for and pamper his partner. After getting married, I realised that time has made everything change, but I've accepted it, because I know that I myself have also had no time to take care of my husband and I've had to find other ways of caring for him, because of time limitations and because I need time to look after the children and family.

Similarly, Ms Thuy (a housewife in Thai Binh), married for five years, talked about her adjustment. Her husband was the only income earner in the family because she looked after their twin sons. Like some other women, Thuy admitted liking romantic gifts such as flowers, but she said "it's better not to buy flowers" because of their limited income. She felt that the practical concerns of everyday life had become their priority and affected their expressions of love and romance.

Goffman (1987, p. 54) suggests that individuals make adjustments based on the ideals of masculinity or femininity, and he asserts that beliefs about gender – that is, about masculinity and femininity – are associated with actual gender behaviour. Many young Vietnamese wives in this research subordinated their personal desire for love and romance and adapted to their husbands. This is not simply women's powerlessness, but also reflects the influences of emphasised femininity.

Building Intimacy in Marriage

In his account of the transformation of intimacy, Giddens (1992) argues for the recent emergence of a new form of relationship termed the "pure relationship", which relies on "mutual disclosure". Jamieson (1998) considers love, caring and sharing to be dimensions of intimacy. She defines this "disclosing intimacy" as "a process of two or more people mutually sustaining deep knowing and understanding, through talking and listening, sharing thoughts, showing feelings" (Jamieson, 1998, p. 158). Recent studies confirm that there seems to be increasing respect for mutual disclosure in intimate relationships, in which partners emphasise the sharing of inner thoughts and feelings with one another (Smith & Huston, 2004) and emotional communication (Mahoney & Martin, 2009).

Gender differences in emotion work have been suggested by many researchers. Hochschild (1983) recognises the participation of both men and women in emotion work, but not in the same way. Men and women also place different degrees of importance on emotion work, with women typically involved in better and more frequent management of their expression of feelings than men (see also Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Minnotte et al., 2007; Schoenfeld et al., 2012). Mackey and O'Brien's study (1995) in the US suggests that, throughout the course of marriage, men are less comfortable than women in talking about their inner thoughts and feelings. One explanation for this is that the instrumental role is more strongly

associated with masculinity, whereas the expressive role is linked more closely to femininity (Hanlon, 2012). Similar to the “hegemonic masculinity” suggested by Connell (1987), Hanlon (2012, p. 1) adds that masculinity is associated with power, aggression and resilience. Robinson and Hockey (2011, p. 144) similarly argue in their study in East Yorkshire that:

Men learn to control their emotions so as not to show vulnerability, and many men “perform” masculinity to hide any inner turmoil they may be facing, from other people. Their masculinity may be, then, all they have as a way of claiming self-esteem.

Although it is seen as a common feature of masculinity, the fact that husbands tended not to share their inner thoughts and feelings was sometimes a source of disappointment for their wives, especially for women in their early years of marriage (Huston, 2009; Smith & Huston, 2004).

Consistent with findings in many countries around the world, there were differences between Vietnamese men and women in the sharing of inner thoughts and feelings. Women particularly valued the sharing of thoughts and feelings. This is also seen by women as one criterion for a good marriage and a good spouse. Ms Tam (a hairdresser in Thai Binh), for example, said: “Ah, a good husband should share happiness and sadness with the wife. He encourages her spirit and mind”. Ms Nga, a university lecturer in Hanoi, also recalled her ideas of a good husband before marrying, saying that:

I had plenty of ideas about my ideal life partner before marrying. I was a romantic person, so maybe what I imagined was impractical. I thought the couple should love and share with each other for the rest of their lives. I hoped that my husband and I would share and talk with each other about everything until the end of our lives.

Women in both urban and rural areas also tended to report more involvement than men in emotion work, particularly in expressing feelings, emotions and thoughts to their spouse. Nevertheless, many women felt dissatisfied with the lack of emotional engagement by their husbands. For example, Ms Lan, a hairdresser in Thai Binh, has been married for a year. She expressed her dissatisfaction with her husband when she said that:

Sometimes I want to share my thoughts with him but he is rarely interested. He was so interested in watching films that he seemed not to worry about my thoughts and feelings ... He also seldom shared his thoughts. Sometimes I asked him, but he didn't tell me.

