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### Social Comportment Difference in the Realm of Dating

Bonjour! For my research project, I decided to research the comportment differences in dating that exist between France and the USA. I chose this project because it was a topic that no other Fellow had undertaken, and it seemed to be a fun and relevant topic. I also felt that it would make for a truly unique project. By choosing this project, I was able to look at a side of French life that foreigners do not usually see. This allowed me to better understand the French people, and experience a truly spectacular facet of France. My project entailed inquiries about the dating habits and perceptions of both Americans and the French, as well as how the media affects those relations. I conducted my research through interviews, surveys, and by viewing various types of media (films, advertisements, music, books, magazines). By compiling these different sources I was able to figure out the dating habits and perceptions of both nationalities, and how they viewed these relationships.

In general, the term 'dating' refers to an interaction between two people for the purpose of romantic growth. Essentially, it is a way for people, usually children, to seek out relationships. Of course, like most social interactions, psychology plays a part in these encounters. Sarah Chiche, author, psychologist, and psychoanalyst, claims that children become aware of romance and the concept of love at age seven. This article discusses the theories of Sigmund Freud and how they apply to today's children, something relatively scarce in American

magazines. The magazine was called *Les Grands Dossiers des Sciences Humaines*, and included articles entitled: *Deux siècles de psychologie de l'enfant (Two Centuries of Child Psychology)*, *SIGMUND FREUD: L'enfant, être sexué et sexuel (SIGMUND FREUD: The child, to be gendered and sexual)*, and *Le béhaviorisme: une science des comportements (Behaviorism: the science of comportment)*. This magazine was available in the CDI of the high school we attended in France. Meanwhile, my high school in America had no scientific magazines and plenty of lifestyle and celebrity magazines. These magazines had articles over beauty and healthy living, as well as countless stories detailing the lives of various public figures (Oprah anyone?). These differ greatly from the French magazines, which contains articles by professional scientists explaining the psychological phenomenons of romance. As such, the following conclusions can be draw based on the fact the differences in available sources. Americans tend to draw their romantic exposure and influence from famous people or established sources. On the other hand, the French draw theirs from science and professional analysis, at least when it comes to the technical aspect of romantic thought. About 60% of the magazines in the CDI were technical, medical, or scientific. In America, the only technical magazines were about different models of cars, let alone new psychological theories.

Romance movies are the genre of choice for millions of people around the world. Everyone knows *The Notebook* (arguably Nicholas Sparks most well known work), but not everyone knows *A Promise* (a French romance movie released in 2013). The most interesting thing about *A Promise*? It is in English. One of the most interesting things I learned when conducting my research was the sheer volume of American romance films and books the French enjoyed. My host sister even went so far as to say: "French movies are really bad." She then

went on to say that most French prefer to watch American films and television shows. While French romance movies do exist, they are not widely watched in France, which leads to an interesting effect. Due to the American cinematography, French people are constantly exposed to American ideas of romance and love. For example, the concept of soulmates, or ‘the One,’ is in almost every American love story. This concept is then applied to dating and love in France, where it was repeatedly shown as the goal of all couples. 79% of the people I surveyed in France said that they believe in soulmates, compared to the 45% of Americans that said they believe in soulmates. In addition, 54% of the French responses said that going to the movies would be their choice for a date. To compare, 50% of the American responses said that going to the cinema was a great activity. Romance movies in America also contain classic cliches that spark date ideas to weddings. These cliches include: childhood sweethearts, girl next door, love at first sight, ‘the One,’ and many more. While prevalent in American films displayed overseas, the French habit to question things has left these cliches relatively separate from actual dating. Talking with and observing couples informed me that while they love American romance, they don’t usually apply our cliches to theirs. In America, these stereotypical hallmarks of love are overused, which actually results in more Americans disbelieving in them on principle. The average American teenager feels disillusioned because of the use of these cliches. This trend accounts for the 34% difference between America and France when it comes to cinematic cliches, like ‘the One.’

While American movies are watched constantly in France, the general French psychology results in the disbelief of romantic stereotypes. In America, these same movies are met with the bored indifference of teenagers who have heard this story before.

