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Power in Dating Relationships

Americans are sentimental about love. In thinking about romance, we emphasize intimacy and caring; we like to view our lover and the relationship as unique. We deemphasize the part that cultural values and social roles play in determining whom we love and how we conduct ourselves with them.¹ In particular we neglect a crucial aspect of love relationships—power. This paper investigates that facet of romance and how traditional sex roles often tip the balance of power in favor of men.

The traditional formula for dating relationships has two basic themes. First, the man is expected to take the initiative. He asks the woman out, plans activities, provides transportation, and pays the bills. Second, our society's concept of "male superiority" dictates that a woman should

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"look up" to the significant man in her life, a stance that is facilitated by his usually being taller, older, and more sophisticated.² Feminists have severely criticized this viewpoint. In *Sexual Politics*,³ Kate Millet argues that patriarchal norms are pervasive and insidious. While male domination may be seen most easily in business, education, religion, or politics, it also extends to personal relationships between the sexes. The family helps perpetuate the power imbalance by teaching children to accept the superior status of men.

In Millet's analysis, romantic love does not elevate the status of women. Rather, the ideology of love hides the reality of women's subordination and economic dependence on men. As television commercials readily illustrate, "love" can be used for the emotional manipulation of women. It is "love" that justifies household drudgery, as well as deference to men. Thus, true equality would require basic changes in the intimate relationships of women and men.

Although traditional views of romantic relationships are under attack, proponents of the old pattern remain strong. A striking example is provided by Helen Andelin, author of *Fascinating Womanhood*⁴ and an advocate of a benevolent form of male dominance. In her book and in classes on *Fascinating Womanhood* around the country, Andelin urges women to accept and enjoy traditional sex roles. Male leadership is a key element.

According to Andelin, women should defer to men and take pleasure in being cared for. The man is "the undisputed head of the family." The woman has a "submissive role, a supporting role and sometimes an active role. . . . But, first she must accept him as her leader, support and obey him."⁵ The popularity of *Fascinating Womanhood* indicates that many women endorse this traditional view.

Young couples today are confronted with alternative models for power in romantic relationships. Traditional sex roles prescribe that the man should take the lead. But contemporary thinking favors a more equal balance of power. The research reported in this paper explores the attitudes of a diverse group of student couples about power and assesses the balance of power in each couple's relationship. It also examines factors that affected whether or not couples actually achieved equal power in their relationship.⁶

THE EGALITARIAN IDEAL

The college students in our sample were staunch supporters of an egalitarian balance of power. When we asked, "Who do you think

should have more say about your relationship, your partner or you?", 95 percent of women and 87 percent of men indicated that dating partners should have "exactly equal say." While male dominance may once have been the favored pattern of male-female relations, it was overwhelmingly rejected by the students in this study. It is possible that some students gave the answer they considered socially desirable, rather than their own true opinion. In either case, however, responses indicated a striking change in the type of male-female relationship considered appropriate.

Although students advocated equality, they seldom reported having grown up in an egalitarian family. As one student explained,

When I was growing up, my father was the Supreme Court in our family. He ran the show. My relationship with Betsy is very different, very egalitarian. We try to discuss things and reach consensus. And that's the way I think it should be.

Only 18 percent of students reported that their parents shared equally in power. A 53 percent majority indicated that the father had more say; the remaining 29 percent reported that the mother had more say. Our data indicated that college students were seeking a different type of relationship from the model set by their parents. A key question was whether those student couples would be successful in achieving the equal-power relationship they desired.

