

## **Where did the Dating Culture go wrong?** A Return to Proper Steps in the Dating Process

I was 10 years old when I received a marriage proposal; it came from a 7 year old girl. So much for passing notes or saying, “I like you.” She just got right to the point, but skipped what I considered to be all the necessary formalities.

### **Meet the dating world**

It was the first time I ever remember considering such a proposal. Apparently pulling her away from the merciless teasing of her older brother was all that it took. She was smitten, practically throwing herself at me. I could do no wrong. That is until my answer broke her heart. I think my exact words were, “No way! What are you crazy?”

I still remember those forlorn eyes. Ironically, the same brother I had saved her from now pulled her, kicking and screaming, away from me, the new source of her pain. Now I could do no right by her. It created quite an embarrassing scene, even halting a couple ball games in progress at the park. Of course, I felt bad for her, but what could I do? Naturally, I ran away!

We had only just met. We were too young. I had no way to provide for her. All those excuses actually applied for once, and I wondered why she couldn't just understand. But had I only known what the dating culture would become, maybe I would have considered her idea more closely and taken the “if you can't beat 'em, join 'em,” type approach.

On a side note: as easy as it often proved to be as a child, to find admirers willing to profess their love, achieving that end became much harder as I got older.

It seems I had been taught the wrong extreme: where for me dating had a set of mostly unwritten protocols and stages. My philosophy followed the basic notion that “first comes love, and then comes marriage.” For this little girl, however, it was much simpler: skip all the preliminary stuff and get down to the serious business: every princess has her prince—she just needs him to realize it and reveal himself by some knightly and noble deed. It's a great romantic triumph to be sure, but the question is one of timing. By the time boys are old enough to be the man of some girl's dream, she's tired of waiting and doesn't believe in it anymore.

Unfortunately for me, I think these days the dating culture sides more with her line of thinking than with mine. It pressures itself more and more into being serious more quickly and into dating younger and younger. But ironically, the culture fears marriage when the time would actually be right for it—which according to my prescribed rules is when a guy and a girl are in love, capable of and committed to the other's happiness. Instead, having already enjoyed all of the benefits without any of the responsibilities, it is the dating culture that's running from commitment now, not me. The dating culture isn't as grown up as it purports to be. I may be alone in my preparations and my methods may

seem extreme, but—before divorce rates reached record highs—mine were the same dating procedures tried and true by the majority.

**The steps to the dating process (as they used to be):**

**1) *Friendship***—A time to get to know everyone. Befriending others involves sharing things in common with another, to get to know and begin to trust others, and to enjoy building many friendships. (Not to be mistaken with the wrong connotation in the stage after rejection, where, “I just want to be friends,” really means, I don’t care if I ever see you or talk to you again. That’s better defined as an acquaintance as that is not a friend.). Children should have plenty of opportunities to develop friendships before worrying about what to do about a crush on any one person. There will be plenty of time to pair off later, when they are more prepared for it. However, if you are getting older and just want to be friends with everyone indefinitely—never allowing yourself to fall in love with any one person—then don’t take a chance on the next stage.

**2) *Dating***—A time when persons are mature enough to plan a date, prepare and carry it out (old enough to have a driver’s license, for example, is a key to the importance of timing here), and then pair off to better get to know someone on a more personal level. The dating stage means going on a date, though the usage of this term in the present dating culture has come to mean exclusively being in a relationship with someone. (That’s more in line with the next step as below, if you are trying to get ahead of yourself.). Going on a date is an opportunity for persons to develop how they interact with the opposite sex.

Here’s the if, then statement each person should have in mind: if both persons have an enjoyable time and hope to get to know each other better after, then you should plan on going on more dates with each other. (This does not mean that you must only date one another from now on, it just means that you are keeping a good date option open for further possibilities with that person, given more time to determine if there is more of a connection). The key is to just go on dates. If you enjoy a date with one person more than another, then go on more dates with that other person, but unless you absolutely did not enjoy a date with someone, then don’t rule out the idea of going on a date again with that person in the future. If at last, you are lucky enough to be excited about someone who also feels a romantic connection with you, and you are both mature enough, that is when, and only when, you move onto the next step (See what the next step entails with those maturity questions you might have).

**3) *Courting***—Once you find a person that feels as you do—that he/she only wants to spend time with you—now is the time to nurture a relationship with only that person. Courting is the term I am using for exclusively dating. You express more affection. You spend lots of time with each other. You will automatically seek quality time building your love for one another, shifting the concern from the importance of your own well-being, more toward providing for the other person’s well-being and happiness. The goal is to bring your lives together, which may take a lot of effort. You will start to see each

other more in daily routine life, but always keep going on formal dates with a significant other.

**4) Engagement**—After a quality courtship, where love has brought your lives together to the point where it would be hard to be apart, then couples naturally start talking marriage. If you are prepared for that commitment to one another, concerns like not having enough money, or enough schooling, or enough of other secular things, should not get in your way. If you have enough love for one another to have a daily enduring relationship outside of marriage while apart, then you will have more than enough love to face life together. Being engaged is a stage that requires action, and yet while it allows you each to take a step in the dark, you do so together. Then watch as your faith is answered, or if it is not meant to be—you may find that you both still aren't on the same page—but you'll still be glad you took this necessary step, rather than figuring out this inconvenience later. Hopefully you will be more and more right for one another as you work at it and the marriage date will come.

**5) Marriage**—Now you might ask why this is being called a dating stage. Well, because the same steps of true friendship and love that brought you together will be required to keep you together. Love is a sacrifice for something greater, but you don't have to just jump right into this stage (like an arranged marriage), and you don't have to leave all the great things of the other stages behind, either—in fact, don't. The reason you love the person you are committed to within marriage, is because you loved them through all of the dating stages, so it would only be right that you always remember that fact, by practicing those things over and over again, in your marriage. It is a time when two people become as one like never before. Persons with the deepest respect and love for another enter into this relationship having reserved sex for marriage, where the appropriate expression of that love will match the appropriate level of commitment.

### **My Conclusion**

Oh, where did the dating culture go wrong? I believe, it ignored the stages, mixed them up, or practiced them too early to be able to form real love. But I think it can change. Where is the girl that understands the steps that should be taken through the dating stages? Maybe that 7 year old girl from my past, has grown up by now. Maybe she's got it figured out. Maybe the dating culture will change and grow up too. I'm sticking to my guns! I'm still holding out hope!