

Teenagers and Dating

Before You Read

Main Idea

Dating, which has undergone many changes over time, serves important social functions for many teenagers.

Reading Focus

1. What are dating and courtship?
2. How did dating emerge as a form of social interaction?
3. What are some of the social functions of dating?
4. How are traditional and contemporary dating patterns different?

Vocabulary

dating
courtship
homogamy

TAKING NOTES

As you read, use a graphic organizer like this one to take notes on dating.

Dating		
Traditional	Contemporary	Functions

A Story of

Star-Crossed Lovers



SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

How did a story of teenage love become one of the greatest romantic tragedies of all time?

In *Romeo and Juliet*, a play by William Shakespeare, two young lovers in Verona, Italy, become victims of a bitter struggle between their rival families. As the feud between the families escalates, Romeo and Juliet fall in love and are secretly married. Eventually, however, they are engulfed by their families' conflict, and in the confusion both Romeo and Juliet commit suicide.

Romeo and Juliet is one of the most famous love stories of all time. It has been performed and retold many times and has influenced and inspired many great works of literature, art, music, film, and drama. In addition, the story's main characters have come to symbolize both young love and "star-crossed lovers" whose relationship, through fate, is doomed from the start.

Why has the story of *Romeo and Juliet* resonated so strongly with people for so long? There are many answers to this question, but one has to do with the nature of love, marriage, parental control, and social norms. *Romeo and Juliet* was written at a time when most young people were not free to choose their spouses. Instead, marriages were arranged by parents, and the idea of romantic love was not a primary concern. By falling in love and secretly marrying, Romeo and Juliet were defying the social customs of their time. ■

The story of Romeo and Juliet has inspired artists, poets, musicians, and writers for hundreds of years.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

continuum a coherent whole characterized as a collection, sequence, or progression

Dating and Courtship

Dating is a social behavior that is familiar to the vast majority of Americans—particularly teenagers. However, like adolescence, dating is not a universal phenomenon. **Dating**, or the meeting of people as a romantic engagement, is most commonly found in societies that allow individuals to choose their own marriage partners. In some societies, marriages are arranged by parents or a go-between who negotiates a formal marriage contract between families.

Because dating is so widespread in the United States today, it might seem as though it has been around forever. Actually, dating is a relatively recent phenomenon. It did not emerge as a form of social interaction between the sexes until after World War I. Moreover, only in the past 60 years have sociologists studied dating.

Prior to the rise of dating in the United States, interaction between young unmarried men and women was restricted to courtship. **Courtship** differs from dating in that courtship's express purpose is marriage. Dating, on the other hand, may eventually lead to marriage. The main purpose of dating is entertainment and amusement, at least in the casual stages. Dating is the means through which most individuals eventually do select their spouses in modern American society. Therefore, it might

be helpful to view the process as a continuum. The continuum begins with casual dating, progresses to steady dating, and then moves on to engagement and, eventually, to marriage. As individuals move along the continuum, the degree of commitment given to the relationship increases. In the modern relationship system, the interaction may stop at any point along the continuum.

The courtship system that existed prior to dating was not this flexible. To understand courtship in modern terms, you might think of it as a point somewhere between steady dating and engagement on the continuum. Courtship was not casual, and roles were very strictly defined. To court a woman, a young man was expected first to meet her parents and ask their permission. It was also expected that the man's intentions would be honorable.

Courtship was usually conducted in the parlor of the woman's home under close supervision. Rarely was a couple left alone. If the relationship continued for some time, marriage was the expected outcome. Young people did have fun together during courtship, but its main purpose was to find a spouse. It was from this strictly structured base that the modern-day system of dating emerged.

Reading Check Compare and Contrast How are dating and courtship similar, and how are they different?