ASSESSING THE BALANCE OF POWER

Although the word "power" suggests a phenomenon that is obvious and easy to study, this is not the case.⁷ Power is often elusive, especially in close relationships. Consider a woman who appears to dominate her boyfriend by deciding what to do on dates, determining which friends the couple sees, and even selecting the boyfriend's new clothes. Is it reasonable to infer that she has a good deal of power in the relationship? Not necessarily. Further investigation might reveal that her boyfriend, a busy pre-med student, disdains such "trivial" matters, and cheerfully delegates decision-making in these areas to his girlfriend. Additionally, he may retain veto power on all decisions, but rarely exercise it because his girlfriend scrupulously caters to his preferences. In this instance, greater power may actually reside with the man, who delegates responsibility, rather than with the woman, who merely implements his preferences.⁸

other 25 percent thought they would go out with the woman's friends. Thus women more often predict a traditional pattern in which the man determines whom the couple sees. Men reflect greater uncertainty, and are equally likely to believe that the man or woman would decide.

Our data also suggested that women may exercise major influence over whether the couple has sexual intercourse or not. At the time of our first questionnaire, slightly over 40 couples were not having intercourse with each other. The major reason given for this was that the woman preferred not to. Further, when we compared women who were not having intercourse to those who were, we found that the no-intercourse women were twice as likely to describe themselves as having greater overall power in the relationship and less likely to report male power.

*total
sample
size*

Many students told us that the simplistic alternatives we offered (e.g., do what he wants versus do what she wants) did not adequately describe their own behavior. Some said they would compromise about which movie to see; others indicated they would take turns, seeing one movie this week and another next week. In some instances, students said they would take other factors into account, such as their partner's mood, or which partner had most recently had their own way about something else. No one decision or event provides a clear indication of the balance of power. As expected, however, people's overall assessment of the balance of power was significantly related to their reports of power in specific situations.

In summary, we have found that fewer than half the student couples in our study believed they had achieved an equal-power relationship. This was true both for a measure of general power, and for reports of power in particular areas. On balance, one person is seen as having greater overall influence in over half the couples in our study.

TIPPING THE BALANCE OF POWER

Why is it that students who want to have an egalitarian relationship are not successful in achieving one? Our analyses indicated several important factors that affected the balance of power in dating relationships: sex-role attitudes, unequal involvement and personal resources, and the woman's career aspirations.

Sex-role attitudes

While most students endorsed an ideal of equal power, they varied considerably in their more general attitudes about proper behavior for

Balance of Power for Traditional, Moderate, and Liberal Couples

	Woman's report			Man's report		
	Man more	Equal	Woman more	Man more	Equal	Woman more
Traditionals (72 couples)	43%	47%	10%	59%	31%	10%
Moderates (73 couples)	37	45	18	51	34	15
Liberals (76 couples)	24	51	25	25	62	13

men and women. Our questionnaire included a ten-item Sex-Role Attitude Scale. Students indicated their agreement or disagreement with such statements as, "If a couple is going somewhere by car, it's better for the man to do most of the driving" and "If both husband and wife work full time, her career should be just as important as his in determining where the family lives." Responses indicated that some students took staunchly traditional positions, others endorsed strongly feminist positions, and many fell somewhere in between. Dating partners generally held similar attitudes; it was unusual to find an ardent traditionalist dating a feminist partner.

While traditional sex-role attitudes were often associated with unequal relationships, there were important exceptions. For example, over one-third of the most traditional couples reported equal power, as Paul and Peggy illustrate. For them, power was not a prominent issue. While Peggy was considered the expert on cooking and social skills, Paul made decisions about what to do on dates. They divided responsibilities in a traditional way, but believed that overall they had equal power. Nor did all nontraditional couples have equal-power relationships; about 25 percent reported that the man had more say.

In summary, sex-role attitudes often have an important impact on the balance of power in dating relationships. Believing that men and women can perform similar tasks, acknowledging that the woman's career is as important as the man's, and other nontraditional attitudes can foster an equal-power relationship. At the same time, it is also likely that having an egalitarian relationship encourages nontraditional sex-role attitudes. The relationship between these factors can work both ways.