Although women acknowledged the love that their spouse devoted to them, they were still upset when that love was not expressed in the specific actions they were expecting. Lan added:

Sometimes I was sad but he just recognised that I was sad instead of understanding the reason for it. When I was pregnant, I felt tired from morning sickness and I hoped that he would say something to encourage me and console me, but he didn't. I know he loves me, but I don't know why he doesn't show his concern for me.

On the other hand, men provided various explanations for why they shared less than their partners. This was usually attributed to their personal characteristics. Women who had been married for many years said that they understood and knew how to accept or adapt to their husband's characteristics. Their familiarity with their husband's

characteristics kept these wives from feeling excessively disappointed with their husbands, though they would still have preferred mutual disclosure. The following case studies illustrate this, showing how men's characteristics are used to explain their limited sharing of thoughts and feelings with their wives, and how their wives deal with this.

The first example is Ms Tuyet and Mr Vuong in Hanoi, who have been married for three years. Tuyet worked for the local authority and Vuong worked as an accountant. Vuong recognised that he shared fewer emotions and thoughts with his wife than she did with him. He said that this resulted from his personal characteristics that he found difficult to change:

I rarely share my thoughts, except for important problems. She demanded that we talk, but actually I am not interested. When I come home, after dinner I sometimes went to sleep quickly so there was no time for her to talk with me. She complained about this, but actually I couldn't change. Perhaps it has been my lifestyle and personal characteristic for such a long time that it's hard to change.

Vuong's wife had come to accept and understand this after three years of living with him, though she remained unhappy. She found a way to adapt, saying that:

I think every woman would like to hear sweet words and share thoughts with her husband . . . I expected that a husband would want to understand his wife's thinking, but actually my husband can't do so. He doesn't care about emotional expressions and doesn't know how to encourage me. This made me very unhappy because I felt he wasn't concerned about me . . . However, then I told myself that I accepted him as my husband so I should accept all of his strengths as well as his limitations.

Another couple in Hanoi, Mr Quoc and Ms Minh, share a similar experience. Quoc (who works as an engineer) recognised that he didn't share much, even though he acknowledged that it was important for spouses to share their emotions and thoughts. He was aware that men are expected to do this less than women. Quoc said:

I think sharing between spouses decides 80 per cent of their marital happiness, because understanding and sympathy make their life easier . . . My wife usually shares her innermost thoughts and feelings with me, but I do it very little. I think men usually do it less than women. There are many worries in life and I think it's better to keep them to myself rather than let my wife know about them and worry.

It appears that men do emotion work in their own way by hiding their feelings, thinking that they are protecting their wives from worries. The gender differences in mutual disclosure are connected to gender role ideology. Quoc's explanation, that he shares less to avoid worrying his wife, is part of a model of masculinity in which a man's role is identified as protecting women. During individual interviews, several men revealed a similar interpretation of their behaviour – not to share their thoughts with their wife, to protect her from worries. It seems that normative pressure restricted men's expression of their feelings. Some men in this research considered the husband to be the captain of a boat who protected his family from storms. They therefore tried to endure difficulties on their own to protect their wives from worries by hiding their feelings and inner thoughts. Mr Phuc (a designer in Hanoi) provided an example:

My wife shared everything with me but I just shared with her about 70 per cent of what I thought while I didn't tell her about the other 30 per cent, which could be upsetting because I think it's unnecessary to tell her about them.

The women who had been married for many years (such as Ms Tuyet and Ms Minh) seemed to have become familiar with their husbands' characteristics and expressed sympathy towards them. Yet many of those in the first two years of marriage were not so understanding. Some wives recognised that the lack of sharing of thoughts and feelings resulted from their husbands' characteristics, rather than from a lack of love for their wives, but they were still less accepting of this and sometimes talked about being sad that their husbands did not share more. The case of Ms Trinh (who works as a receptionist in Hanoi), married for nearly two years, is one example. She said:

My husband seldom expresses his emotions. I understood that it was his nature that he didn't want to show his emotions, but sometimes I asked him why he didn't share his thoughts and feelings with me. When [we] spouses can't share with each other, it makes me feel sad.