INTERACTIVE *

Courtship and Dating in the United States

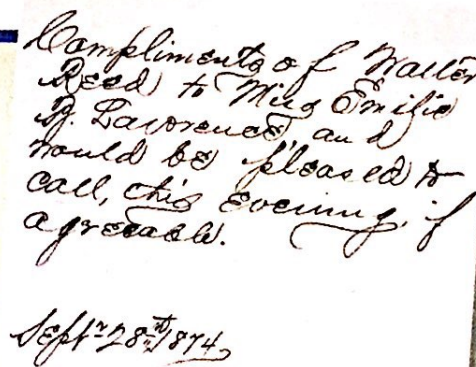
For most of American history, young men and women socialized and selected spouses through courtship. Eventually, however, changing technologies and social patterns led to the decline of courtship and the development of dating. **How have new technologies changed dating in the United States?**

Early History Throughout the early history of the United States, most people were farmers, and men generally did not marry until their father gave them enough land to support a family. As a result, parents controlled the timing and circumstances of marriage.

Formal Courtship In formal courtship, roles were strictly defined, and the ultimate purpose was marriage. Young men had to ask permission to court a young woman. Couples usually met formally in the young woman's home, where they were closely supervised.

The Industrial Revolution

During the Industrial Revolution, many young people left the farms and moved to cities to work. Free from their parents' economic control, young people began to interact more informally. Courtship declined, and dating began to develop.



Compliments of Walter Reed to Miss Emile B. Lawrence, and I would be pleased to call, this evening, if agreeable.

Sept 28th 1874

This letter from 1874 is an example of a request to visit in a formal courtship. It says "Compliments of Walter Reed to Miss Emile B. Lawrence, and would be pleased to call, this evening, if agreeable."

The Emergence of Dating

The rise of industrialization contributed greatly to the development of dating in the United States. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the economy of the United States was based primarily on agriculture. The timing of marriage was determined by the age at which a man acquired the property necessary to support a family. This requirement generally meant that marriage was delayed until a young man's father was willing to transfer a portion of the family land to the son. Because family property was involved, parents exercised considerable control over the marriage choices of their children.

During the Industrial Revolution many people moved away from farms and into the cities. As a result, young adults became less dependent on their parents for economic security. They could seek employment away from the family farm and establish their own households independent of their parents' assistance. This economic freedom reduced parental control over courtship and set the stage for the development of dating.

Free public secondary education also helped to pave the way for dating. By the beginning of the 1900s, the majority of secondary-school students were enrolled in public schools. Unlike many private schools, public

schools were coeducational, which meant that young men and women spent a good portion of their day with one another.

The trend toward dating accelerated in the years after World War I. During this time, more and more Americans acquired telephones and automobiles. These two technological developments gave young people added freedoms. The 1920s also was a period of increased social and political equality for women. More women entered the workforce and took active roles in the community. As a result, the interaction between single adult men and single adult women increased. Under these changed social conditions, dating was a much more practical form of interaction than was the traditional courtship system.

Willard Waller conducted one of the earliest sociological analyses of American dating patterns. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Waller studied the dating habits of students at Pennsylvania State University. Based on his findings, he concluded that casual dating was a form of entertainment that had little to do with mate selection. Status attainment and excitement were at the center of dating. Partners were selected on good looks, nice clothes, and popularity. Thus, dating contrasted sharply with the courtship process, in which the traits of dependability and honesty were most valuable.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

coeducational
the education of students of both sexes at the same institution



Coeducational Public Schools By the early 1900s most high schools were coeducational, which increased social interaction between young men and women through events such as school dances.

The Telephone After World War I, telephone use increased dramatically, which allowed more opportunities for direct, informal contact between young men and women.



The Automobile The automobile increased dating among young people. By the 1950s, young couples commonly went in cars on unsupervised dates to drive-in movie theaters and other events.

Contemporary Dating Today, dating is more diverse than ever before. Young people have a range of new technologies that give them more flexibility to arrange informal meetings in a wide range of places.

Interactive Feature

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Waller also found that dating on the Pennsylvania State campus was almost entirely limited to members of sororities and fraternities. Individuals dated people of similar social rank—members of the “best” fraternities dated members of the “best” sororities. Women ranked potential dates according to status characteristics such as fraternity membership, looks, money, clothes, cars, and dancing ability. The object was to be seen with the “right” people. To be seen with a person of lower status could damage an individual’s social standing on campus.

