



DATING: DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME

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Women, here's a revolutionary idea: Date with a purpose. What purpose? Getting married.

Whoa! Am I moving too fast for you? Making you *uncomfortable*? Dating, you say, is just—well, dating. You know—hook ups, casual flings, having fun.

Yeah? Who said so?

Don't get me wrong. I'm all for fun, but I'm interested in something deeper here—like happiness. I'm certainly not saying that marriage should be the first topic of conversation. At least wait until the pizza is served (just kidding). But I am saying that you need to ask yourself this question: Why do you want to go on a date with someone? Physical attraction? That's important. Common interest in something? Also important. But what else?

Let's face it, most of the time, we—and by “we” here, I'm referring to women—have no idea. We have no plan. That's okay as far it goes. But “as far as it goes” is not very far. And, frankly, not very smart.

But let's play out the scenario. We too often assume that relationships have levels of commitment, progressing—if they progress at all—like video games. A hookup is level one, dating is level two; level three—living together. And then, after we've had those, *maybe* we're ready for marriage.

But in fact, relationships usually don't progress that way. Hookups arise out of whim, impulse, or simple attraction. Dating is often based on compatibility or convenience, and sometimes on the hope that something serious might develop. Living together may be based on real love and a tryout for marriage. But it can also be based on less serious considerations, like lack of other opportunities, desire for a roommate, or the inability to afford a single apartment.

But marriage is a different enterprise entirely. Those looking for a good marriage are looking for someone who wants to build a shared life. They're looking for someone who shares their values and beliefs—moral, political, and, where applicable, religious. They view each other not only as a “partner,” but as something even more profound: husband and wife.

The problem with so many dating relationships is that people enter them with completely different understandings of what the ideal outcome should be. He wants X, and she wants Y.

And it's easy to get distracted and fooled by superficial compatibility. They're thrilled they both like kombucha, kayaking and karaoke on the weekends. That's all great, but when do you get

down to the stuff that really matters over the long run? Stuff like marriage, family, faith, and values.

I say: the sooner, the better. If a relationship looks like it has a future, talk about it early on. And if doesn't look like it has a future, what are you doing in it?

I have no doubt the reason so many women get stuck in dead-end relationships is that it has become taboo—or, to be precise, not politically correct—for a woman to articulate what she really wants.

Which takes me back to marriage, and why women crave it. Here are three reasons:

Protection. Commitment. Love.

Nothing wrong with wanting those things. It is something women have wanted—and great societies have valued—for thousands of years. It is something men still want, too. Little wonder: Study after study shows that those in good marriages are happier, healthier, even wealthier, than those who are not. Like anything you want, you have to work toward it. And anything that isn't moving you toward your goal is a waste of time.

What's the difference between living with someone and marriage? It's the difference between referring to the man in your life as "my boyfriend," "significant other," or "partner" and referring to him as "my husband." And him referring to you as "my wife," as compared with "my girlfriend."

Ask *anyone* who has taken the plunge and they'll tell you living together and marriage have little in common. It's sort of like the difference between living in a country and being a citizen of that country. The latter, with its commitment, obligations, and expectations, means a lot more.

To someone who tells you that a marriage license is trivial, "just a piece of paper," here's a good response: If it's just a piece of paper, why are you so reluctant to sign it? The answer, of course, is that no one *believes* that it's trivial. Everyone knows it's the most important decision you'll ever make. So treat it that way.

Here's a good rule of thumb: Think about the kind of relationship you want as much as you think about what kind of career you want.

I'm not anti-career. I'm just pro-relationship. Specifically, pro-marriage. Because when you get it right, that's the best relationship there is.

And it starts with the first date.

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