

Gender and Dating Expectations

By

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Literature Review

There are so many different things to worry about before you go out on a date. For a girl, you want to make sure your hair looks great and you are dressed nice. And for a guy, you want to make sure that you look sharp and attractive. Worries, concerns, expectations, excitement; these are all different feelings that one will experience before going out on a date. I want to focus my research project on the different expectations that men and women face in today's dating world.

Expectations are something we all have of each other, from one culture to another, and they also maintain the level of community standards that are in place. So by looking at dating expectations I should also find out the community standards that are in place for this area. It is important to realize that community standards will not always stay in place. When society is in a state of transition, social codes become ambiguous. (Sherwin, Corbett; 1985:259) If Humboldt County is in a state of transition, then I will need to take that into consideration while conducting my research.

A huge problem today is the sexual double standard that exists between men and women dating. So much has changed since the sexual revolution of the 1960's. There are high levels of sexual representations on television, advertisements, and newsprint. Many people are under the impression that there is sexual equality amongst

men and women, but the reality is that not much has changed. Research over the last decade suggests that, despite significant social changes, young women are largely positioned within dominant discourses of heterosexuality that subordinate women's sexuality to that of men. (Cram, Jackson; 2003) That is why there is still a double standard between men and women. The sexual double standard is regulated through the tool of sexual reputation that is the negative labeling of an active, desiring female sexuality and positive labeling of active male sexuality. [(Holland et al., 1996) Cram, Jackson; 2003]]

People learn about sexuality through sexual scripts, and they are taught to us from society. This is an indirect process, there isn't a piece of paper that literally tells us what to do in every sexual situation, but it does lead us down a certain path. With expectations I presume that it will be the same way. "College students probably perceive that dating serves several functions, including recreation, a source of sexual activity, and socialization about heterosexual activity." (Sprecher, McKinney; 1991:8)

Recreation, sexual activity, and socialized heterosexual behaviors are all very important to the dating social structure. These three things are also connected to dating expectations. When two people are coming into a dating relationship there are concerns and expectations that each person will have. By drawing upon past experiences each person will

create new expectations for new dates in the future. This is how dating expectations will change and make society better in the future.

Other research suggests that there is not a double standard in today's dating world. "No evidence was found that men want to marry virgin or less experienced women and women want to marry sexually experienced men." (Sprecher, McKinney; 1991:9) However, the same research shows us that when people are just interested in dating, that there is a double standard. "Males were perceived as most desirable as a date when they engaged in moderate sexual activity, whereas females were perceived as most desirable for a date when they engaged in high sexual activity." (Sprecher, McKinney; 1991:9) This brings up a very interesting point, where men are supposed to be more experienced in a relationship, but when men have too much experience he is looked down upon. Women can fall into the same trap where men want an experienced woman, but not too experienced. So there is a double standard in dating relationships, but not so much so for marriage relationships. Dating double standards play a huge part in dating expectations, because that is the backbone of dating. When men and women have both been socialized to act a certain way this will play into what men and women expect out of each other on a date.

The sexual expectations on men and women have increased over the years. It is now more permissible to have sex on the first date, than

ever. "Comparison of responses in 1963, 1971, and 1978 reveals a significant change toward a liberal direction, with an increasing degree of sexual activity expected within a casual dating relationship." (Sherwin, Corbett; 1985:265) Just to show how far we have come "in 1963, 65% of respondents identify a campus sexual normative pattern limited to 'necking' as appropriate, expected behavior for casual daters." (Sherwin, Corbett; 1985:265) So in 1963, "necking" was expected, in 2004 I can only imagine what the sexual norm will be for campus daters. It is important to keep in mind though, that change is slow. So while most people would assume from looking at the past data, that having sex is standard for a first date, one must realize that change is slow. "By 1978, the selection of necking had diminished to a third of all responses, and the category of light to moderate petting was now the most frequently selected option." (Sherwin, Corbett; 1985:265)

While reviewing the past literature I realized that dating expectations are guidelines, and do not necessarily apply to everyone. People have their own ideas on dating and what is ok to do, and not to do.

Methods Section

The purpose of this study is to find out what makes people choose their dating partners. At first I wanted to look at how double standards play into the partner selection process. I realized that this would be too focused of a topic, so I made my topic a little broader to include what reasons make people choose their dating partners. This data will help me and others understand what makes people choose their dating partners.

