

DATING PATTERNS AMONG A SELECTED
SAMPLE OF STUDENTS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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August, 1966



ABSTRACT

DATING PATTERNS AMONG A SELECTED SAMPLE OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

It was the purpose of this study (1) to attempt clarification of various issues in the area of dating and (2) to test in Canada the findings of American research on dating.

Data were collected in March, 1966, by means of a questionnaire administered to students enrolled in sociology courses at the University of Manitoba. As the sample was chosen on a non-random basis, findings were not generalized to all students at the University of Manitoba.

Twenty-two hypotheses were tested by means of contingency tables. A Chi Square analysis was applied to each test and the five percent level of confidence was selected as the minimum for the determination of significance.

The analysis of data indicated that age of initial dating was not significantly related to the variables of occupational class of head of student's household, educational class of head of student's household, use of language in addition to English in the student's home, and going steady. Age of initial dating was found to be significantly related to frequency of dating for both sexes, to expected age of marriage for females, and to number of persons dated for males.

Dating type was found to be significantly related to frequency of dating for both males and females, and to expected age of marriage for females. Dating frequency was

found to be related to number of persons dated for both sexes and to expected age of marriage for females.

The data also indicated a significant difference between urban and rural males with regard to age of initial dating, and to times lack of material factors interfered with dating, but not with regard to frequency of dating.

It was found that students from the upper social classes tended to restrict their dating to university students more than did students from the lower social classes. No significant difference was found between students from the upper and lower classes with regard to times lack of material factors interfered with dating or with regard to dating adjustment.

Dating adjustment was found to be related to dating frequency for both sexes, and to age of initial dating and type of dating for females.

The data indicated that fraternity members dated more frequently than non-members. There was no difference between sorority members and non-members regarding frequency of dating.

Finally, it was found that a greater proportion of Jewish than of Gentile students mentioned religion as a factor interfering with dating.

As the results of the analyses of data indicated that for females in four instances, and for males in one instance, three variables were significantly interrelated, additional analyses were performed in which the relationship

of two variables was compared while controlling the effect of the third related variable. When this was done, it was found that among females, seven relationships were being influenced by a third variable, while among males, two relationships were influenced by a third variable.

Edward Stephen Herold

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have assisted me during the preparation of this thesis. Thanks goes out to the University of Manitoba Computer Centre staff whose co-operation was at all times courteously extended. Grateful acknowledgement also goes out to Don Peterson, who, voluntarily, and with able vigour, prepared programs for computer use. As a direct result of Don's aid, use of the computer was made feasible, resulting in a broadening of the scope of the study, as well as the saving of valuable time. Acknowledgement also goes out to Mrs. Pat Houska for the professional concern given by her in the typing of the manuscript.

Special acknowledgement is also given to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Manitoba for providing the funds which enabled me to complete this thesis during the summer of 1966. Without this financial assistance, the task of preparing the thesis would have been rendered more arduous and it would have taken a considerably longer length of time to complete.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. W. Morrison, Dr. W. J. Mayer-Oakes, and especially my advisor, Dr. Douglas Rennie, who freely gave of his time in making innumerable contributions. His frank observations and kindly counsel resulted in thesis writing being an enjoyable and profitable learning experience.

Finally, my personal appreciation goes out to Diane Gudgeon who assisted with coding operations and who provided an impatient, but helpful spur, throughout the entire course of this research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Objective of Study

It is the purpose of this study to examine certain patterns of dating among students enrolled in sociology courses at the University of Manitoba in an attempt: (1) to clarify various issues in the area of dating, and (2) to test in Canada the findings of American research on dating. No attempt will be made to explore the changes in dating that may have occurred over time.

Outline of Study

In the following chapter, the review of literature will deal with convergences, as well as divergences, in the findings of sociological research on dating. Issues requiring additional study will be emphasized.

Chapter III will deal with hypotheses arising from issues presented in the review of literature and the definition of concepts used in this study.

Chapter IV will deal with the methodology of this study including: questionnaire, measurement of variables, sample, and statistical techniques.

The general and dating characteristics of the sample will be presented in chapter V.

Chapter VI will deal with the analysis of findings. The hypotheses presented in chapter III and additional hypotheses which arose during the course of the study will

be analyzed here.

In chapter VII, control for interrelated variables will be made in order to see whether or not certain relationships are being influenced by other variables.

A qualitative dimension will be added to the study in chapter VIII, where an analysis of students' comments in reply to open-ended questions will be made.

A summary of the study will be presented in chapter IX followed by suggestions for further research in chapter X.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A study of the literature indicates that most investigations of dating are concerned with the influences on dating choices. The data may be grouped into four schools of thought from the work of five major sociologists: Waller, Burgess and Locke, Lowrie, and Burchinal.

