3. High School Dating: Implications for Equality

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Though there has been considerable research on dating behaviour and dating choice, most research has used a university sample. This research of 186 high school students showed recreation and socialization to be the prime function of dating. Few students viewed their date as a potential marriage partner. Females were more likely to be dating one person, than males. Daters preferred personality characteristics such as cheerfulness, consideration and affection in their date rather than prestige characteristics. Males were more likely to prefer physical attraction. The date is most likely initiated by, and paid for by the male. The male usually determines how the dating time is spent.

This research shows that student sexual inequity exists in present dating practices. Early socialization, peer pressure, self perception and the societal economic structure mitigate against equality in dating and in marriage. If the norm of equality in marriage is to be achieved, male-female roles and expectations prior to dating must be more equalitarian.

The mate selection process has maintained a prominent part in most family courses and texts. Research and theory on this subject, when compared to some other specific topics of the family, has been substantial. Studies on mate selection date back to the 30's.

Dating is an important element of the mate selection process in modern society. Generally, research has focused upon the more formal dating experience or the dating pattern just prior to marriage. In other instances the research focus has been upon sexual behaviour in dating (Reiss, 1965). Samples are generally biased because they have used university students almost exclusively. In North America there is a dearth of research on dating in its earlier (beginning) stages, that is, in the high school setting.

The purpose of this research is to re-examine variables of the functions of dating, preference in date choice, and sex differences in dating behaviour. In contrast to most dating research this study uses a high school sample. The sample is comprised of 186 subjects in three high schools in three Ontario cities.

Review of the Literature

Winch defines a date as a "social situation (which) may involve entertainment, such as movies, dances and parties, or it may involve merely 'being together'. For the

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duration of the date, which is usually no more than a few hours, the male and female are identified as constituting a pair" (1971: 530). Females are found to date more frequently than males (Rice, 1975: 196). Delora describes the progressive stages in dating as casual dating, steadily, going steady, engaged to be engaged, and engagement (1963). Reiss feels the 70's have a much more unstructured courtship system than previously and therefore the term dating is too stiff and formal (1976: 86). Recreation, sex or even cohabitation may be viewed by daters as the ultimate end of the heterosexual pairing in contemporary society. Marriage may or may not be a goal.

Udry has noted dating pattern changes in the last several decades. Dating now begins at a younger age and generally includes longer term relationships (1971: 110-1) and dating with fewer persons than before the sixties (1971: 115). Heiss has shown that stereotyped sex roles and "posing" decreases as the relationship becomes more intimate (1962).

Skipper and Nass have found that the functions of dating are fourfold: recreation, socialization, status grading and status achievement, and courtship (1966).

The function of the date varies, depending upon the age of the dater, degree of intimacy and expectation. Cameron and Kenkel (1960) found that 70 percent in their college student sample were thinking of marriage. In an earlier study, Crist (1953) found that only 15 percent of high school students considered their date as a possible marriage companion.

Crist also found in his high school sample that dating basically served a socialization function. After several dates, recreation was important in the behaviour. In many cases the first date was initiated through peer pressure. Dating was a means of group status achievement.

Waller's (1937) dating-rating study of university students showed a competitive and prestige orientation in the selection of the date. Daters preferred a member of a fraternity or sorority, who owned a car and was well dressed. Christensen (1950), Smith (1952) and Blood (1955) retested Waller's work but found personality factors such as a sense of humour, considerateness, cheerfulness, and being a good sport as preferred attributes. Harold (1974: 116) found dating partners to be evaluated in the following sequence of criteria; personal appearance, social sophistication and personality. All of these studies, as well as that of Rogers and Hover (1962) indicate a competition or rating in the dating process. Reiss (1963) has shown that this rating is reflected in the dater's social background.

Hansen's more recent work with 354 high school students shows a preference of internal personality characteristics such as cheerfulness, dependability and consideration, particularly among middle class subjects. In establishing a rank order of characteristics preferred in a date as compared to a mate, items did not change, except that qualities such as humour and neatness in appearance shifted down in rank, and honesty shifted upward in mate preference (Hansen, 1977, 135).

The early pattern of sex segregation has an important effect upon sex role development and more specifically, social behaviour for the adolescent. Different outlooks on life between the male and female are generated, to warrant the term of sex subculture (Udry, 1971: 75). The adolescent girl's concept of feminity is on personal attractiveness, facial and anatomical (Udry, 1971: 93). Clothes augment this beauty, and thus the female adolescent's interest in shopping expeditions at an early age. The male's perspective is different. "The female... does not equate attractiveness with sexuality. An attractive girl is pretty, not sensuous. A synonym for attractiveness which