Imbalance of involvement and resources

Social-psychological theory⁹ suggests that power in a couple is affected by each partner's dependence on the relationship. One partner may be passionately in love while the other partner has only a lukewarm interest in the relationship. Such imbalances of involvement are likely to affect the balance of power. Sociologist Willard Waller described this phenomenon as the "principle of least interest," which predicts that the person who is least involved or interested in a relationship will have greater influence. The more involved person, eager to maintain the relationship, will defer to the partner's wishes. Thus the less interested partner is better able to set the terms of the relationship and exert control. Being deeply in love is a wonderful experience. But unless love and commitment are reciprocated, they make a person vulnerable to their partner's influence.

Our questionnaire contained several measures of love and involvement. One question asked straightforwardly, "Who do you think is more involved in your relationship—your partner or you?" Less than half the students reported that their relationship was equal in involvement.

	Woman's report	Man's report
Equal involvement	48%	43%
Man more involved	28	15
Woman more involved	24	42

The "principle of least interest" was strongly supported by our data. In couples where the man was the least involved, it was most common for the man to have more power. In contrast, when the woman was the least involved, nearly half the couples reported that the woman had greater power.

Relative power	Relative involvement		
	Woman less involved (60 couples)	Equal (57 couples)	Man less involved (100 couples)
Man more say	23%	54%	70%
Equal say	28	20	20
Woman more say	49	26	10

Attraction to a partner and involvement in a relationship are affected by many factors. The degree to which we find our partner highly desirable and rewarding is very important, as is our assessment of the possible alternative relationships available to both of us. If our present partner is more desirable than the available alternatives, our attraction should remain high. Thus such personal resources as physical attractiveness, social skills, prestige, or money affect the balance of power.

Findings concerning physical attractiveness and alternative dating partners illustrate the pattern we found. Although we may like to think that inner qualities are more important than physical appearance, there is ample evidence that beauty can be a valuable resource in interpersonal relations.¹⁰ As part of our study, we took full-length color photos of each participant, and then had these rated on physical attractiveness by a panel of student judges. As predicted, if one person was judged more attractive, she or he was likely to have more say in the relationship.

The more options a person has about alternative dating relationships, the less dependent he or she is on a single partner. We asked students whether they had either dated or had sexual intercourse with someone other than their partner during the past two months. We also inquired if there was a "specific other" they could be dating at present. For both men and women, having dating alternatives was related to having greater power in the current relationship.

Our analysis suggests that a possible way to increase one's relative power in a relationship is to acquire new personal resources or greater options. This message is conveyed, in highly different forms, by both *Fascinating Womanhood* and the Women's Movement. *Fascinating Womanhood* promises women a happier marriage by learning to be more "feminine." Women are encouraged to pay greater attention to their husband, improve their appearance, become better cooks, learn to be more sexually attractive and, in general, improve their "feminine" skills. By increasing her own desirability, the woman may indirectly increase her husband's interest in their relationship. As a result, the husband may be more willing to defer to his wife's wishes and concerns. While endorsing a pattern of male leadership and control, *Fascinating Womanhood* nonetheless suggests ways for women to work within the traditional pattern to achieve their own goals.

Contemporary feminists have rejected inequality between the sexes,

and encouraged women to become less dependent on men. This can be achieved by developing closer relationships with other women, and by learning new skills, especially "masculine" skills such as car repair or plumbing. Greatest emphasis has been given to women's gaining financial independence through paid employment. In the next section, data from our study bearing on the impact of women's careers on power in dating relationships will be presented.

Women's career goals

It is traditionally common for men to divide their interest and energy between personal relationships and work. For women, in contrast, a family and a career have often been viewed as incompatible goals. Typically, women have given far higher priority to personal and family relationships than to paid employment. Many of the college students in our study rejected the idea that the "woman's place" is in the home; both men and women expressed more favorable attitudes toward careers for women. What impact does this have on power in male-female relationships?

Fulltime paid employment makes women more similar to men in several ways. Work provides women with additional skills and expertise, with important interests outside the relationship, and with additional resources such as income or prestige. For all these reasons, it seems likely that a woman's employment might affect power in a dating relationship.