Waller

Waller's essay on rating and dating has greatly influenced sociological conceptions of dating and courtship.¹ In his conceptualization, dating and courtship are separate activities governed by different norms and engaged in for different purposes, although courtship may emerge from dating. Waller regarded dating as a competitive game in which the primary objective of young people was not to build meaningful relationships but to exploit or to use the dating partner for personal benefit. This exploitative element which makes dating a competitive game of strategies, was found to be extremely prevalent among the dating pairs Waller studied at Pennsylvania State College in the late 1930's. Waller discovered that students tend to rate one another according to such criteria as physical appearance, dancing ability, access to an automobile, popularity with the

1

W. Waller, "The Rating and Dating Complex," American Sociological Review, 2, 1937, pp. 727-734.

opposite sex, clique membership, and having a "good line". On the basis of these ratings some persons were considered to be class A daters, while others not faring so well were considered to be class B, C, or D daters. Dating invitations were then extended or withheld, accepted or rejected, with the clear notion of whether or not the particular date would raise or lower one's own prestige.

Largely because of the influence of Waller's views, to a great extent, dating and courtship have remained separate areas of discussion. The rating and dating complex has been ritualistically repeated in marriage and family textbooks, and the dysfunctional elements of the dating system have been emphasized.²

Burgess and Locke

For Burgess and Locke, "dating is...a social engagement of a man and a woman which is for the enjoyment of each other's company and involves no matrimonial commitment."³ To these authors dating provides a basis for determining compatibility before becoming emotionally involved.

Lowrie

Lowrie, in 1951, called attention to the discrepancies which he found between the theories of dating put forth by

²

Margaret E. Donnelly, "Toward a Theory of Courtship," Marriage and Family Living, 25, 1963, pp. 290-293.

³

E. W. Burgess and H. J. Locke, The Family (2nd ed.) (New York: American Book Co., 1960), p. 67.

Waller on one hand and by Burgess and Locke on the other. Data from high school and college students were analyzed by Lowrie to test the validity of Waller's idea of the competitive, exploitative relationship, Burgess and Locke's idea that dating is a distinct yet preliminary phase of courtship, and Lowrie's view that dating is a process whereby youth obtain the training and experience needed for reasonable selection of mates. From his findings, Lowrie concluded that motivation for dating was dominated by educational and socialization aims and that aims associated with the rating and dating complex were negligible.⁴

Critics of Waller

W. M. Smith retested Waller's theory at Penn State University in the 1950's. Responses from students failed to substantiate the rating and dating system as described by Waller and attached greater importance to the personality-companionship factors. However, Smith reported some support for Waller's thesis in the selection of dating partners since dating among fraternity men exhibited status homogamy.⁵ By itself, however, evidence that the fraternity men and sorority women selected dates on an equal basis does not mean that their dating was characterized by the rating and

⁴

S. H. Lowrie, "Dating Theories and Student Responses," American Sociological Review, 16, 1951, pp. 335-340.

⁵

W. M. Smith, Jr., "Rating and Dating: A Restudy," Marriage and Family Living, 14, 1952, pp. 312-316.

dating complex.

Blood, in analyzing data obtained from a random sample of single undergraduate students at the University of Michigan, in 1953, found that popularity was based more on personality items than those derived from Waller's complex. He concluded that if the rating and dating formulation was applicable earlier, it was not typical among the students in his sample.⁶

Yet, an investigation of rating and dating practices based on a random sample of unmarried undergraduate students at Iowa State University, in 1956, found that prestige ratings were established for fraternities, sororities, dormitories, and off-campus housing, and that students dated within their own prestige groups.⁷

Thus, it appears that two points of view are reflected in the research concerning criteria for selecting a mate. One, expressed in Waller's rating-dating theory, suggests that the choice is based on a desire to rate well in the peer group and is made according to prestige symbols as dictated by that group. The other, proposed by critics of Waller, maintains that personality factors and inter-personal relationships influence the choice of a date, not material-

6

R. O. Blood, "A Retest of Waller's Rating Complex," Marriage and Family Living, 17, 1955, pp. 41-47.

7

E. M. Rogers and A. E. Havens, "Prestige Rating and Mate Selection on a College Campus," Marriage and Family Living, 22, 1960, pp. 55-59.

istic or prestige factors. The important determinants are such things as pleasant personality, neat appearance, and consideration for others.

