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Who Pays for Dates? Following Versus Challenging Gender Norms

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Abstract

Chivalry dictates that on a “date,” the man pays, whereas egalitarian ideals suggest that gender should not determine who pays. We examined the extent to which people embrace or reject these competing notions. Unmarried heterosexual participants ($N = 17,607$) reported their behaviors and attitudes regarding who *does* and who *should* pay for dates on a survey posted on NBCNews.com. Although most men (74%) and women (83%) report that both members of the couple contribute to dating expenses after dating for 6 months, most men (84%) and women (58%) reported that men still pay more expenses. Many women (39%) wished men would reject their offers to pay and 44% of women were bothered when men *expected* women to help pay. Many women, however, were bothered when men won’t accept their money (40%). Nearly two thirds of men (64%) believed that women should contribute and nearly half of men (44%) said they would stop dating a woman who never pays. Nevertheless, the majority of men said they feel guilty when accepting women’s money (76%). These data illustrate how many people are resisting or conforming to traditional gender norms in one telling aspect of dating that historically was related to the male’s displaying benevolent sexism, dominance, and ability to fulfill breadwinner role during courtship.

Keywords

dating, doing gender, undoing gender, benevolent sexism, gender norms, dating scripts

There has been a dramatic convergence in men’s and women’s participation in the family and workplace over the past 40 years. Despite this move toward equality, there appears to still be considerable adherence to traditional gender norms. As England (2010) noted, gender equality in terms of how romantic relationships are organized has been particularly stagnant. Norms based on persisting gender stereotypes are still readily apparent in dating patterns in which the prescribed behaviors for heterosexual men and women differ substantially (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Grazian, 2007; Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Zelizer, 2005).

Recent studies place the spotlight on collegiate “hooking up” in which sexual encounters between casual acquaintances or strangers typically last just one night (Bogle, 2008; England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2007). Dating, however, is not a thing of the past. This term is still widely used on college campuses today, typically after “hanging out” together long enough leads to defining themselves as boyfriend and girlfriend, that is, “dating” (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2014). Postcollege, based on interviews with a small subsample of graduates, Bogle (2008) found that formal “dating” replaces hooking up as is the way to get to know someone, and young adults have money to spend and enjoy going somewhere on their planned “dates.” Traditional norms dictate that on that first planned encounter, the man pays the bill for their entertainment (Bogle, 2008; Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

We examined the extent to which people reject or endorse one aspect of the traditional dating norms: men paying for dating expenses. When the check arrives at the table, the ensuing interaction provides important information about the extent to which people adhere to traditional norms and how the decision to pay nothing, part, or all of the expenses is viewed by the dating partner. Whereas most research on dating norms has been limited to college samples, here we use a large and diverse national sample of adults to investigate reported paying behavior and attitudes about gender equality regarding paying.

We focus on this one highly gender-stereotyped aspect of dating for several reasons. First, men’s paying reflects their historical domination of financial resources and reinforces the gender stereotype of “male as provider.” The extent to which each person rejects or endorses the assumption that the man will pay for everything, perhaps the deepest gender divide in the dating interaction, is then an excellent indicator of following or challenging the dictates of gender inequality in courtship.

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Second, social and economic changes in the public sphere have been accompanied by documented social and economic changes in couples' domestic sphere (Ridgeway, 2011; Zelizer, 2005), so an interesting empirical question is whether the latter changes can also be observed earlier in heterosexual intimate relationships, namely, during dating and courtship. The percentage of men and women in the paid labor force in the United States is roughly equal although men still earn more than women on average (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a). But the relative earning power of men and women has been shifting. More women than men are receiving bachelor's and master's degrees (Becker, Hubbard, & Murphy, 2010). By 2006, among couples where both partners worked, 28% of women outearned their partners (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b). The vast majority of marriages (8 in 10) today are based on sharing the breadwinner's burden (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2009). Research shows the vast majority of married couples, as well as cohabitators with children, pool their earnings, whereas a minority also keep individual accounts; it is not reported whether the latter contribute to the common pot equally or proportional to income (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Manning & Brown, 2006; Treas, 1993). Our related question is whether "shared breadwinner" behavior is also found in expectations about women's contributing to dating expenses, and if so is it an equally shared burden, and is it early or later in dating relationships?