Later research challenged Waller’s picture of the “rating and dating” game. Status attainment and entertainment are certainly major factors that attract people to casual dating. However, character and personality factors are also important. Many similarities exist between the qualities that someone is looking for in a casual date and what he or she looks for in a marriage partner. For example, status attainment is important both in casual dating and in spouse selection. In fact, status attainment is a function of **homogamy**—the tendency of individuals to marry people with social characteristics similar to their own.

Reading Check Identify Cause and Effect What factors led to the emergence of dating in the United States?

Functions of Dating

Dating serves several important functions in adolescence. First, dating is a form of entertainment. Dating allows young people to get together to simply have fun. This goal is particularly true in the case of casual dating. Second, dating is a mechanism for socialization. It teaches individuals about other people and how to behave in social situations. It also helps individuals to learn appropriate role behaviors and to define their self-concepts. Third, dating fulfills certain basic psychological needs such as conversation, companionship, and understanding. Fourth, dating helps individuals attain status. In societies where individuals choose their own marriage partners, people are judged in part by whom they date. In some societies dating a person who is valued by others can raise one’s own status. Finally, in the later stages of dating, spouse selection becomes an important issue.

All of these functions are not necessarily present at each stage of the dating continuum. If they are present, they may not carry the same weight. For example, in the case of casual dating, entertainment and status attainment may be, as Waller suggested, the most important functions. However, as the level of commitment in a relationship increases, socialization and companionship may be of primary concern.

Reading Check Summarize What are five important functions of dating?

Dating Patterns

Dating patterns, like dating relationships, can be viewed as a continuum. On one end are traditional dating patterns. These are the ones most closely associated with dating behavior prior to the 1960s. On the other end of the continuum are the informal patterns that are characteristic of dating today.

Traditional Dating Patterns Traditional dating patterns can still be found in small towns and rural areas of the United States. However, they are most characteristic of dating during the 1940s and 1950s. Under the traditional dating system, responsibility for arranging a date fell to the man. He was expected to contact his intended dating partner, suggest a time and place for the date, select the activity, and pay for any expenses that arose.

Dating behavior was quite ritualized. Both parties knew what was expected of them because the rules of conduct were well defined by the group to which they belonged. Peer pressure to conform to expected behavior was strong, and behavior that was not in line with group expectations met with sharp disapproval. In most cases, an established weekly timetable for setting up a date existed. If Wednesday was the designated day for arranging Saturday night dates, attempts by young men made later in the week often met with rejection. If a young woman accepted a date late in the week, this action was often seen as an acknowledgment that she was not a young man’s first choice. Dating was so expected and so tied to social status that individuals who did not have dates on prime dating nights were known to hide in their rooms in shame.

The Science of Attraction

Have you ever thought about why you are attracted to someone? Using the latest technology to study the science behind attraction, scientists have discovered that most men and women prefer their partners' to have

symmetrical faces. Other studies have also shown that people tend to be attracted to people who look very similar to themselves. In a study in Scotland, scientists used computer-graphic technology to morph photographs of college students' faces into the opposite sex. However, the students were not aware that they were viewing morphed photos of themselves. After viewing all of the photos of the opposite sex, most students preferred the morphed photos.

In addition to discovering that opposites do not usually attract, scientists have used technology to study other factors in attraction, such as the ability to "smell" genes. In one study, researchers gave t-shirts saturated with male sweat



These photos show a male face morphed into a female face. Scientists use this advanced computer technology to study people's reactions to appearance.

to female participants. The results astounded the researchers—the women preferred the odor of the men who shared genes similar to their own. Today, scientists continue to investigate the role of odors and certain chemicals humans may emit to attract the opposite sex. Science may one day determine whether the eyes or nose really knows who you should be attracted to.

Thinking Critically

Analyze Do you think most celebrities who are considered beautiful by society have faces that are symmetrical?

Technology Focus

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Particularly in the early stages of a relationship, dates revolved around set activities such as going to movies or sporting events. This type of activity often helped to lessen the stress felt by dating partners. For example, if interaction between the partners proved awkward, they could focus their attention on the activity.

