

# To go out or not to go out? The

## Dating dominates daily life, sets pattern for future

By Carrie Fields  
Staff Writer

We've all heard it a thousand times – adolescence is the age of emotional turmoil. It's cliché, but true. Teenagers everywhere struggle to form a personal identity as they leap into the big, bad world of adulthood. Yet, throughout the ages, another issue has remained first and foremost in the teenage consciousness – dating.

You may scoff at the suggestion that a typical high school student would trample over more pertinent issues in the frenzied pursuit of a mate. However, according to most experts, the teenage obsession with dating cannot be attributed to mere superficiality.

According to Dr. Robert Doolittle, a specialist in adolescent medicine, there are two major sparks that fuel the intensity of the teenage dating drive.

"First, biologically, adolescents are advancing in their sexual maturation, so they have hormones that make them interested in a sexual relationship," said Dr. Doolittle. "The second reason is TV. The message on most shows is sex, sex, and more sex. Combine the two, and that's where a lot of the emphasis comes from."

So, does this mean that teens who seek an emotional relationship are only masking their rampant sex drives? Not necessarily.

For students like sophomore Jack McDonald, dating can serve a deeper purpose as well. He said,

"I think relationships are very important in high school, because they allow you something to hold on to during a stressful time of life."

Dr. Doolittle agrees that high school relationships often have a positive psychological effect.

"[Teen relationships] are a form of experimentation with the adult way of life," he said. "Teens are figuring out how to make a better choice every time they have a new relationship. It's like taking English 101, 102, 103...they provide a learning experience in how to relate to others."

Senior Mary Ann Kong does

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**-Robert Doolittle, M.D.**

not regret any relationships, whether they endure everything or end in a week. "I think that you should date as much as possible," she said. "By dating many different kinds of people, I can learn about myself and also discover the kind of person that I want to be with in the future."

On the other hand, the positives of teen romance are sometimes shadowed by a negative psychological influence. According to Dr. Doolittle, social pressure makes teens try to be something that they are not. He said that nearly all

people, male, female, hetero- or homosexual, go through a phase when they define their behavior for the sole purpose of attracting a partner. While somewhat true throughout life, it especially applies during the high school years.

Kong agrees. "Some people change their whole personality based on who they are dating," she said. "I know girls who feel like they have to have someone in order to fit in. They are brainwashed to believe that they can't be complete if they don't have a guy."

Kong also believes that while males today still feel some pressure to dominate, they are also expected to show a sensitive side.

For Dr. Doolittle, however, the importance of gender is most significant when considering, on a larger scale, the different expectations that a male and a female bring into the same relationship.

"In most high school relationships, girls are looking for love and boys are looking for someone to have sex with," said Dr. Doolittle, who believes that these misunderstandings are a direct result of society's influence during the adolescent years.

"It's the way we are raised. Look at what the culture tells men – to be tough, never to cry or be vulnerable. Their first sense of a relationship comes from what they see in the media as to how a male is supposed to act," said Dr. Doolittle. "Girls are expected to be nurturers [according to society] and to help make things better. They learn that

the most important thing in a relationship is to care about somebody."

If taken too literally, gender stereotypes may convince us that every male tries to deceive women into sex, while all women are emotionally genuine and passive.

According to Kong, "Guys can definitely be caring and sensitive. And, often, girls carry the whip in a relationship. They can be rude and deceptive towards men, too. It goes both ways."

In assessing the high school student's mentality, most mainstream magazines or TV shows will testify that dating and romance, in their many forms, play a huge role in teenage life. For some, it is an obsession, or just a natural consequence of being young. Others find the social fixation with dating to be exclusive and emotionally detrimental. Regardless of whether you routinely visit [www.crush.com](http://www.crush.com) or if the thought of romance makes you gag, dating has branded its mark--in pink lipstick--on our generation.



"Tips for Teens," 1966

## Couples voice objection to casual relationship



Seniors James Harmon and Rikki Smith visit New York, after going out for over a year. They see each other every day and usually eat lunch together.

By Matt Griffin  
Staff Writer

The wild male lion lives as the leader of his pack, mating with multiple females. The black widow spider kills her mate when she is through with him, while swans partner off for life.

So just what are the mating habits of the American teenager in the wild?

Of those who choose to be in relationships, most students tend to fall into one of two categories: those who prefer a serious long-term relationship with a single person or those who feel dating should be casual and not limited to one person.

James Harmon and Rikki Smith, both seniors, have been dating for over a year—"Right now we've been going out for 14 months," Harmon said. According to Harmon, the relationship began through friends who knew that he and Smith were interested in one another. He and Smith learned about one another's interest through the friends, and things developed from there. "Rikki made the first move," Harmon said.

While Harmon and Smith are

enjoying a serious relationship, senior Kayte Neas prefers the benefits of casual dating. "It's high school," Neas said. "There's no reason to have a serious relationship right now. There's so many options to explore."

Near feels that the best part of casual dating is that it allows for freedom and exploration. "You don't get caught up in just one person. You get to meet more people and experience different things," she said. Harmon, meanwhile, thinks that students involved in serious relationships benefit from their personal connections. "[The best thing about a serious relationship is] probably the fact that you know you have someone there if something goes wrong, and they'll always be there for you."

Despite the difference in dating philosophies, those who prefer serious commitment do agree with those who would rather stick to casual dating on some aspects of a relationship. The typical date? "Usually we go out to eat and then hang out somewhere," Harmon said.

Near echoed Harmon's response. "I like going out to din-

ner, [and] just bumming around," she said.

Serious and casual dating, how-

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**-Kayte Neas, senior**

ever, both possess inherent drawbacks. For the casually-dating student, the lack of a constant companion can be disheartening. "You go through dry spells and you get lonely," Neas said. Yet students in serious relationships have their own problems. "Your weekend is basically taken up if you have a girlfriend and a job," said Harmon.

Casual and serious dating both have their high points and their drawbacks. But regardless of which dating path you may choose, one thing remains the same: at least you won't be killed and eaten by your date when the night is over.