I will be using semi-structured interviews to collect data from ten students at Humboldt State University campus. Participants will be selected from a convenience sampling method. Interviews will take place at the convenience of the researcher and the participant. The data will be transcribed and color coded for patterns and themes.

As noted above subjects will be selected from using the convenience sampling method. All of the information received from the subjects will be kept confidential, and will be destroyed 30 days from the end of the Spring 2004 semester.

The benefits of participating in the interview process will be minimal. One may experience satisfaction from being able to talk to someone about dating relationships. Participants may also feel happy about contributing to fellow students at Humboldt State University.

While recalling past dating experiences, participants may recall a traumatic dating situation. In this case, I would direct the student to the

Counseling Services at Humboldt State University. I really don't think this will be a problem, but it is always good to take extra precaution.

Results

After reviewing my transcribed interviews, and re-reading the past literature on gender and dating expectations, I have come up with some main ideas that will serve as a template for the rest of this section. The first one being that Humboldt University is definitely in a state of transition moving away from traditional dating methods to the new form of “hooking up”. Next, I found some evidence of a double-standard in dating, mostly dealing with how men and women pay for dates. Another aspect that was revealed during the interviews was the very non-conservative nature of Humboldt State’s campus. There was also a very high indication of alcohol being needed on romantic evenings as well as other dates. Lastly, and most interesting was how everyone commented on wanting to go out to dinner and have great food while on their date.

As the years go on and times passes by, old rituals go by the wayside. This has lead to men and women being able to live together before marriage, amongst other more egalitarian living arrangements. The old way of dating would involve a man asking a woman out on date. Everything would be very formal where the man would pay for everything, and the woman would be treated to a night out. Nowadays with men and women making much closer to the same amount of money, the first few dates are often paid by men, but out of expectation. One male interviewee said, “... I’ll bring out my credit card cause I feel like I have to

pay, but the person I'm with doesn't know that." And when I asked him whether it matters if he has money or not he responded, "I always feel like I'm expected to pay and then I'll do it anyways even if I don't have any money at all." So the problem here is that the men understand that they are expected to pay for dates even when they don't have money and this will eventually lead to credit problems in the future which could make him a less desirable dating partner.

A very interesting point that I found from my research was how men often were always pulling out their credit cards to pay for things, while women on the other hand had a different view on who pays for things on a date. The men always said that they thought they should pay for a date no matter who asks who out. "Usually I end up paying for everything. I expect to pay for things." Another one of the male interviewees had a stronger view on money and dating, "I go straight for my wallet and I would rather pay for everything". The women though, thought that if the guy asks her out then he should pay, and if she asks him out then she would pay. "Usually whoever asks pays. Yah, that's how it goes, so if he asked me out then he would pay, and if I asked him out then I would pay." One woman knew how to work the system though, "I expect that they will because that's like the American stereotype and they usually do anyways". So men and women both have certain expectations about who pays while on dates, and they don't always line up perfectly.

When social codes become ambiguous society is in a state of transition. So not only are there problems with expectations about who pays for things, but there is also a problem with boundaries for how far sexually people will go on dates. Many of my interviewees said that they don't have set rules for themselves. Only one person mentioned that a dating rule for him was, "I usually don't have sex on the first date that's for sure." This question of what rules do you have for yourself shows the true beliefs of an individual. With that in mind I was really surprised that more people didn't have a set of rules of themselves. Everyone in my interviews except the man mentioned above, said that they do what they feel is comfortable, and as long as they trust the other person then they would do whatever would feel comfortable. I would have guessed that people would have had more set boundaries for their lives, especially in today's world, where it is very easy to contract a sexually transmitted disease.

It is also important to note, that all of my interviewees said that they break their own rules all the time. So, I thought it was interesting that they would say that because only one person from my sample said he had rules for himself in the first place. When I asked one of the male interviewees about how often he breaks his own rules he said, "Always!" The women had pretty much the same response as the males. "I don't have any rules. Like if something is going to happen you're going to kiss somebody or whatever you're going to do you just decide then. Rules are

dumb!" While interviewing my subjects I made sure to give them an example of what rules people may have. The most common example that I gave was about kissing on the first date. So there must have been another factor at hand for people to say they don't have any rules, but yet they break them all the time. This was very puzzling to me, and may have been a limitation to my research.

"Hooking up" with someone is the new trend of the future. The best definition that I could find was from Christian Century (8-15-01, Vol. 118 Issue 23,p5) "it can involve a range of sexual activities, from kissing to intercourse; is usually engaged in when both parties are drinking or drunk; may or may not be repeated with the same partner; and is understood by both parties to involve no emotional commitment or even affection".

