

Introduction

When I traveled to Amsterdam in 2018, it didn't take long to see differences between the American and Dutch cultures. Because of my age and close acquaintances, I paid the most attention to the differences within the dating culture. Not only does the Dutch culture express more conformity towards sexual freedom- ranging from kissing passionately in public to more revealing attire- but there is also a common agreement in the normality of it all. Although I belong to Gen Z, individuals who are born between 1995-2015, I also found it fascinating to include millennials, as defined by Balbi as individuals born between the 1980s-2000s, since they too are affected by the trending dating culture. Before diving into how Gen Z and millennials (Gens to reference both) are changing the dating culture, it's necessary to understand how dating has changed from a more universal scope. This way there is clarity to how changes in dating have and will continue to impact Gens in their single, married, and family lives. Based on my observations as a part of Gen Z and the articles presented, I believe that both Gens will lose the capacity to develop compassionate relationships primarily due to the trending hook-up culture aided by virtual dating platforms. The result of this lifestyle being "settlement" marriages that are essentially forced by societal expectations.

Dating is one of those words whose definition has shifted over the years. Around the 1950s, dating meant going on continuous dates with the same person, a prelude to officially being in a relationship¹. Nowadays, the word "dating" can also be used to describe people already in a relationship, which can be understood by the common statement of, "Did you hear so and so are dating?" This shift in the usage of the word dating can be pinpointed to the 1960s, the beginning of the sexual revolution². For those who may not be familiar with this event, the sexual revolution gave rise to feminism and broke the barrier to a life filled with sexual freedom. It's no coincidence that this event changed the way that people dated. Dating no longer meant continuous dates or introducing partners to parents, but shifted dramatically to booty calls, friends with benefits, open relationships, and hook-ups. Although this was a huge change, the biggest one was that people were no longer dating to marry, but rather dating for fun or to find sexual pleasure with someone. This time period continues to be referenced as the sexual revolution because many Americans found this type of behavior immoral and unethical (mostly men). Fast forward to current day, although dating can still apply to people who are in a relationship and occasionally to those continuously going out, Gen Z has expanded the term to online dating. Online dating has evolved to many forms that include websites, applications, social media and texting. This technological advancement made it easier for people to meet each other with the click of a button or a simple swipe. But what does this mean for Gen Z? The variation of apps presented alongside the accessibility of them, makes it almost too easy for anyone to find whatever they want. This can mean that if a person wants a simple hook up, they find someone who also wants just that. A person is allowed the freedom to just call someone up who may live right around the corner!

Because the dating culture is an umbrella term for all forms of dating, this paper will focus on the hookup culture and its current relationship with both Gens. The hookup culture will be used as defined by Balbi which she describes as, " Millennials define being 'together' as

¹ Balbi, Amanda. *Finding Love in a Hopeless Place: Dating Patterns of American Millennials*. Master's thesis, Johnson and Wales University, Winter 2016. Providence: Providence Campus, Rhode Island. Pages 15-18.

² Ibid. Pages 7-15.

‘hooking up and probably having sex, but not exclusive’ or ‘exclusive but no love yet’.” A speculative definition can be summarized to two people who simply satisfy each other’s sexual needs temporarily. Temporarily can mean one night or multiple nights, so long as both parties are not emotionally invested.

Presentation of Literature

But just where do we find the biggest difference between Gens in these two cultures. The answer is simply the home. As Amy Schalet explains in her book, *Not under my roof*, Dutch kids grow up with a fairly liberal system at home, in which they may be able to have a sleepover with their significant other starting in their late teens. Contrary to this leniency, American teens tend to grow up sheltered and don’t gain full access to their sexual freedom until they head off to college. By that point, they’ve most likely experimented with sex and dating anyway. This contrast in how they are raised according to how they are taught to date heavily influences who they grow up to be later on. Dutch millennials grow up dating a variety of people publicly, getting a feel for what it means to pursue those who they see a possible future with. Americans on the other hand, tend to have secret affairs that their parents may not approve of, and thus don’t develop deep and emotional bonds until they get out from under their parents’ roof. Although not causal, this could be a factor to why the American hookup culture is more prevalent in college. Dutch millennials have a different relationship with their families called *gezelligheid*³. There is not a direct translation for the term, but we can view it as a fun and comfortable relationship between children and parents, much like a friendship. This could be why Dutch millennials are more comfortable being honest and may not be in a rush to move out for college.