Trinh's husband, Huy (a photographer), admitted he shared less with her, and explained that this was his nature. He said: "I hardly ever show my emotions. I know my wife wants me to, but I haven't changed ... Maybe I am peculiar and just do things in the way I want to".

It seems that it is a typical feature for men to suppress their feelings, which makes it hard for them to be open with their wives. Another couple in Hanoi – Ms Thanh (a nurse) and Mr Trung (a government official), married for about two years – had marked problems relating to differences in their opinions about the sharing of thoughts. Maybe Western ideas of love and intimacy influenced Thanh's desire for more intimacy and sharing with her husband. By contrast, her husband wanted to share less. Thanh said:

At the beginning, I usually shared everything with him, even my problems at work ... I shared more with him than he did with me. He knew this, but he said that he had other ways of sharing. For example, he told me he would talk to me about work when he had achieved something, but he didn't want to tell me about the difficulties in the process to achieve it. However, I wanted him to share everything with me, regardless of whether it was a good or bad thing, but he said he would worry about difficulties and try to solve them by himself and my duty was to worry about the family.

Thanh's account also shows the influence of a masculine ideology in focussing on the role of husbands as enduring difficult problems on their own and not worrying their wives. Yet, in an individual interview with her husband Trung, he seemed to perceive their sharing in a different way. While Thanh emphasised mutual disclosure and complete sharing, Trung consciously selected what should be talked about with his wife. He dismissed what his wife had to say as he thought it was trivial and said he was sometimes uninterested in or unable to understand her work problems. As a result, he did not want to be bothered by her work stories, since he considered them unimportant. He also did not talk about his own work except to report on some of his achievements. He said:

I think we should select what we share with our spouse. She told me about everything at her workplace, but I didn't understand about her workplace and I found her stories trivial.

Conversely, I seldom talked with her about my work. I just wanted to share with her when I achieved a particular result.

Although some couples experienced disagreement and dissatisfaction as a result of a lack of interest in mutual disclosure by a spouse (commonly the husband), a few couples made an explicit effort to improve the sharing between them, particularly those married for several years, who recognised how mutual disclosure could positively affect their marriage. Mr Trong (the operator of a door workshop in Thai Binh), married for six years, talked about their spousal life:

We share both happiness and sadness with each other. After dinner, we have time together and we talk to each other. So, we can understand each other better, such as our characteristics, lifestyles or personal matters.

His wife, Thuong (a housewife), agreed, saying: “Actually, we share everything, even telling each other about the money that one of us has borrowed. When I have any issue, I usually tell him about my thoughts or worries and we discuss it”. Another couple in Thai Binh, Ms Diep (a farmer) and Mr Chu (a mason), also shared their thoughts and feelings during their four-year marriage. Diep said: “When I have sorrows that I can’t tell anybody, I might share them with him. He understands me and gives me advice or encourages me to overcome it. We can then understand and love each other more”. Her husband added that sharing strengthened their relationship because “it makes us closer and helps us understand each other better” (Mr Chu).

Mutual disclosure was usually prioritised by the female rather than the male participants, but there were exceptions. The case of Mr Cuong (a lawyer) and Ms Lien (a secretary), married for two years in Hanoi, is one such example. At the start of their marriage, Lien was not familiar with sharing her thoughts and feelings with her husband. Lien said that her personality prevented her from self-disclosure,

I hardly ever let other people know my thoughts and feelings. It is my personality. This isn’t good, because sometimes my husband doesn’t understand why I look unhappy. If I was upset but stayed silent and didn’t talk to him, it would influence our relationship because he would feel uncomfortable about it. However, I have gradually changed.

Unlike most men, Cuong shared even minor issues with his wife, with the aim of promoting closeness between them. Cuong said:

Since we fell in love, I have talked with her about everything every day, even about simple things. This seems to be simple, but actually it is essential in a marriage. Sometimes, one might feel tired from work or have something unexpected restricting one from sharing with one’s spouse, which might create a distance between you . . . I share with her every day so she can understand my thoughts, concerns and feelings or even the changes in me. I tell her about everything in my daily life.