While hooking up with someone is generally a college trend, it is also a nationwide phenomenon and reaches across many age groups. Though both people know that hooking up involves no emotional attachment, there will be a problem the next time the two see each other. Both often wonder how the other person will react and what lies ahead for the two of them. These things create very ambiguous situation for both parties involved and always create awkward situations for both people involved.

"I don't know, dating is such a weird thing. I don't think I've actually dated before," said one of my female interviewees. This is another example of the unknown dating cycle these days, people

sometimes don't even know if they are out on a date or not. Almost all of my interviewees made a comment about not having really dated in a long time. But really it's more of not knowing that you are out on date, I think. Another one of my female interviewees mentioned this new dating method, "Well, usually I don't go, I guess I do the friend thing first, test the waters, like "Hey you wanna go to the beach?" or something like that." So instead of actually someone out on a formal date, it's more of a friend thing first. Most of the men mentioned that they like to get to know a girl, that he thinks is cute, by hanging out with a group of friends first, then try and get to know her a little bit, before asking her out for some one on one time. "I've haven't been asked out on too many dates... It wasn't really a date date, but we kind of had feelings and then the person, uhh the lady, then she just asked to hang out by ourselves," said one of the male interviewees. I found this to be one of the better ways that males and females can have a successful dating relationship. Rather than hooking up with someone, which may or may not lead to any lasting relationship, you get to enjoy the companionship of friends first. Then if anything more is going to happen, the male or female can take the lead and ask the other person out on a date without the group of friends.

Alcohol is a drug that can take an edge of a person; it also works well for the first stages of dating. Alcohol makes it easier for people to talk to each other because it lowers your inhibitions. Both the males and

females that I interviewed expressed the need for alcohol during a date. When asked about the perfect night out, one female responded, "Maybe go out and get drinks, and go out to dinner, and get some more drinks, and talk". The males had the same general response with one male saying he would like, "Italian food with some wine". Now I know that alcohol can make it a little easier to talk to someone, but I wonder if it gives the person a false impression. If two people are drinking and getting to know each other, the alcohol will eventually take over, and then the two people start saying things that aren't really in their nature. This is a problem in the dating circle where alcohol leads to people hooking up and then breaking up. It is not a healthy cycle, and it doesn't lead to anything.

At first I was really surprised by how many people said they wanted to go out to dinner or make food at home while on a date. It took me a while to figure out that dinner serves as a great time to be able to talk to someone and figure out what their interests are. Both men and women said that eating great food would be part of their romantic evening out. Now, I was always taught that you take a girl out to dinner and movie. "I don't really want to go out to a movie cause you cant talk at all," said one of the male interviewees. He also went on to say, "You're just sitting there watching a movie. You can't really talk to the person." I think at Humboldt State, the students have realized that movies aren't that great

to go to when you are first dating, because you can't talk while the movie is playing.

As mentioned in the literature review section of this paper, sexual scripts play a huge role in today's dating world. And even though dating is becoming an old term, the sexual scripts still play a part in hooking up. Sexual scripts serve as guidelines for college students to follow. When I asked one of the males about some common misunderstandings that he has encountered he said this very interesting thing, "When I've been intimate or sexual with a girl, they usually think its going to be more serious and more committed then I'm expecting". And this is the problem with hooking up the guy got what he wanted, and left the woman wanting more. Hooking up with people can really mess with peoples emotions.

Limitations

While conducting my research I noticed a few things that didn't seem to go as right you I wanted them to. One of those things was my interview guide, which was not bad, but I think there was some room for improvement too. One of the questions asked if the person had any rules or guidelines for dating. Almost everyone said that they didn't any rules. On the follow up question I asked how often they break their own rules, and everyone said "All the time". So there must have been something going on here that I wasn't able to grasp.

Another limit to my research was the location of my sample size. Everyone that I interviewed had been going to school here for a few years, and all, except for one, was white. I also wish that I could have had more diversity in my sample size. But since Arcata is a city filled with predominantly Caucasian people, it represents my sample size as well.

Lastly, I think that by being able to interview more people I could have found some more themes to write about in my paper. I was only able to interview ten students during this semester, but I think if I had enough time to interview one-hundred students, I could have had a more in depth research project. But in a semester's time I was able to get a good idea of what people think about gender and dating expectations.