These differences cannot be generalizable to all Gens in either country, but are possible options for their decision-making processes. It is true however, that both grow up with distinct familial systems that do influence the way in which they make decisions throughout their emerging adulthood. Schalet explains this best by labeling the U.S. as a participant in adversarial individualism and the Dutch in interdependent individualism.⁴ Briefly, this means that American parents use the method of *reestablishing connection through control* whereas Dutch parents use the method of *maintaining control through connection*. The most significant difference is that Dutch parents view their kids as adults even while they are still living in their home; American parents distinctively don’t do this until their children have left the house. The Dutch view of children being adults also crosses over to how they are able to handle relationships. The result is that more Dutch Gens are viewed as being able to hold emotionally/sexually led romances early on with approval from their families. American Gens on the other hand have to be secretive and sneaky when it comes to such things, and ultimately abuse their freedom when they arrive at a college setting or decide to move out.

Moving Forward

³ Schalet, Amy T. *Not under My Roof: Parents, Teens, and the Culture of Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pages 87-89.

⁴ Ibid. Pages Page 20.

Now that there is some background to the evolution of dating and the foundational differences of American and Dutch millennials, it's vital to talk about how this all comes together through the hookup culture and further extends to the societal expectation of marriage. The truth is that Gens on both ends participate in online dating, a leeway for hooking up. It's debatable how prevalent the hookup culture actually is, given that there are Gens worldwide. However, this will focus on Gens who do participate in the hookup culture. To view how the hookup has somewhat become a normality, Purdue university published a key tool for understanding Family Diversity and Contexts⁵, in which, under the heading of Family Life Cycle Stage, the first three stages are dating, hooking up, and cohabitation. Hooking up, although difficult to define, has become so recognized that it's presence is a part of the Cycle that one goes through. In truth, this does seem to apply to a majority of Gens.

Balbi completed a study consisting of surveys that divided American millennials into three categories: maximizers, satisficers and neutrals. Better explained by Balbi:

“Maximizers are those who seek “the best” potential option, but this is often too difficult, so people end up being “satisficers” who dream about having the best, but are content with having a “good enough” option.”⁶

Neutrals were those who had characteristics of both previously mentioned groups. The results presented a negative correlation between age and category. Older millennials seemed to be satisficers, whereas upcoming millennials fit the characteristics of maximizers. This is potentially due to the fact that those who are barely starting to date, build up the expectations of their future partners. It could also be true that because more options are available, individuals become more adamant about finding the perfect person, believing that they're one swipe away from finding the so-called “one.” Other aspects that the study recognized were whether participants were interested in marriage, what they hoped to accomplish prior, the characteristics of the person they hoped to marry, and finally how they felt about the current hookup culture.

In response to the first point, most millennials said they wanted to save money, fall in love, and find stability in a job/ career. This is why I believe that Gens are more self-oriented and wish to accomplish more before they decide to settle down with someone. Although not all participants said they were interested in marriage, it is important to note that some are and still have that plan in the back of their minds, they just need more time. Many of my peers in Gens have also mentioned that they want to live life freely before deciding to settle down. In terms of waiting to marry, more and more of my female peers agree that their education and career ambitions must be met first. A mirror tribute to our 1960s feminists for sure.

For the second point, most individuals seemed to prefer a partner with intelligence, personality, and a close tie between a sense of humor and trustworthiness. It's interesting to note that these are all things that one finds out about another through personal interaction alone. There's no way to swipe through someone's online profile and see whether they're smart or funny. This could suggest that some individuals choose to use only dating as a matching game,

⁵ *Family Diversity and Contexts*. Policies and programs affect different aspects of family functioning for different types of families in different ways.

https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fi_toolkit_fdc.pdf

⁶ Balbi, Amanda. *Finding Love in a Hopeless Place: Dating Patterns of American Millennials*. Master's thesis, Johnson and Wales University, Winter 2016. Providence: Providence Campus, Rhode Island. Pages 45-46

and try to go through as many people as they can to see who seems to be the best fit. There are many people my age who decide to go on dates based off of brief introductions on dating profiles, but more often than not, they return having felt like the person just wasn't the right fit. Adding on to this, many dating apps reflect success in their match-making, but how often do you really hear about people saying they met the love of their life online?

