

Dating Scripts in Among Young Adults in Same-Sex and Other-Sex Relationships

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Abstract

Individuals have different perceptions about what they want out of a relationship. Previous research has shown the use of general master narratives to get a better understanding on how people act and think. This study aims to use master narratives as a way to understand what individuals and society's expectations are in their already formed as well as future relationships. The questionnaire consisted of three open ended questions regarding expectations in relationships and was distributed online through Qualtrics, who pays participants to take their surveys. There were 499 participants between the ages of 18 and 30, all in either same sex or other sex relationships. An analysis of the results was done by coding the answers into 5 general master narratives that people fit into. The most common one was the expectation of having a relationship happen in a certain expected timeline, while the expectations of heteronormativity and quality in a relationship closely followed. Less common but still present was the gender roles expectation and least common was a religious one. The results gave some interesting representations into people's thoughts and feelings around relationships, with many common answers between surveys.

Introduction

Master narratives are powerful, cultural and societal stories that help shape each individual's personal identity (McLean, Schucard, & Syed, 2017). They observe where a person positions themselves in society based on what they deem is important to their personal narrative. The narratives are shared stories and patterns that provide individuals guidance on what is expected and normalized in society.

Society also puts expectations on patterns of romantic relationships. These expectations, scripts or narratives guide normalized patterns of behavior, beliefs and expressions of an individual's sexuality. Results of a study done by Masters, Casey, Wells and Morrison (2013) showed that individuals do indeed act on and believe scripts that are embedded in literature as well as society. On the other hand, when observing homosexual relationships, individuals chose more untraditional, nonnormative practices of their relationship, seeming to shy away from the scripts that society set up for "normal" relationships (Lamont, 2017).

Method

Participants: Our sample consisted of young adults ($N = 499$) ages 18 to 30. 72% were college students. They were predominately white (64%). 53% were women, 47% were men. Approximately half of the participants were in same-sex relationships.

Procedures: Our sample was recruited via the Qualtrics panel platform, where participants had previously provided demographics and were recruited according to our sample criteria. Participants completed informed consent and a questionnaire online.

Method (cont)

Measures: In addition to basic demographic variables, participants responded to three open-ended questions that asked about: 1) expectations they knew about related to sexual and dating relationships; 2) how they fit in with these expectations; and 3) how they did not fit in with these expectations. Participants also completed additional questions not analyzed here.

Analysis: Participants' open-ended responses were read and organized into themes by a team of researchers. The authors used and refined these themes as they reviewed the responses and coded each responses for the presence or absence of each theme. Adequate agreement between coders was reached.

Results

Heterosexuality – 44% of responses

This category included responses described expectations to find an other-sex partner. Participants often referenced society or individuals, such as relatives or friends, requiring or expecting an other sex partner. This also included responses where a same-sex partner was described as not desirable or outside of expectations.

Example: Response 38 - "I feel [like] my dating life and sexuality is normal. Other[s] would expect me to be heterosexual, like my family they expect me to get married with a man and have children."

Example: Response 115 - "Straight, heterosexual. No lesbian or bisexual was allowed for my family. They would cast me out if they ever found out I was involved with the same gender!"

Timeline – 47% of responses

This category included any response in which the participant described a sequence and/or timing of life events, including dating, sex, marriage, children, growing old, retirement, etc. They do not need to be in any particular order - just an indication that one event comes before another. This could include a parent or other person/society imposing this expectation.

Example: Response 3 - "To meet a guy, date for a bit, and fall in love. Then get married and stay faithful. To have a few kids and tend to the children as well has having a career."

Example: Response 118 - "No because I'm past the age where most friends got married. There is a lot of pressure now from friends and family to get married and have children but I haven't."

Quality Relationship – 42% of responses

These responses described happiness, love, stability, respect, loyalty, honesty, safety, faithfulness, monogamy, security, commitment to describe a relationship (including one's sex life) as expectations for relationships.

Example: Response 127 - "It made me feel very happy since I feel great with my partner, in a relationship it is about giving love, respect, security, giving everything for everything, and putting together a beautiful family that is what all human beings want."

Results (cont)

Traditional Gender Roles– 16% of responses

This included responses referring to men or women acting within their specific gender role or referring to well-known qualities of specific genders.

Example: Response 18 - "Find one person to be with and stay faithful. Make it work, get married, have children. The woman stays home to raise the child(ren) and the man works to provide."

Example: - Response 113 – "I am expected to be with a man and be [married] and have children and stay home with them clean cook and do everything while my husband works full time I'm expected to satisfy my partner with what he wants."

Religion– 7% of responses

This included responses with reference to any kind of religion (Christianity, Judaism, Mormonism, etc.). Any mention of God or another greater power having influence on life or life choices were also included.

Example: Response 25 - "I would like to have and expected to have a nice Christian based relationship. This helps with following God's advice and putting your partner first."

Discussion

Results from the survey showed many recurring patterns. The most common expectation is to have a relationship happen in a certain timeline, usually being to meet a person, date, get to know each other, get married, have kids etcetera. Sex was also discussed with the most common thought being that it is expected to wait to have sex, but not common to wait until marriage. Two very common expectations include heterosexuality, whether this is the expectation to marry someone of the opposite gender or an unacceptance because of having an attraction to someone of the same gender, and quality, which includes being monogamous, having trust and promoting a healthy, happy relationship. Gender norms were much less common. Some participants discussed the expectation for the female to stay home with children and the male to be the breadwinner, but these answers were not as abundant as some others. The last and least common expectation was religion, where answers usually included going to church with one's partner or having faith in God. The expectations in the answers came from parents, friends, society in general, or from one's self.

References

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