



Egalitarian Attitudes, Gender Roles, and College Students' Beliefs About Dating Behaviors

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Introduction

Despite shifts in gender roles in recent decades, people still engage in traditional gendered behavior on first dates. In a 1993 study by Rose and Frieze, participants described expectations for a hypothetical date and events that occurred during their most recent first date. Descriptions evidenced strong gender-specific behaviors, with men being proactive (e.g., initiate date, pay for date) and women being reactive (e.g., accept the date, worry about appearance). Gender stereotyped behavior is probably expected on first dates because such behavior makes the date run smoothly, with fewer awkward moments involving uncertainty (Rose & Frieze, 1999).

Since times have changed and gender stereotyped behavior is becoming less prescribed, gender stereotyped dating behavior should have changed too. Numerous studies suggest that first date behaviors have remained consistent since the 1950s (Rose & Frieze, 1999). Even couples who identify as being egalitarian (i.e., both genders have equal power) still engage in traditional dating behaviors at the start of a relationship (Serewicz, & Gale, 2008).

One reason many individuals still follow gender-specific dating behaviors is social norms (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2007). When someone breaks a norm, s/he may be seen as odd and may even be socially sanctioned. People follow norms because they have seen someone act in a particular way during a situation, leading to a certain result. This kind of norm is referred to as descriptive (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). If dating behaviors are descriptive norms that individuals have seen or learned, this would help explain why the behaviors persist. Dating behavior could also be described as an injunctive norm (e.g., gaining approval from others, Cialdini & Trost, 1998). If people on dates act according to gender expectations, they may be more likely to be accepted. Even egalitarian people may conform to gender expectations so a date will be more normative and perhaps go better than if they had acted in an egalitarian way (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

Another reason individuals may engage in gender stereotyped behavior while dating is potential gains and losses. If one looks at a situation with high gains, there will be more benefits and little cost. This is typically seen as a good decision. On the other hand, there are situations with few benefits and high costs, which would be considered a bad decision (Higgins, 2000). For example, if an individual who is going on a date really wants the relationship to work, he will lose more than he gains if the date does not go well. He might, therefore, engage in gender-specific behavior on the date to make a good impression. In contrast, someone who believes he has nothing to lose if a date is unsuccessful may or may not engage in gender-specific behavior.

Project Overview

The purpose of this study is to investigate how participants' gender and degree of egalitarianism are related to their perceptions of date success when a date involves people engaging in traditionally masculine/feminine behaviors vs. gender neutral behaviors, as well as when the date involves a gain frame vs. loss prevention.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant differences between male and female participants' ratings of date success for dates involving traditional vs. gender neutral behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant differences between individuals with high and low egalitarian scores in terms of their ratings of date success for dates involving traditional vs. gender neutral behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals with a high egalitarian score will give high ratings of date success for dates involving a gain frame and traditional behaviors, and will give low ratings of success for dates involving loss prevention and neutral behaviors.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals with a low egalitarian score will give high ratings of date success for dates involving loss prevention and traditional behaviors, and will give low ratings of success for dates involving a gain frame and neutral behaviors.

Method

Participants

Participants (N = 160) were UW-Eau Claire students who identified as heterosexual and as having dating experience. For the purpose of this study, dating experience was defined as having gone on at least one date. 120 of the participants were women and 40 were men. 35 participants were freshmen, 31 were sophomores, 37 were juniors, and 57 were seniors.

Materials

Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRES) The SRES (King & King, 1993) was developed to measure attitudes toward the equality of women and men. This scale contains 95 items that require judgments about both women assuming nontraditional roles and men assuming nontraditional roles. The response format for each item is a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. A total score is obtained by summing across all items ($\alpha = .97$).

Vignettes and Date Success Items The researchers developed eight vignettes describing a person going on a date. The vignettes differed across three dimensions: female vs. male main character, traditionally masculine/feminine vs. neutral behaviors, and gain frame vs. loss prevention. In terms of gain frame vs. loss prevention, half of the vignettes described an individual who would gain a relationship if the date is successful at a time when a relationship is not necessary, while half of the vignettes described an individual who will lose faith in relationships if the date was not successful. In terms of masculine/feminine vs. neutral behaviors, half of the vignettes contained 80% masculine/feminine behaviors and 20% gender neutral behaviors and half of the vignettes contained 80% gender neutral behaviors and 20% masculine/feminine behaviors. Five pairs of questions designed to measure participants' beliefs about the success of the date followed the vignettes. The response format for the first question in each pair was a 10-point Likert-type scale, with 10 indicating the most success and 1 indicating the least success ($\alpha = .80$, e.g., "How likely do you think it is that this couple will go on a second date?"). The second question in each pair utilized an open-ended response format (e.g., "Why do you think this couple is likely or unlikely to go on a second date?").

