The Relationship between Gender & Contemporary Dating Behaviors

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Research Problem

- Overall, the lack of traditional dating in college has made many believe that there is an underlying societal problem.
- Students are enrolled in college for a longer period of time than previously for a variety of reasons. Given this additional time in college, many young people postpone traditional dating with the intent of a committed relationship (Ingoldsby, 2004).

Research Question

Are there gender differences in contemporary dating behaviors in a sample of college students?

Hypothesis

We predicted that males would prefer “hooking up” over traditional dating, while females would prefer traditional dating.

Theoretical Framework

- Gender is a socially constructed.
- Societal expectations of men and women that are not genetically determined are known as gender roles.
- This predicts that women would prefer traditional dating over hooking up because they are expected to be more nurturing and caring, and therefore would prefer being faithful to one person (Ingoldsby, 2004).

Literature Review

- Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville (2010) explored the views of U.S. college students at a medium size southeastern university on “hooking up” and dating in many different situations and found positive and negative outcomes linked with each. The overall results of the study found that significantly more women desired traditional dating over “hooking up,” while men desired “hooking up more frequently than dating.”
- Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward (2009) examined men’s sexual experiences outside of a relationship. The study found that a lot of the participants defined things differently than each other so it was hard to find a lot of solid data.
- Eshbaugh & Gute (2008) researched a sample of college females and whether or not they had regrets as a result of hooking up that involved sexual intercourse as well as oral sex. Even though “hookups” are common in the college setting, the results in this study indicated that “hookups” that included sexual intercourse were regretted more than ones that did not include intercourse.
- Orr, Serewicz, & Gale (2007) surveyed students from the Midwest area of the U.S. and had them create a list of activities that they expected on a first date. The findings in the study showed that if a person was asked on a date, rather than initiated the date, the more they believed that sexual activity would take place.
- Bartoli & Clark (2006) reviewed two studies that researched common dating activities. The results of the first study showed that men were not found to have a higher expectation for sexual intercourse than women. The second study found that regardless of what year a student was in college, the expectations for sexual activity was high.

Methods

Participants

- 47 male and 53 female college students from a university in northwestern Wisconsin

Research Design

- Non-random pilot study
- Cross sectional
- Purposive sampling design

Data collection Instrument

- IRB approved, informed by literature & theory, implied consent
- Self-administered surveys with one independent variable, three demographic variables, ten closed ended statements based on a 1-5 Likert Scale, and two open ended statements

Procedure

- Administered questionnaires to male and female college students in general education courses
- Explained implied consent and confidentiality

Data Analysis Plan

- Cleaned & coded surveys
- Analyzed data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Results Summary

We found support for our hypothesis with significant mean differences between the genders with PRF: ps<.01 (PRF: I prefer traditional dating over hooking up).

Significant Differences Between the Genders

- Females preferred traditional dating over “hooking up” more than males.
- Males were more likely than females to participate in sexual intercourse with a person they have known for less than 24 hours.
- Males believed dating was more stressful than “hooking up”.
- Females regret/would regret “hooking up” with someone while in college.
- Females believed “hooking up” lowered one’s self-esteem.

Independent T-Test

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* = significance at p<.01

Implications

- Practitioners
  - For counselors, explore how “hooking up” could affect self-esteem and stability of young adult relationships
  - For educators, gender differences to be taken into consideration:
    - Some males preferred to “hook up” versus dating because they felt traditional dating was more stressful
    - Females felt “hooking up” lowers their self-esteem
    - The idea that a student from “hooking up” was a reason why females preferred to traditionally date

Future Research

- If this survey were to be repeated, we would recommend to ask about relationship status, religious views, morals, and the difference between preference and opportunity.
- If these items were to be addressed, this might decrease the number of “neither agree/disagree” responses in addition to expanding the Likert scale to increase the variance of responses.

Conclusions

- Females prefer traditional dating more than males; however, more males prefer traditional dating than “hooking up”.
- We were surprised that more males in college would prefer to traditionally date than “hooking up” given that in our literature we found that males were more likely to “hook up” in college than traditionally date. Also, we found it interesting that there were many students that have never “hooked up” while in college.
- Contemporary dating practices appear to be much different from more conservative times…college students today continue to value traditional and committed dating relationships.

“I’d rather hook up as to dating. Dating someone takes to much time and is too stressful. Hooking up is satisfying my human urges, takes less time and leaves my options open.” - Male

“I am more of a family guy. I’ve always wanted a family and I believe that traditional dating is the best way to find that someone special.” - Male