Third, focusing on this one aspect of social interaction is intriguing because it provides a rare case where the maintenance of status inequality and gender difference may be perceived as favoring women, thus making females the sex more likely to resist changing this age-old gendered pattern. In an early classic article "Why Men Resist," William J. Goode (1980) helped explain why ideologies favoring true equality have trouble taking hold, making the point that when roles are in flux, people embrace changes that reduce their burdens but resist changes that reduce their privileges. Goode saw the social changes of earlier times as more threatening to men (e.g., being accepting of their partners working to help pay bills, but resisting increased housework and child care). The same logic applies to women: If women perceive "being treated" as a female advantage within the code of chivalry, they may resist giving up this advantage.

Below, we examine traditional and emerging beliefs about gender that shape beliefs about who should pay for dates. We then present the results of a large-scale study of men's and women's attitudes about paying for dates, as well as their reported behaviors, which enables us to examine the extent to which people are generally following traditional or egalitarian ideologies, or somewhere in between.

Chivalry Maintains Traditional Gender Ideologies

Chivalry is the idea that men, to show they cherish and protect women, engage in acts specifically for women that they

may not do for other men. These include acts like picking the woman up, opening the door, and paying for the date. Most important for our research question, one enduring chivalrous act sets up the man as the "inviter" and the woman as "invitee"; thus, as the "inviter," the man bears more obligation to treat.

The rewards of being the recipients of chivalrous favors are readily apparent to women, whereas the costs of this "benevolent sexism" (Glick & Fiske, 2001) are less visible and more abstract. One cost according to Zelizer (2005) is that in dating today "single men still invite single women out for meals or entertainment, pick up the tab, and expect a degree of intimacy to prevail during the encounter" (p. 115). This provides one incentive for men to be the ones to resist change and to continue to pay for dates.

Ridgeway's (2011) work would lead us to predict men will keep paying simply because gender is so deeply embedded and provides "a clear framework of cultural beliefs that defines who men and women are by differentiating them" (p. 53). Ridgeway's contributions extend the groundbreaking work of West and Zimmerman (1987) who recognized the social construction of differences and conceptualized the achievement as "doing gender." People may not always live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity, but they know what they are and they "engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*"; that is, people engage in interaction with an awareness of accountability or "how they might look or be characterized" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136).

Men offering to pay and women accepting this offer serves as one way that they can safely act to be positively evaluated. Men who fail to pay risk being viewed as lacking economic resources or as being uninterested, unchivalrous, or—worse yet—cheap. In an interview study of women, Lamont (2014) found that many women said they valued chivalry as sign that a man was respectful and caring, and part of chivalry included paying for the first several dates. Some men may pay because they feel socially obligated to do so, and may feel guilty if they fail to live up to these gendered expectations.

Is There Deviation From Traditional Gender Norms?

But perhaps a broad empirical investigation of men and women across the age spectrum of daters will show that not everyone is playing it safe by relying on older scripts. It is possible that an examination of who pays for dates will reveal that the old gender norms are losing their currency. Risman (2009) put out a clarion call for research that monitors where traditional gender stereotypes are loosening their hold, where the performers by their social actions may be "undoing gender" (p. 81). That is, she called for researchers to be on the lookout for situations where traditional gender roles are becoming significantly less relevant than it has been in our past.

One important motive to share dating expenses fairly is that both men and women want their personal actions to be consistent with their professed beliefs. By the mid-1990s, a majority of Americans agreed with various statements in the General Social Survey used to measure beliefs in gender equality (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). For example, when respondents were asked to agree or disagree with this statement—“It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family”—only 34% disagreed in 1977 compared with 64% in 2010. Apart from being judged masculine or feminine, one also risks being seen as a hypocrite to assert women are men’s equals, then continue to behave as the givers or takers of special treatment that puts women on the pedestal while men act as the dominant providers.

Studying Who Pays for Dates: Is There Movement Toward Gender Equality?