Procedure

In the first phase of the study, participants used UW-Eau Claire's Qualtrics system to complete the SRES and provide demographic information. This phase was completed at a time and location selected by participants. For the second phase, participants were asked to come to a classroom on campus and were given a vignette to read. Female participants were given a vignette with a female main character and male participants were given a vignette with a male main character. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four vignettes designated for their gender. After reading the vignette, participants responded to the questions measuring date success. An email address or codename provided by participants was used to match responses from the first and second phases.

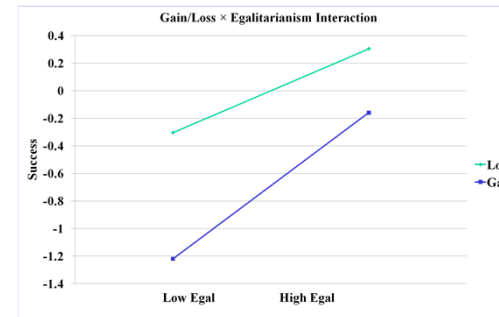
Results

Data were submitted to a multiple regression with gain/loss, traditionally masculine or feminine/gender neutral, gender, and egalitarianism as predictors of date success. The overall model was significant, $\Delta R^2 = .073$, $F(4, 155) = 4.129$, $p < .003$.

- Whether the scenario was traditionally masculine/feminine or gender neutral was not associated with perceptions of date success ($\beta = .094$, *ns*).
- Whether the scenario depicted a potential gain or loss was not associated with perceptions of date success ($\beta = -.016$, *ns*).
- Participant gender was significantly associated with perceptions of date success ($\beta = .325$, $p < .001$). Male participants rated the date as more successful than female participants.
- Egalitarianism was unassociated with date success ($\beta = .086$, *ns*).

A second regression model was tested that included gain/loss, traditionally masculine or feminine/gender neutral, gender, egalitarianism, and all possible two-way interactions as predictors of date success. Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .104$, $F(6, 149) = 1.901$, $p < .084$. Model $R^2 = .161$; $F(10, 159) = 2.85$, $p < .003$.

- A significant interaction between gain/loss framing and egalitarianism emerged ($\beta = -.317$, $p < .017$).
- Low egalitarian participants viewed the loss scenario as more successful than the gain scenario, whereas there was no difference for high egalitarian participants.



Discussion

These findings show that it does not matter if one has high or low egalitarianism with respect to preferences for traditional vs. neutral dating behaviors (Hypothesis 2). This reflects Ganong and Coleman's (1992) findings about dating behavior and egalitarianism, and is similar to Rose and Frieze's (1993) findings about dating. The findings are significant because even though other gender roles have changed, gender roles in dating have not changed due to the fact that individuals want the date to go well.

Another finding within this study was that men tend to rate dates as more successful than women. However, men and women's ratings of date success did not differ as a function of traditional/neutral behaviors (Hypothesis 1).

Hypothesis 3 was not supported, however partial support was found for Hypothesis 4. Although gain or loss framing did not directly affect perceptions of date success, it did interact with egalitarianism. Findings suggest that low egalitarian participants viewed the loss scenario as more successful than the gain scenario, whereas there was no difference for high egalitarian participants. This makes sense because if a participant is low in egalitarianism, he or she will use gender roles to make sure the date runs smoothly, so he or she does not have anything to lose from this situation. It may also be the case that high egalitarians are less likely to devalue dating behaviors that deviate from traditional gender roles.

We had anticipated that participants would view the traditional date as more successful. We believe that the wording of neutral scenarios may have allowed participants to assume that traditional behaviors had been enacted. Furthermore, the scenarios did not convey behaviors that were explicitly non-traditional (e.g., the woman initiates a goodnight kiss).

Further research could be conducted to determine why men tend to evaluate hypothetical dates more favorably than women. This could assist people in understanding why there are different perceptions of successful dates between men and women. Further research could also examine why low egalitarian participants view the loss scenario as more successful and why neither situation has an impact on ratings of date success for individuals who are high in egalitarianism. Perhaps most important to our original hypotheses, future research should construct scenarios that clearly differentiate between traditional and neutral behaviors of the actors.

References & Acknowledgements

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