Leonard and Felicia, two of our participants, illustrate this effect. They met and were married in college, where both majored in music. The couple agrees that while Felicia is a competent musician, Leonard is a musical genius on his way to becoming a famous composer. After college, Felicia took a job as a music teacher to put her husband through graduate school. She acknowledged his superior ability, and was willing to support his career by working. But she viewed her job strictly as a necessity. Her primary involvement was in her marriage. Leonard's attitude was completely different. Felicia says bluntly: "For him, music comes first and I'm second. If he had to move to New York to be famous and I wouldn't go, he'd leave me." In part because of this imbalance of involvement, Leonard had greater power in their relationship. He determined where they lived, for instance, and required Felicia to tolerate his sexual infidelities.

During the past year there has been a great deal of strain in the

relationship. Partly because of this, Felicia took a summer school course in a new method of teaching music. She found the course exciting, and during the summer she gained greater confidence in her abilities as a music teacher. She became seriously interested in teaching as a career. With the support of other women in the class, Felicia decided to apply for admission to a graduate program in the new instructional method. In long talks with other women, she reexamined her ideas about marriage, sex roles, and her career. She realized that "the fantasy of having a man fulfill a woman is a dangerous myth. You have to fulfill yourself." Despite some objections from Leonard, Felicia intends to start graduate school in the fall. She feels that these changes have already helped her marriage, and changed the balance of power. "If I'd gone on working this year to support him, as Len wanted me to, he'd be the more dominant. . . . If I hadn't decided to go to school, he'd be taking the money and running the show." Having made her decision, Felicia feels less dominated and exploited by her husband. She hopes that as she gains more respect for her own abilities, Len will gain respect for her, too.

This is only an example. We asked all of the couples about their educational and career plans. Nearly 70 percent of both men and women said they planned on going to graduate school. Among those seeking advanced degrees, women were more likely than men to desire only a masters degree (50 percent of women versus 32 percent of men). Men were more likely than women to aspire to a doctorate or the equivalent (38 percent of men versus 19 percent of women). Additional questions probed students' attitudes about fulltime employment for women, and their own support for a dual-career marriage in which both spouses have fulltime careers.

As expected, the woman's educational and career plans were significantly related to the balance of power in the current relationship. For instance, in one analysis we examined the relationship between the highest degree the woman aspired to and the balance of power. The results were striking. When the woman aspired to less than a bachelor's degree, 87 percent of students reported that the man had more power in their relationship. When the woman planned to complete her BA, about half (45 percent) reported that the man had more power. And, among couples where the woman planned on an advanced degree, only about 30 percent reported that the man had more say. As the woman's educational aspirations increased, the likelihood of a male-dominant

relationship decreased sharply. In contrast, no relationship was found between the man's educational aspirations or career plans and power.

OVERVIEW

We have found that power in a dating relationship is related to sex-role attitudes, to the balance of involvement and resources, and to the woman's career plans. For women, these three factors were interrelated. Women who planned on graduate school reported relatively less involvement in their current relationship, had more liberal sex-role attitudes (and tended to date men who were also more liberal), and often planned to make a major commitment to a fulltime career, as well as to marriage.

For men, educational plans, sex-role attitudes, and relative involvement were *not* related. Liberal and traditional men did not differ in their educational goals, nor in their relative involvement in the current relationship. In American society, all men are expected to work. This is as true for men who reject traditional roles as for men who support them. Although the man's educational plans did not affect the balance of power, his own sex-role attitudes and his relative involvement were important determinants of power.

While many women in our sample wanted to pursue a career, they did not see this as a substitute for marriage. About 96 percent of women and 95 percent of men said they expected to marry eventually, although not necessarily this partner. Further, 90 percent of women and 93 percent of men said they wanted to have one or more children. What distinguished traditional and liberal women was not their intention to marry, but rather their orientation toward employment. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the women we studied will follow through on their plans for advanced degrees and fulltime employment.