Cuong had complained to his wife that she did not share her thoughts and feelings as much as he did. Lien reported that she deliberately changed in order to avoid misunderstandings with her husband. She then felt that the increased sharing with her husband positively influenced their marriage. She said:

He told me about this [her not sharing her thoughts], and then I changed . . . Now I share nearly everything with him and I find we understand much more about each other . . . I think

sharing with each other is very important. Without this, we couldn't have so much understanding and respect for each other.

Studies indicate that men have less emotional participation in marriage than women (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993) and women tend to have to adapt to men's preferences for expressing love (Schoenfeld et al., 2012). My research found that women and men invest in their marriages in various ways, and this is reflected in an imbalance of power between men and women in doing emotion work. Despite the government's efforts in introducing many laws and policies, gender equality still seems to be a challenge in Vietnam, especially in the domestic sphere. Women perform caring and sharing with their husbands as the woman's expected normative role. It seems that women have experienced a struggle. On the one hand, they expect and express romantic love and intimacy as linked to individualism and modernity (Shohet, 2017). On the other hand, they subscribe to narratives of the ideal woman as self-sacrificing. Women adapt to their husbands by adjusting their emotional expectations and learning to accept their husband's lower levels of disclosure. When one husband in the study was dissatisfied with his wife's inability to share her thoughts and feelings, the wife usually soon changed and increased her self-disclosure, but men seem to have less emotional participation in their spousal relationships. The pressure of normative roles on husbands sometimes restricted their thought sharing. Given the husband's role as breadwinner, men have to focus more on supporting their family financially than on expressing love and participating in mutual disclosure. There seems to be an unbalanced power relationship between the sexes in terms of their adjustment to modern expectations of intimacy and romance. Even when women showed dissatisfaction with their husband's refusal to share their thoughts and feelings, men did not report any major changes in their emotion work.

Conclusion

This article has reflected on the emotional structure of gender relations between young spouses. Young people now tend to emphasise building a companionate marriage – defined as a marital ideal and practice typically based on romantic love, individual choice of spouse and emotional closeness (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). They not only emphasised love as the basis of marriage, but also respected the open expression of love, emotions and thoughts in marriage. Yet, consistent with some other studies (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Minnotte et al., 2007; Schoenfeld et al., 2012), this research found gender differences in emotional satisfaction and involvement. Many wives in both rural and urban areas reflected a desire for love and romance and mutual disclosure between spouses. They also expressed their love and shared their inner thoughts and feelings with their husbands. Emotional fulfilment significantly influenced women's evaluation of and satisfaction with their husband and marriage. This was particularly marked in the comments of urban women, who were less concerned than rural women with economic well-being. Instead, their satisfaction with their husband's expression of love, romance and caring was the main criterion used by many urban women when evaluating whether their marital expectations were met. On the other hand, men had less involvement in emotion work than women. Men seemed to be influenced by traditional

norms of gender roles. They respected their role as the backbone of the family, focussing on earning money while suppressing their emotions and hiding their inner thoughts.

Women's desires and practices in expressing love and mutual disclosure reflect their transition to the companionate model of marriage. They tend to initiate ideas of companionate marriage and transform it into practical marriage. Many young wives expressed disappointment that their desire for love, romance and mutual disclosure was not fulfilled in their marriage. In accounting for this disappointment, both male and female participants admitted the lesser involvement of husbands in emotion work. Men appear to be more conservative and suppress their feelings, and they seem to prioritise their role as breadwinner over doing emotion work.

Young couples' division of emotion work reveals that there remains a considerable gendered power imbalance in Vietnam. The emotional structure of gender relations between young couples suggests that women seem to have less power. Men provided a variety of explanations for being less involved in emotion work, ranging from personal characteristics to the competing demands of work. Men were clearly reluctant to change their behaviour to better meet the expectations of their wives. For some men, these were legitimate reasons for their reduced involvement in emotion work and their inability to change their behaviour in order to meet their wife's needs. In striking contrast, most of the wives in this study ultimately compromised and adjusted their own demands, in order to accommodate their husband's lack of compromise. Furthermore, many women were observed to have adjusted their thinking over time in order to accommodate their husband's expectations of a wife's behaviour.

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