Burchinal states that there need not be any quarrel between these two sets of data. Dating appears to be based on the educational-personality-companionship norms described by Blood, Smith and Lowrie. Yet at the same time, as data reviewed later in this paper will show, dating is generally endogamous with regard to race, religion, status, and other sociological variables.⁸

Dating as a Market System

Goode approaches the field of dating by comparing it with a market system in which the participants attempt to gain the best bargain for themselves. Of course, the participants may not be consciously aware of this process. Parents may see themselves as "seeking the best for their children" or a young man may see himself as "seeking the hand of his beloved". Few clearly see the factors affecting their choice. In our part of the world, legally, any man can marry any woman. In reality, however, as concrete findings indicate, the number of eligibles is in fact highly restricted.⁹

8

Lee G. Burchinal, "The Premarital Dyad & Love Involvement," Handbook of Marriage and the Family, ed. Harold T. Christensen (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), p. 645.

9

William J. Goode, The Family, in Foundations of Modern Sociology Series, ed. Alex Inkles (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 37-38.

Despite today's emphasis on human qualities in social relationships, class factors are influential even at the early dating phase of the mate-selection process. Hollingshead, in Elmtown's Youth, reports that 61 percent of all dates belonged in the same social class and 35 percent in an adjacent social class. When a boy crossed class lines in two out of three times he dated a girl in a lower class; if a girl crossed the lines, in two out of three cases she dated upward. What is important to note here is that those who dated in a higher class were likely to have special qualities. The girls were popular or pretty; the boys were outstanding athletes or high-school leaders.¹⁰ In Goode's language, they were able to gain the advantage of dating with a person in a higher class position by offering in exchange other valued traits. Thus even in the dating phase there is a pattern of bargaining and class influence. Goode concludes:

It is clear that if the sober factors of wealth, occupation, caste, age, or religion do not substitute for love, they nevertheless create the framework within which it operates. Since the marriageable population of the United States is gradually segregated into pools of eligibles with similar social backgrounds, relatively free dating patterns can exist without disrupting the stratification system. In fact, there is not a completely free market in courtship or mate selection. Rather, as in economic exchanges, there are smaller markets in which few are eligible to participate. It is within each such market that considerable freedom exists.¹¹

10

A. B. Hollingshead, Elmtown's Youth (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949), p. 149.

11

Goode, loc. cit.

Thus, in a society such as ours where the courtship system is highly competitive and where many cultural barriers operate to obstruct mate selection opportunities, a sizeable number of individuals are handicapped in the competition for dating partners. In considering the influence of sociocultural factors on dating relationships special emphasis should be given to their influence on non-dating, for amid the reports of dating frequency, it is well to remember that some students do not date at all, or at least not as often as they would like.

Psychological Adjustment to Dating

Melvin J. Williams, in his survey of 1,500 high school students in rural and urban communities in Georgia and Michigan found that well over one-fourth of all high school youths and almost one-third of the girls felt that they were failures in dating and courtship. While about 54 percent of his respondents wanted to date more, a large percentage of these did not know what to do, or how to act on dates; a third of them did not find their dating experiences very satisfactory, and almost one-third of them experienced fear while dating. This, Williams points out, illustrates the frustration which arises as a result of conflicts between what is upheld as valuable (namely popularity and dating) and the ability of youth to make satisfactory adjustment to social pressure.¹²

12

Melvin J. Williams, "Personal & Family Problems of High School Youth and their Bearing Upon Family Education Needs," Social Forces, 27, 1949, pp. 279-285.

Material Possessions

Williams also notes the special emphasis given to the need for material possessions to gain status among the young people in his survey. He states that this need is considered so important that if it is not met, adolescents tend to become upset, often to the point of self-pity, and may seek fulfillment of their needs in anti-social behaviour.¹³

Landis, in his research on teen-age dating, found that among boys the reasons mentioned most often for not dating were lack of money and access to an automobile. In the lower-income class almost two-thirds of the boys felt blocked in dating for lack of a car; in the middle class, half, and in the upper class a little more than a third did. As well, girls considered the boy's lack of a car an important factor in their not dating. Many felt they could not, for status reasons, accept a date unless the boy had a car.¹⁴

Dating Adjustment

Many young people still report considerable anxiety and unhappiness about their dating relationships. A national sample of high school students reported common feelings of inadequacy in dating and feelings of shyness, self-consciousness, or being ill at ease. Furthermore, large percentages of each sex were anxious for the other sex to assume more initiative in making dates.¹⁵

13

Ibid., pp. 281-282.

14

P. H. Landis, "Research on Teen-Age Marriage," Marriage and Family Living, 10, 1960, pp. 90-91.

15

H. T. Christensen, "Dating Behavior As Evaluated By High School Students," American Journal of Sociology, 57, 1952, pp. 580-586.