POWER TACTICS

Traditional sex roles dictate not only that the man should have more power, but also that the sexes should exert influence in different ways. While men are direct, even bold in their leadership, women are expected to be more subtle and covert. *Fascinating Womanhood* offers several suggestions for giving "feminine advice":

Ask leading questions: A subtle way of giving advice is to ask leading questions, such as "Have you ever thought of doing it this way?"...

The key word is *you*. In this way you bring him into the picture so the ideas will seem like his own.

Insight: When expressing your viewpoint use words that indicate insight such as "I feel." Avoid the words "I think" or "I know."

Don't appear to know more than he does: Don't be the all-wise, all-knowing wife who has all the answers and surpasses her husband in intelligence.

Don't talk man to man: Don't "hash things over" as men do and thereby place yourself on an equal plane with him. . . . Keep him in the dominant position so that he will feel needed and adequate as the leader.¹¹

Sociologists have taken note of these differences in male and female styles of power. In fact, Jessie Bernard suggests that in many marriages male control may be only an illusion:

From time immemorial, despite the institutional pattern conferring authority on husbands, whichever spouse had the talent for running the show did so. If the wife was the power in the marriage, she exerted her power in a way that did not show; she did not flaunt it, she was satisfied with the "power-behind-the-throne" position.¹²

This "Lady Macbeth syndrome" is a familiar, and often acceptable, pattern. Jokes about henpecked husbands ridicule not only the man who lacks control but also the wife who foolishly exposes her true power.

Recent research by Paula Johnson¹³ has systematically explored sex differences in power strategies. She simulated a work situation in which one student was to supervise the work of a partner. At one point the supervisor was asked to tell the partner to "sort faster," but was given a choice of six ways to make this request. Students conformed to traditional expectations. Women preferred to use "feminine" tactics involving helplessness, giving indirect information, or appealing to a sense of group solidarity. They chose statements such as "Help. Please sort faster. I'm really depending on you." Or, "Please sort faster. I think our group can be one of the best. Let's all try to sort very fast." Although men often used these "feminine" strategies, they were equally likely to use "masculine" strategies that were rejected by women. These included referring to their own expertise, their authority as supervisor, or giving direct information. Statements included, "Please sort faster. I

know it's possible to go faster because I've worked on this sort of thing before and you can really go fast." Or, "As your supervisor, I'd like to ask you to sort faster, please."

For women to use direct, authoritative power styles is seen as inappropriate by both women and men. Johnson points out that feminine strategies are often effective, at least in the short run. But they have several disadvantages. First, indirect and manipulative tactics perpetuate women's powerlessness. Such ploys exploit women's subordinate position, in the same way that slaves manipulated their masters. But such manipulation does not challenge the power hierarchy. Feminine styles of influence are designed to conceal women's true influence. As a result, they make women appear helpless and less powerful than they actually are. At the same time, they add to the impression that women are sneaky and devious. Finally, feminine strategies may contribute to women's own feelings of powerlessness and low esteem.

But Jessie Bernard suggests that in recent years, women are increasingly shunning "feminine" styles of power. In describing recent trends, she says:

The wife was no longer dissembling. She was rejecting the idea of a misfit between the . . . theoretical pattern and the actual pattern. This . . . reflected wives' increasing reluctance to go along with the institutional conception of marriage which put them down and reduced them to manipulative operators. They no longer wanted to be devious, to simulate, to be patronized.¹⁴

