

A Flaw in the Rules of the Dating Game

by Stephen M. Golden

Copyright © 03 January 1990

I've given up the dating game. I don't understand it. Or perhaps I understand it all too well, and I don't agree with it. I dislike situations in which I cannot be myself. In the past, I have found myself involved in activities I didn't like, eating foods I detest, and being someone other than myself simply because it was an appropriate activity in which to get to know another particular person better.

Why did I do this? It was an appropriate activity. Why didn't I do something I liked doing instead? Those activities weren't quite as appropriate.

Because of the "inappropriateness" of many activities for new couples which might be appropriate later in a relationship, people often find themselves involved in activities in which they would otherwise not be involved if it were not for the presence of the other person. It could be, neither of them would normally choose to do the activity except that it is an acceptable way for them to be together. This, as I see it, is a problem. They are not being themselves.

But a more serious problem is one in which one of them enjoys a particular activity, while the other is only involved in order to be with that person. In many cases, a couple will have many hours of "fun" together in the beginning, but as the relationship matures, one member notices the other seems to have lost interest in things that "we used to both enjoy." "You've changed," is the lament. Then comes the startling revelation from the other party, "I haven't changed. I never really liked doing that in the first place." At this point, you find you don't really know the other person as well as you had thought.

The purpose of dating is to allow two people who do not know each other well to get to know one another better. This may or may not lead to the development of a significant relationship, but if the two are not honest in the dating process it is counter-productive.

The dating process has been described as a marketing venture in which each party markets their advantages (with respect to interests and abilities) over other likely candidates. If this is true, marketing in areas which are not true interests could be classified as false advertising.

But what if most of the things one likes to do fall into the category of "inappropriate dating situations," while only a few of the things one likes to do could be classified as appropriate? Throughout

the dating process, the few things are over-emphasized, and the most are set aside. This presents a distorted perspective of one's interests. I believe this happens quite often. How many people really enjoy going to bars and movies every weekend? How many of us can AFFORD to dine out every weekend?

Allow me to use myself as an example.

For someone to get to know me, it involves activities which are seen by society as questionable for initial dating. I can hear the response already, "Oh, my! What are you like?" No, no, no, you take me wrong. I love deep conversation, reading, and music. To get to know me requires a place to talk, a place to read, and a place to play music.

I am most "me" in my own home. "Aren't we all?" No! Many people do not enjoy spending a lot of time at home. My essence resides in my home. I write. I like others to read my writings. I make music. I like others to hear my songs. I like to listen to music. I love to read. I love to read to others. I enjoy giving oral interpretations of stories — adding character to the characters and emotion to the scenes! I like to read various assorted essays and works. I like to discuss meanings and thoughts about the stories and works. These are "me". If I portray an individual who is intimately involved in other activities than these, I market an individual who is not me.

"Isn't there anything else you like to do?" Well, of course! I love attending the Symphony, but I can't afford it except on rare occasions. I enjoy trips to the Art Museum, the Museum of Natural History, and the IMAX theater, but how many times can you take a date to these? Once each — TOPS! I thoroughly enjoy dressing-up in unusual attire and "putting on airs" for fun. One place for this is the Renaissance Festival, but my zeal for this behavior is not shared by most. I have therefore spent considerable time and effort devising events that are appropriate for dating, and tolerable for me as an individual. This has become wearisome.

From this point on, I will not play the dating game, for I cannot present my true self through it. I will elect to attend only events I truly enjoy. Events which I would do whether or not another person attends with me. It may take much time for me to find another individual who shares enough of my interests for a relationship to develop, but if I do find that individual, I will have presented to them the most honest version of my self possible, and will have eliminated many areas of misperception and false expectation.

It is important for each person to be who they are.

“ . . . to thyself be true.”