

Chivalry Is Alive and Well

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DEK: Four hundred years ago, knights in shining armor wooed their wives with chivalry, acting according to a code of respect, loyalty and honor. But what does chivalry mean today? While the term has evolved, its essence — showing kindness, respect and consideration — remains ingrained in modern dating culture. Maybe the days of men writing sonnets to their betrothed are behind us, but rest assured, values associated with chivalry are not dead.

"Chivalry is things like being polite and kind and respectful and honorable," said Professor Victoria Orrego Dunleavy, who teaches an intrapersonal communication course at the University of Miami.

"Chivalry is just a way for men to display 'I'm worth your time — I am worthy of you taking me seriously, and I'm a responsible guy,'" said Professor Michael Beatty, who has been teaching romantic relations at UM for eight years.

Through simple acts of kindness or showing a genuine interest, people — regardless of gender or sexual orientation — can demonstrate respect and consideration towards romantic interests to foster positive, meaningful relationships.

"We are still human — whether 100 years ago or now — we are still human, and we still want to preserve connections and act in chivalrous ways to maintain relationships," said Professor Orrego Dunleavy.

"When I hear the word chivalry, I think of medieval times," said Will Carello, a senior majoring in international studies and geography and sustainable development. "I think of men doing things out of respect for women — being gentlemen, holding the door open, putting their coat over puddles."

"Chivalry is a lot less of a financial problem," said Paris Brady, a senior majoring in nursing. "It is more about respect and manners and knowing how to interact with the person you're dating."

Chivalry is subjective — it can mean different things to different people. The most important thing to remember is that perspective is everything.

UM gender studies professor, Caroline Oueslati-Porter, believed chivalry was historically about gallant knights putting certain women on a pedestal to romanticize and adore them.

"Activities of chivalry are activities that men do for women that are very superficial — such as opening a door for a woman because she is a woman," said Oueslati-Porter.

Of chivalry within present-day romantic relationships, Oueslati-Porter expressed concern about equality within power dynamics.

"If Chivalry includes things like men who are dating women being expected to pay for the dates, that can be problematic in terms of power in the relationship — it puts women in a position where they feel like they owe something to the man or the man should have more of a say within the relationship ... chivalry is a manifestation of patriarchy in action," said Oueslati-Porter.

Beatty looks at chivalric practices from a chemical standpoint.

"Things like an email throughout the day or bringing home a rose — those kinds of things generate oxytocin in women to make them bond with the guys, whereas the man is doing those things to have her bond with him," said Beatty.

Beatty said that while oxytocin, the bonding hormone, is generated for women through any act of intimacy, the only reliable means of stimulating oxytocin in men is sex.

"Things that would cause an improvement of oxytocin in women do not work on men — men act in those ways to generate oxytocin in women, not in themselves," said Beatty.

Beatty said people should be cautious, as chivalry can be an opening move.

"What their character is like plays out over time — whether they are responsible, keep their promises, and how they treat other people," said Beatty.

Orrego Dunleavy emphasized the role chivalry plays in maintaining a romantic relationship.

"When we think of chivalry, we think of knights and honor," said Orrego Dunleavy. "Honoring someone is assuring and respecting the person — I see them as synonymous with respecting and honoring your relationship by treating them with kindness."

Looking through the lens of Canary and Stafford's relationship maintenance strategy, Orrego Dunleavy said that when people are happy in a relationship, they want to preserve and maintain the relationship, becoming more mindful of how they communicate to sustain love in that relationship. Orrego Dunleavy said some examples of this include assuring their partner of their faithfulness and loyalty, being supportive of one another's emotions, being open to current and

future directions of the relationship, and willingness to spend time with your partner's friends and family.

Professor Orrego Dunleavy said she also sees love languages as intertwined with respecting and honoring a relationship.

"We can also see this similarity in love languages. When I thought about chivalry in relationships, we can communicate chivalry by showing your partner respect, whether through quality time, physical touch or acts of service," said Orrego Dunleavy.

"To be completely honest, I'm not the best example of chivalry," said Brady. "But I try my best to do simple things like open car doors or get flowers or do things that may not be super expensive but are just good simple gestures."

"Respect is the pillar of a relationship," said Carello. "I always walk curbside, pay, lend my sweatshirt, hold doors open."

"To be honest, chivalry is something I consider once I am dating someone," said Brady. "At a school like UM, I don't think it [chivalry] is at the forefront of people's minds unless they try to take a relationship seriously."

Oueslati-Porter said traditional, chivalrous values may still exist, but they're modernly defined within the terms of hookup culture.

"Hookup culture is not nearly so invested in old-school chivalry; people form relationships around sexual experimentation. There is a lot of sexism in hookup culture, whereas chivalry isn't as important," said Oueslati-Porter.

"The dating culture at UM is not very serious because it is a very superficial dating scene," said Brady. "But that is not an excuse to accept less than your expectations just because other people at UM are in situationships."

"When you're looking at polite behavior, you will not see it in 22-year-old frat boys," said Beatty of hookup culture. "There are exceptions; you may see it in some guys."

Beatty discussed situationships from a biological perspective, saying that women are usually 17 when their prefrontal cortex develops — which spearheads decision-making and awareness of consequences — whereas men can be as old as 25 or 26.

"Men and women have different priorities; women are looking for an upstanding man, and men are looking to get laid," said Beatty.

Even within hookup culture, which strays from traditional relationship dynamics, Oueslati-Porter said that men are often expected to guide the relationship.

"Research says that guy in the hookup is the one who is supposed to make the move and say, 'I think we should see each other more or be exclusive,' and she is supposed to wait," said Oueslati-Porter.

"In many of the long-term relationships I know at UM, which are few and far between, chivalry is something that is stressed a lot, so it does still exist," said Brady.

"If men and women want to be equal and respect each other in relationships, chivalry would be irrelevant because we can all help each other throughout our day-to-day lives by doing things like opening doors regardless of gender," said Oueslati-Porter.

Regardless of relationship status or perspective on chivalry, chivalry boils down to treating the person you're seeing with respect and kindness.