If a couple continued to date casually over a period of time, the relationship often developed into one of steady dating. This type of dating carried with it a formal set of expectations and commitments. As a visible symbol of the commitment to "go steady", the young man often gave the young woman his class ring, identification bracelet, or letterman's jacket. Because of the level of commitment involved, steady dating acted as a form of anticipatory socialization for marriage. Even so, steady partners were not necessarily expected to get married. Individuals commonly had several "steadies" at different times throughout their adolescence before settling on a future marriage partner.

Contemporary Dating Patterns Since the 1960s, dating has not followed such formal patterns. Today there is greater opportunity for young men and women to interact with each other informally. There are no set stages of dating. In addition, there is now greater equality in dating, and both sexes actively initiate dates. Similarly, it is acceptable for either partner to pay for the date.

This tendency toward flexibility reveals some important differences between traditional and contemporary dating patterns. Under the traditional dating system, interaction was formal and the relationship centered on the couple. In order to obtain a date, some men thought they needed to have a good "line"—a method of selling themselves to a potential date. Today relationships are based more on friendship and the group than on the couple. Consequently, it is often not necessary to use a "line" to create a first impression. In addition, teens today have more opportunities to communicate with each other through text messaging and e-mailing.

Contemporary society gives teenagers a lot more freedom than they had in the past. These days, it is not unusual for a woman to ask a man out on a date, something that was unthinkable in the past. However, today's teenagers can face enormous emotional stresses because of these freedoms. For example, many young people feel pressure to be cool, to have money, to look good, and to be successful daters. Despite the stress and awkwardness, however, dating is still an important step in adolescent development and socialization, and a way to test the waters of a relationship.

Amish Dating Patterns The traditional dating practices of the Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, offer an interesting counterpoint to dating patterns today. The Amish have lived in the United States for several hundred years but choose to have little to do with society outside of their own community. Most Amish devote themselves to farming and live without electricity, automobiles, appliances, or any other mark of the modern world. The dating activities that many of today's high school students take for granted are practically unknown to Amish teenagers. Amish communities have no cars, shopping malls, theaters, or sports stadiums. Yet practically all Amish youth date, court,

and eventually marry. The Amish begin dating around the age of 16. At this age Amish men customarily receive their own courting buggy, or horse-drawn carriage.

Most opportunities for young Amish men and women to spend time together occur at formal events. These opportunities include picnics, weddings, cornhuskings, and barn raisings. However, the best time for arranging dates comes at Sunday evening "singings." At these events, women and men sit across from each other, sing hymns, and talk. After the singing, they mingle socially. At the end of the evening, some men and women pair off. The men then escort the women home, either by buggy or on foot. If the two begin to go steady, they usually see each other on dates once every one or two weeks. They are usually very discreet about dating and only make a public announcement of their relationship when they decide to marry.

Dating is a serious business for Amish youth because it is done with marriage in mind. They must be very careful in their selection of a spouse, because the Amish faith does not recognize divorce.

Reading Check Analyze How have dating patterns changed in the United States over time?

Online Quiz



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SECTION 2 Assessment

Reviewing Main Ideas and Vocabulary

- 1. Describe** What are some basic features of courtship and dating?
- 2. Sequence** When did dating begin to emerge in the United States?
- 3. Make Generalizations** How do the functions of dating differ as the level of commitment in a relationship increases?
- 4. Compare** How are modern dating patterns similar to traditional dating patterns in the United States?

Thinking Critically

- 5. Develop** How did the Industrial Revolution contribute to the development of dating in the United States? How have more modern technologies, such as the Internet and cell phones, affected dating patterns?

- 6. Support a Position** Which of the functions of dating do you think is the most important? Why?
- 7. Rank** Using your notes on dating and a graphic organizer like the one below, list the basic stages of dating on a continuum from Least Commitment to Most Commitment.

Least Commitment

Most Commitment



FOCUS ON WRITING



- 8. Descriptive** Write two brief paragraphs comparing traditional dating patterns with dating patterns that are common today. Be sure to consider the ritualized nature of traditional patterns and the more informal nature of modern dating.