Additionally, one of the things I found most intriguing was the number of books (romance and other genres) that were translated from English. Some of the titles offered were: *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Wuthering Heights*, the *Twilight* saga, the *Crossed* series, and the *Hunger Games* trilogy, as well as several John Green books. Most of these were translated into French, with some offered in both languages. This is a dramatic comparison to the libraries in American high schools. For example, my high school does not have any books in French, aside from a few French dictionaries. Romance books, however, are prevalent throughout the library. These books include the ones in France (*Twilight*, *Hunger Games*, *Crossed*, John Green, etc.) as well as ones ranging from time travel to historical. One of the things I found interesting about this was the fact that many of the romance available in France were translations of English books, or a collaboration of authors, like *Amours d'enfer*. It is a collection of supernatural romance stories written by Scott Westerfeld (American), Melissa Marr (American), Laurie Faria Stolarz (American), Justine Larbalestier (Australian), and Gabrielle Zevin (American). In American schools, most, if not all, books are written in English by an American or by someone writing to an American audience. A key difference between America and France when it comes to romantic literature is the amount of diversity. In France, there was a great deal of diversity in the books: German, Spanish, Italian, English. In America, books are available in English and occasionally in Spanish. These differences may account for more acceptance of romantic relationships between people of different religions or race. In my observations abroad, people in France seemed more open to the idea of someone of a different faith, whereas in America the fact that the other follows a different religion often means that that person will never be a prospective boyfriend/girlfriend. However, this is not necessarily true in large urban areas, or

among my generation (early 2000s and onward). Indeed, both countries seem to have a rise in toleration since the 2000s and in cities. As such, the reading materials available in America and France shape how open people are to relationships with people different from themselves.

In France, dating seems like a more laid back thing, a major want more than a necessity. It is still an important part of the culture, mind you, but it is not as intrinsically necessary for a good life. Based on my surveys, 72.7% of people said that they were or are in a relationship, with most relationships being six months to one year old. This is different than in the USA, where the average is six months, but the mode is three months. In addition, 54% of people said that they had been in a relationship prior, with 58% of that 54% saying that they remained friends with their ex's. The amount of people that have been in a relationship prior to their current one is a sharp contrast to American responses- a 38% difference! When it comes to the logistics of dating, 37% of the people said that the guy asks the girl out and 35% said that it was acceptable for either the girl or guy to ask the other out. One response simply stated: "la personne intéressée," (the person interested) and left it at that. Generally, the duty of asking someone out is not assigned to one gender like it is in America. Whether or not this is a change to accommodate modern ideas or just a product of the French psychological development is uncertain. The duty of planning the date falls primarily to the couple or the girl, with only 13% saying that it was the male's responsibility. This is a similarity between America and France, where modern culture and influences stress the emphasis on communication between a couple as the key to romantic success. Activities for dates are commonly trips to the cinema, diners at a restaurant, and walks about the town. When it comes to the bill: 61.9% said it depends on the people, 21.4% said that the guy pays, and 16.7% said that they would split the check. Not one

person said that the girl only would pay, an interesting similarity to the USA. Also, 61% of people said that going on a date with someone makes the relationship exclusive, unless stated explicitly beforehand. I was informed that the concept of dating was a relatively new topic, and that commitment after the first date was normal. The other 39% generally said that it depended on the people, and that they needed to discuss it together. A response described it this way: “cela dépend de la nature du rendez-vous, si il est romantique alors il est préférable de ne pas aller à d'autres rendez-vous romantiques avec d'autres personnes car nous ferions passer le message que nous ne sommes pas intéressés en la personne car nous allons voir ailleurs en même temps,” which explains it very eloquently in my opinion. This quote translates into: “It depends on the nature of the date, if it is romantic then it is better not to go to other romantic dates with other people because we would send the message that we are not interested in the person because we will others at the same time.” In addition, a whopping 62.8% of people said that the media did not influence their relationships in the slightest. Those that said it did affect them (20.9%- a little, 16.3%- yes) said that it affected their relationships in both positive and negative ways. A common influence in both France and America was the effects music and movies had when remembering events in their relationship- their own soundtrack, if you will. In conclusion, the dating culture in France is a combination of modern change, French traditions, and the desire to connect with and love others.