To examine the extent to which boyfriends and girlfriends use different styles of influence, Susan Kaplan¹⁵ invited 59 of our couples to participate in a lab study of couple interaction. Each couple was observed while working together on a series of activities designed to assess different aspects of power. In one part of the study, the couple read brief case histories of hypothetical couples. Each involved some sort of conflict or disagreement. In one case, for instance, David wants to spend a quiet evening with Jane, but she feels they should go to a party given by her friends. For each case, the boyfriend and girlfriend read slightly different accounts of the incident. One version, for instance, would be favorable to Jane's position while the other was more positive to David's point of view. After reading each case, the couple was asked to discuss it and reach a joint decision about whose position in

the story was more justified. These discussions were tape-recorded, and later scored by trained coders for twelve different power strategies that men and women might use. Some strategies were more "feminine," such as using an emotional appeal or asking for information. Others, such as taking control or giving an opinion were more stereotypically "masculine." When Kaplan compared the types of strategies used by men and women, she found surprisingly few sex differences. On ten of the twelve measures, men and women did not differ. For instance, men were just as likely as women to use emotional appeals or to ask questions.

The two measures for which sex differences did emerge conformed to sex-role expectations. Men resorted to giving information significantly more often than women did. And women were more likely than men to disagree with an idea or contradict information given by the boyfriend. Kaplan suggests that males take a more assertive stance than females, whose power derives from resisting male assertion. Kaplan sees this as adhering to a traditional pattern in which the man "proposes" and the woman "opposes."

A HAPPY ENDING?

Fascinating Womanhood proposes that the acceptance of traditional sex roles and male leadership are essential to a happy male-female relationship. Feminists argue that traditional sex roles oppress women and make honest male-female relationships difficult. What impact do sex-role attitudes and the balance of power have on the success of a dating relationship? Our surprising answer is that they seem to have little impact on the happiness or survival of dating relationships.

We found no relationship between sex-role attitudes and satisfaction with the current relationship. Liberal and traditional couples rated themselves equally satisfied with their relationships, and indicated that they felt equally close to their partners. Liberals and traditionals did not differ in reports of the likelihood of eventually marrying the current partner, in their love for their partner, or in the number of problems they anticipated in the relationship. Data from our follow-up indicated that liberal and traditional couples were equally likely to stay together or to break up.

To understand these findings, it is important to remember that dating partners usually had similar sex-role beliefs. Having shared attitudes and values may be much more crucial to the success of a

Power—one person's ability to influence the behavior of another—cannot be directly observed, but must be inferred from actual behavior. The context in which an action occurs and the intentions of the participants largely determine the meaning of the act. Especially in close personal relationships, judgments about power may be difficult to make. In order to assess power in our couples, we asked very general questions about the overall balance of power, as well as more specific questions about particular situations and events.

Despite their support for equality, only 49 percent of the women and 42 percent of the men reported equal power. When the relationship was unequal, it was usually the man who had more say. About 45 percent of the men and 35 percent of the women reported that the man had more say, compared to 13 percent and 17 percent respectively who said the woman had more say. Clearly, the relationships these students had were often more traditional than the ideals they espoused.

In answer to more specific questions about power, a similar pattern emerged. Students were asked which partner had more say in five important areas of their relationship: recreation, conversation, sexual activity, amount of time spent together, and activities with other people. In each of these areas, fewer than half the students reported equal power.

More specific questions about hypothetical situations supported these data. For instance, the couple wants to go to a movie, but disagrees about which film to see. About one-third of the students reported that they as a couple would do what the man wanted, one-third what the woman wanted, and one-third were uncertain.

A second situation involved whose friends to go out with:

You and () are trying to decide how you as a couple will spend the weekend. You really want the two of you to go out with some of your friends, but () wants just as strongly for the two of you to go out with some of his/her friends. Obviously you can't go out with both sets of friends at once. Whom do you as a couple decide to go out with?

Answers to this question showed an interesting sex difference. Half the women were sure that the couple would go out with the man's friends; only 13 percent thought they would go out with their own friends. In contrast, half of the men were undecided about what would happen; 25 percent thought they would go out with the man's friends, and the

part in the research. Both partners independently responded to lengthy questionnaires concerning their background, attitudes, and current relationship in 1972. Follow-up questionnaires were administered one and two years later.