Interestingly, the final point identified that most American millennials are discontent with the dating culture. While most voted for a neutral stance -not liking it but saying that it's the personal choice of the individual- most reflected a negative tone towards it.⁷ Further adding to this, those who were not in favor of the dating culture were asked why they believed that the hookup culture existed. The majority of responses stated that it was due to the influence of older generations on commitment and sexual freedom. Influence from the older generation hints at "broken" families, those whose parents divorce or married without love. Gens who see this are discouraged from marriage for fear of having the same results. Commitment and sexual freedom are closely tied together to the term choice. Dating apps/ websites have made it so accessible to find a variety of people that Gens don't want to commit for fear of missing out on other people.⁸ Although Balbi's sample group consists of millennials, GenZ is so close behind that these studies can also be applied to them. Some, like myself, may even argue that it applies to them more so because they are more present on online platforms and up to date with the new dating apps.

On the other side, there was a study done on Dutch millennials by Hannah Stokes, whose goal it was to see the relationship between them, technology, and the dating culture.⁹ Her article touches briefly on the holistic education that Dutch kids receive and how this influences their diverse perspective on life and controversial topics. This form of education also supports how progressive the Netherlands is. This smaller study consisted of five in depth interviews that were made to be generalizable. Within her study, Stokes found that participants found themselves drawn to dating applications because it made it easy and accessible to find other people. Four out of the five participants used the Tinder app and all expressed positivity towards being able to view options with the simple swipe of a finger. However, when diving into the reasons why they used it, Stokes found that the participants had come out of a long term relationship and just wanted to have fun. They expressed that although using the app was fun, they still intended to find someone who they'd be willing to marry.

A curious turning point in this study was that two participants expressed neutral feelings towards monogamy. It seemed that these millennials didn't think that one person necessarily needs to marry another and be with them for the rest of their lives due to love, but rather simply marry for financial reasons. There was a consensus amongst the participants that Millennials still have a lot of time to experiment and figure out what they want through whatever means necessary. Curiously, although using Tinder and other dating apps, participants said that Dutch Millennials only use it as a supplement to dating, and still prefer in person dating. Ultimately, it seems that Dutch Millennials are open to any form of dating -online dating is embedded into their culture because of the great technological infusion- but still prefer the good old traditional

⁷ Ibid. Page 54.

⁸ Ibid. Pages 55-58.

⁹ Stokes, Hannah, "Come on Baby, Light My Fire: A study on Dutch Millennial Usage of Dating Applications and Morals" (2016). Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. Paper 2337.
http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2337 Pages 7, 25-43.

form of dating. This article also further supports the notion that Gens just want to have fun, but understand that there are societal benefits to being married.

A different article posted by DutchReview humorously presented what one needs to know if they want to date someone Dutch. The points include: being honest, keeping things casual, romantic gestures, marriage, open mindedness, and saving money.

“I once had a friend of mine saying: ‘First comes the house, then a pet, then a kid then the marriage. I’m not going to marry someone without making sure that we can spend the rest of our lives together. What if he is a bad father?’”¹⁰

When it came to marriage, the article explained that the Dutch don’t play with marriage, it’s a serious commitment. There was a brief joke about how one has to move in first, then have kids, and then marry so they can know whether it should be a permanent arrangement. This perspective can explain why Gens pose a greater focus on dating rather than marriage/commitment.

Conclusion

Gens in both cultures participate in the hookup culture without necessarily liking it. We can also understand that Gens’ open mindedness leads to their perspective that a person can pursue whichever form of dating that they wish. But what does this mean for future marriages? Balbi’s presentation of maximizer and satisficer shows that in the beginning of their dating experiences, American Millennials appear as maximizers, but then slowly transition into satisficers when they reach an age in which society mandates marriage. Satisficers then fall into what I believe is a “settlement” marriage: marriage forced by societal expectations rather than love. Dutch Millennials on the other hand, form a union without marriage, and pose a greater emphasis on a stable home before committing their life to another. A huge factor and supplement to the hookup culture seemed to be in the many options that millennials are presented. These options vary from the accessibility of dating apps to the accessibility of education. Gens attending college prefer to focus on themselves and those become targets for the hookup culture, since they themselves don’t wish to be a part of a serious and committed relationship. However prevalent and easy the hookup culture is, Gens need to stray from it and genuinely pursue a romantic relationship going into marriage, instead of settling for any reason.

Although dating apps make sexual freedom more accessible and provide a leeway for the hookup culture, it can be seen that slowly, more and more Gens on either side of the world are unsatisfied and slowly shifting back towards traditional forms of dating. However, if that were not to be the case, then settlement marriages look like a strong indicator of future Gens’ marriages.

¹⁰ “The Netherlands and Dating: 6 Things about Dating the Dutch – DutchReview.” DutchReview. February 11, 2018. Accessed July 17, 2018. <https://dutchreview.com/culture/netherlands-and-dating-things-dutch/>.