Annotated Bibliography

Buysse, Ann and William Ickes. Communication Patterns in Laboratory Discussions of Safer Sex Dating Versus Nondating Partners. Journal of Sex Research; May 1999, Vol. 36 Issue 2, p121, 14p

This journal had good information on how men and women talk about sex. It also included some information on the communication patterns between men and women when they are in a dating.

Christian Century. Courting Confusion. Vol. 118, Issue 23, p5, 2p

This paper has a great definition of "hooking up", the new popular form a dating relationships.

Cram, Fiona and Susan M. Jackson. Disrupting the Sexual Double Standard: Young Women's talk about Heterosexuality. British Journal of Social Psychology; March 2003, Vol. 42, Issue 1, p113, 15 p

This journal article helped me to really see what the sexual double standard is. There are some great interviews from women talking about the double standard and how it affects their lives.

Crawford, Mary and Danielle Popp. Sexual Double Standards: A Review and Methodological Critique of Two Decades of Research. Journal of Sex Research, February 2003, Vol. 40, Issue 1, p13, 14p

By using my definition of 'hooking up' combined with information from this article I had a full understanding of how the sexual double standards affect men and women, and how those play out in everyday life.

Harding David J. and Christopher Jencks. Changing Attitudes toward Premarital Sex: Cohort, Period, and Aging Effects. Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 67, p221-226

This article had information on possible reasons why things have since the 1960's. Other than that, there is not a lot of info that I can use for my paper.

Herold, Edwards S. and Robin R. Milhausen. Does the Sexual Double Standard Still Exist? Perceptions of University Women. Journal of Sex Research, November 1999, Vol. 36, Issue 4, p361, 8p

There is a lot of great background information in this article as to how people have tried to explain sexual double standards in the past.

Kalof, Linda. Stereotyped Evaluative Judgments and Female Attractiveness. Gender Issues, Spring 1999, Vol. 17, Issue 2, p68, 15p

This article was evaluating men's perceptions of women from photographs, not the most helpful article, but interesting to read.

Ramsbey, Thomas W. and John P. Roche. Premarital Sexuality: A Five-Year Follow-Up Study of Attitudes and Behavior by Dating Stage. Adolescence, Spring 1993, Vol. 28, Issue 109, p67, 14p

I thought this article would be very pertinent to my topic, but it deals more with AIDS and other STDs.

Schulz, Barbara and George W. Bohrnstedt, Edgar F. Borgatta, and Robert R. Evans. Explaining Premarital Sexual Intercourse among College Students: A Causal Model. Social Forces, September 1977, Vol. 56, Issue 1

A model made to separate how men and women engage in premarital sex.

Sherwin, Robert and Sherry Corbett. Campus Sexual Norms and Dating Relationships: A Trend Analysis. The Journal of Sex Research, August 1985, Vol. 21, Issue 3, pp 258-274

This was a very helpful article showing the dating norms, and how they have changed over the years.

Sprecher, Susan. Premarital Sexual Standards for Different Categories of Individuals.

The Journal of Sex Research, May 1989, Vol. 26, Issue 2, pp232-248

This article took a look at the different sexual standards between men and women, and also took a look at age. Methods used were surveys.

Sprecher, Susan and Kathleen McKinney, Robert Walsh, Carrie Anderson. A Revision of the Reiss Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale. Journal of Marriage and the Family, August 1988, Vol. 50, p 821-828

These people made revisions to the Reiss scale. Reiss was the fore father of premarital sexual behavior.

Sprecher, Susan and Kathleen McKinney. The Effect of Current Sexual Behavior on Friendship, Dating, and Marriage Desirability. Journal of Sex Research, August 1991, Vol. 28, Issue 3, p387, 22p

Great article with information about sexual scripts and how information can get around easily.

Sprecher, Susan and Pamela C. Regan, Kathleen McKinney, Kellye Maxwell, Robert Wazienski. Preferred Level of Sexual Experience in a Date or Mate: The Merger of Two Methodologies. Journal of Sex Research, 1997, Vol. 34, Issue 4, p327, 11p

This article looks at the different levels of sexual experience preferred by men and women in dating versus non-dating relationships.

Williams, John D. and Arthur P. Jacoby. The Effects of Premarital Heterosexual and Homosexual Experience on Dating and Marriage Desirability. Journal of Marriage and the Family, May 1989, Vol. 51, p 489-497

This article took a look at the past sexual behaviors on current relationships. This was also the only article that deals with homosexuals.