In America, dating is perceived as an essential part of life, specifically teenage life. I handed my surveys out randomly to prevent bias in my survey. What I discovered was that 80% of my responses said that were or had been in a defined relationship before. The average time of these relationships was roughly six months, not counting those who are married. Furthermore,

92% of the people currently in relationships had been in a relationship before, and of this 92%, 58% said that they remained friends with their ex's. This provides an interesting comparison, with over half of the people in relationships experiencing this part of life before. To go on a date, 65% of the Americans said that the guy would ask the girl out. This is most likely a direct correlation between common cultural stigma we kept from the 1700s- the concept of the 'gentleman' taking responsibility for initiating the date. When it comes to planning the dates however, 90% of the people said that both people collaborate in planning the date. Activities typically planned include movies, diner, and hanging out at public places, like a park. This a very similar list of date ideas, compared to France. If the date involves money, in America the guy will pay 95% of the time. Many of the people surveyed said that it was expected for the guy to pay, and that they would split the check if the girl offered. One said: "a gentleman pays, unless [the date is] planned by the girl." In general, the term 'dating' is something that must defined and that is not necessarily assumed. People said that communication is key in a stable relationship, and usually that they need to outright say that they are dating for the relationship to be exclusive. In addition, 55% of Americans said that the media has shaped their views and expectations when it comes to relationship. Of this 55%, most (if not all) said that it negatively impacted their views and caused them to expect too much and feel lonely when they aren't in a relationship. One also said that it caused her to relate certain stages or moments in her relationship with songs. Overall, the dating culture in America is a mixture of 18th century habits, misleading media, and a general openness to dating people.

A topic that has recently gained worldwide attention is the LGBT community. Reactions to this range from legalizing same sex marriage, to preventing transgender people from joining

the military, to mass movement for representation and acceptance. The LGBT community is a worldwide being, and I will be comparing the similarities and differences I observed in America and France. To start, both my school and the school I attended in France had LGBT messages/clubs. My school, Edmond North, had a club called the Gay/Straight Alliance, which is “a safe space for LGBTQ and straight students wishing to find friends and to discuss LGBTQ/equality issues.” They hold regular meetings, and it involves student planning and leadership. In France, posters like the one at the end of this paper were placed around the school. They were government supported posters trying to connect French LGBT members. This is different from American programs, as they are not usually government sponsored and are created at the urging of students. In addition, the management of LGBT programs at schools is different. Ones in America involve more student-to-student interaction and involve meeting at school for meetings. Those in France are more bureaucratic, then involve meeting with many schools, off campus usually. This is also reflected in the legalization of same sex marriages: France legalized same sex marriages in 2013, while America legalized it in 2015. France, like most European nations, seems more open to the LGBT community in general. 38% said that the LGBT community was not represented enough or correctly in media in France, while 80% of the Americans said that LGBT was incorrectly portrayed and underexposed. Overall, the LGBT community, while facing struggles in both countries, seems to be more accepted and represented in France.

In conclusion, the differences between France and America usually pertain to traditional influences and adaptations to modern society. This is reflected in the expectations for men to pay, higher in America than it is in France by 73.6%! This is also evidenced by the defining of



the relationship after one date, the usual case in France, or at the discretion of the couple, the usual case in America. Furthermore, the media of France and America portrays relationship differently than in real life, with American romantic hallmarks being used as the ideals of a relationship. As such, both groups are skeptical of these cliches, and believe in romance based on experience. The media also shaped how each nationality views the other in terms of dating. One French interviewee said that she thinks “that in America, relationships are more serious than in France, [and] they last longer.” The same is true in America, where people assume that the French have mastered dating and “know how to take a relationship seriously and make it last.” The influence of American media in France, including books and movies, also contributes to how accepting and open the French are to dating people different from them. In addition, LGBT is portrayed and represented differently in the two countries, with France seemingly more open to helping the community. Also, sources about the scientific facets of romance are scarce in America, with most American high schools carrying sources detailing the romantic lives of celebrities. In France, scientific magazines debating this topic can be readily found in the CDI. The process of going to dates themselves varies in between both countries, with expectations for the guy to ask the girl more prevalent in the USA and media factoring into relationships more. There are similarities, however. Most responses in both countries said that the girl does not pay unless she offers, or the couple splits the check. In addition, activities for dates are relatively the same: movies, diner, and just ‘hanging out.’ Overall, while there are some interesting cultural difference in the realm of dating between these two great countries, common threads link them in ways we cannot imagine.

NOTE: To protect the privacy of my survey takers, none are mentioned by name.

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