The typical couple in our study consisted of a sophomore woman dating a junior man. When the study began, the couples had been dating for a median period of eight months. About half the participants' fathers had graduated from college, and about one-fourth held graduate degrees. About 44 percent of the students were Catholic, 26 percent were Protestant, and 25 percent were Jewish, reflecting the religious composition of the colleges in the Boston area. Virtually all participants (97 percent) were white.

Those interested in further papers based on this research should see Letitia A. Peplau, "Impact of Fear of Success and Sex-role Attitudes on Women's Competitive Achievement," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34 (1976), 561-68; Charles T. Hill, Zick Rubin, and Letitia A. Peplau, "Breakups before Marriage: The End of 103 Affairs," *Journal of Social Issues*, 32:1 (1976), 147-68; and Letitia A. Peplau, Zick Rubin, and Charles T. Hill, "Sexual Intimacy in Dating Relationships," *Journal of Social Issues*, 33:2 (1977), 86-109.

- 7 Ronald E. Cromwell and David H. Olson, eds., *Power in Families* (New York: Wiley, 1975).
- 8 Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, "The Study of Family Power Structure: A Review—1960-1969," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32 (1970), 539-52.
- 9 Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: Wiley, 1964); and John W. Thibaut and Harold H. Kelley, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (New York: Wiley, 1959).
- 10 Ellen Berscheid and Elaine Walster, "Physical Attractiveness," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 7 (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
- 11 Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood*, pp. 145-46.
- 12 Bernard, *The Future of Marriage*, p. 155.
- 13 Paula B. Johnson, "Women and Power: Toward a Theory of Effectiveness," *Journal of Social Issues*, 32:3 (1976), 99-110; and Paula B. Johnson and Jacqueline D. Goodchilds, "How Women Get Their Way," *Psychology Today*, 10:5 (October 1976), 69-70.
- 14 Bernard, *The Future of Marriage*, p. 152.
- 15 Susan L. Kaplan, *The Exercise of Power in Dating Couples*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Harvard University, 1975).
- 16 Hill, Rubin, and Peplau, "Breakups before Marriage."

relationship than the nature of the attitudes.¹⁶ Mismatching on sex-role attitudes can create problems for couples, and such differences may be most important when a couple first begins to date. Since all the students in our study were already "going with" their partner, we do not have information about the impact of sex roles on first meetings or casual dating. Couples in our study had all survived the beginning of a relationship, perhaps because they agreed about sex roles, or had managed to reconcile their differences.

Since students were nearly unanimous in their endorsement of an egalitarian ideal of power, we might expect the balance of power to affect couple satisfaction or survival. In fact, we found no differences at all between equal-power and male-dominant couples on measures of satisfaction, closeness, or breaking up during the two-year study. In contrast, however, both men and women reported less satisfaction in relationships where the woman had more say. It is apparently easier to follow a traditional pattern or to adhere to the new pattern of equality than to experience a female-dominant relationship.

Currently there is much controversy over proper behavior for men and women. Whether to adopt traditional standards, attempt to modify them, or reject old patterns outright are decisions we all must face. The results of our study suggest that traditional and egalitarian patterns are equally likely to lead to a satisfactory dating relationship, or to a miserable one. Consensus between a man and a woman may be more important for couple happiness than the particular pattern a couple follows.

NOTES

- 1 Zick Rubin, *Liking and Loving: An Invitation to Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973).
- 2 Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Marriage* (New York: Bantam, 1972); and Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: Dell, 1968).
- 3 Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).
- 4 Helen B. Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood* (New York: Bantam, 1963).
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.
- 6 This research is part of a large study of dating relationships. To obtain a representative group of college dating couples, the researchers contacted a random sample of students at four colleges and universities in the Boston area. To be eligible for the study, students had to be "going with" a boyfriend or girlfriend, and both partners had to be willing to participate. A total of 231 couples met these criteria and took