

1900s–1910s

In the first decade of the twentieth century, men "called upon" young women whom they fancied by (with the permission of her parents) visiting her home. The two would spend time together, usually with the supervision of her parents so that they may get to know each other on an intellectual and emotional level. The couple was rarely left alone, making sexual intimacy (and physical contact in general) nearly impossible. Since lower-class families did not have the resources to entertain potential suitors in their home, many couples began leaving the house to spend time together. Thus, the phrase "going out on a date" became popularized. During this period, a couple's dating history was typically defined as the period of time two people spend together (in an exclusive or nearly exclusive, nonsexual relationship) before marriage.



1920s–1930s

As the twentieth century progressed, many young members of the upper class grew to dislike the "calling" style of dating and started rebelling by going on dates as did members of the lower class. Dating became a common and more relaxed way to get to know another person, especially when the automobile was invented and widely consumed by the American public. Now with their own modes of transportation and much more freedom, young people began going out to restaurants or to the cinema to have fun, instead of having lengthy discussions with the woman's parents. During the 1920s and 1930s, dating became a system of ratings. Women would only accept date invitations from men with money and gifts and tried to refrain from being seen with the same boy too often. The dating scene among college students was very competitive: in the first half of the twentieth century, American universities were overwhelmingly populated by men, who sometimes had to fight for dates with the most desired female students.



1940s–1950s

During the World War II era and continuing through the 1940s, young male adults in the United States were scarce. As a result of the mandatory draft, most of them were overseas fighting the war—many of whom never returned. Women became less concerned with a man's status and more about his likelihood of survival. A new relationship style called "going steady" emerged. Across university campuses, couples publicized their decision to "go steady" when the man gave the woman an article of his clothing to wear, such as a jacket, sweater, or ring. In both "going steady" and "dating" relationships in the 1940s and 1950s (unlike those of previous generations), peers had a much larger influence on the relationship than did the family. As the twentieth century progressed, young couples were more likely to partake in premarital sex within the context of committed relationships.



1960s

Around the mid-1960s and in conjunction with the Women's Movement and the emergence of the birth control pill, a sexual revolution began. This time period is said to mark the end of the dating era, and the beginning of the "hookup" culture. Many young adults on college campuses began partying and experimenting with alcohol and psychedelic drugs in large groups. This new crowd activity replaced the typical date night that existed in the past. People began to have more sexual encounters, due in large part to the newly acquired liberal attitudes that the birth control pill allowed. Students were also more willing to have sex outside of committed relationships because birth control was increasingly available. Sex before marriage became less of a taboo. Oral sex was also on the rise, entering the lives of many young people. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Women's Movement enforced the idea that women, like men, were sexual beings who had desires and the right to receive pleasure. All of these factors united to create an atmosphere that appreciated sex and all of its benefits. Therefore, people became open to having sexual experiences and accepting their inner desires. This new drive to experience and understand one's own sexuality—combined with the freeing nature of drugs and alcohol—created an environment wherein people felt comfortable expressing their sexuality.



2000s

In the most recent decades and in the beginning of the 21st century, it has become clear that dating has evolved dramatically. LGBTQ-identified individuals are becoming much more accepted in mainstream society. Love is beginning to be seen as a universal human emotion/condition, no matter which gender or sexual orientation is involved. Terms like "girlfriend," "boyfriend," and "partner" are used frequently when describing a person's significant other, and there are now many stages involved with dating. The first phase, the initial attraction usually leads to "talking," a time period in which two people may casually get to know each other through texting, talking on the phone, and hanging out casually, possibly while going on dates. Dating has become a very individualized process: each dating-scene participant may have their own set of rules and ideas about what should come from relationships and how much sexual intimacy should occur during each stage. In addition to talking, dating, and long-term relationships, the practice of hooking up has also become popular. Each generation has developed a new form of dating to add to the relationship spectrum and the main contribution of the 21st century is the hookup. Some may view this addition as a step backward, but it is really just an added facet to the diversity of relationships. While some people may not see traditional dating as desirable in the 21st century, there is still a large subset of people who enjoy going on traditional dates, want to fall in love, and desire a long-term, monogamous relationship. The terms of these relationships vary, which is why open communication and trust are inherently important to the development and lasting potential of these relationships.

In the multitude of relationship options that exist today, it is ultimately up to the individual to choose which style of dating is right for them. The truth is that no which form of dating a person chooses to pursue, they should focus on establishing mutual trust and communication—the universal key to maintaining a happy relationship.