Despite an extensive literature related to dating and mating preferences and dating scripts among young adults (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Grazian, 2007; Laner & Ventrone, 2000), almost nothing is known about modern attitudes toward who should pay for dates, and who does actually pay for dates, among a wider range of adults. One single item was embedded in the Online College Social Life survey collected on 21 campuses; among heterosexuals ($N = 12,899$): 63% said that on a “recent date” the man had paid, 19% said they both paid, 16% said no money was spent, and 2% said the woman treated (England & Bearak, 2013).

We believe that quantitative methods can also be used to advance the study of some microscale social interactions with the notable benefit of their ability to identify behaviors, attitudes, and feelings from significantly larger and more diverse samples of subjects. In our case, we analyzed people’s attitudes toward behaviors that have traditionally been gendered and their reports of how they have managed expenses in their dating relationships. As West and Zimmerman (1987) cautioned, people who stray from tradition do so with an awareness of the inherent risks, so we expect in a time of flux that many people have devised creative strategies to reconcile the desire to adhere to some notions of chivalry and allegiance to sex differences along with their modern gender egalitarian ideals.

The Present Study

Who Reports Actually Paying on Dates—Men, Women, or Both?

Given the deep entrenchment of the norm that men should pay for dates, we hypothesized that most people would follow the traditional convention and men would pay more of the expenses. Researchers working from an “undoing gender” perspective, however, would emphasize that it is important to identify the extent to which people are not following the

traditional conventions. Due to the social incentives to move toward more egalitarian behaviors, we also hypothesized that a substantial minority of women and men—daters of all ages, but especially younger ones—are not just paying lip service to gender equality but living up to its ideals by sharing expenses to some extent.

Men’s and Women’s Attitudes About Paying for Dates

Given women’s greater loss of perceived benefits when norms are violated, we expected gender differences and hypothesized that more men than women would endorse attitudes favoring sharing expenses, and women’s attitudes would reflect resistance, or at least ambivalence, regarding change.

Emotional Consequences of Paying for Dates for Men

Despite this move toward equality, however, we hypothesized that there is still an emotional toll that men experience when they violate traditional gender ideologies. The internal experience of shame, guilt, or regret is elicited when people feel they have violated social expectations or done harm to others, and the function of this emotional response is to motivate people to modify their behavior and make amends for violating social norms (e.g., Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Fessler, 2004; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed that when people believe they do not live up to gendered social norms and expectations (e.g., displaying a slender body for women), this causes them to feel shame. Consistent with this logic, we hypothesized that when men do not pay for dates, they typically experience some guilt or shame as a result of not adhering to interpersonal and cultural expectations.

Do People Feel That Paying for Dates and Sexual Activity Are Connected?

Finally, consistent with traditional gender norms surrounding dating, we hypothesized that paying for dates and expectations of physical intimacy are linked.

In testing these hypotheses, we also examined whether important demographic characteristics (age, education, and personal income) were associated with these behaviors and attitudes. In particular, we hypothesized that younger age groups and more educated participants would be more likely to endorse less traditional attitudes regarding paying for dates.

Method

Participants

This study is based on secondary analyses of anonymous data collected as part of the “Money, Sex, and Love Survey” conducted by msnbc.com and ELLE.com. The survey was

posted on multiple websites for 10 days in 2008, and only participants who completed the survey via the msnbc.com entry portal were included in analyses. The website's 58 million unique monthly visitors include a broad diversity of people in terms of age, income, and political orientation ("Media kit," 2012). Political diversity is reflected by respondents' self-identification as conservative/very conservative (34%), moderate (31%), or liberal/very liberal (24%), and in terms of percentage identifying as Republican (31%) versus Democrat (33%; Nielsen, "Plan Profiling: Omniture Data From December 2010," personal communication with market analyst from NBCNEWS.com, December 30, 2010). Data sets garnered through the official website of NBC News (NBCNews.com, formerly msnbc.com) have been used to examine attitudes toward female bosses (Elsesser & Lever, 2011), sexual jealousy (Frederick & Fales, 2014), sexual regrets (Galperin et al., 2013), sexual behavior (Frederick & Jenkins, 2015), online sexual activity (Groves, Gillespie, Royce, & Lever, 2011), mate preferences (Fales, Frederick, Garcia, Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fisher, 2016), friendship (Gillespie, Frederick, Harari, & Groves, 2015; Gillespie, Lever, Frederick, & Royce, 2015), interest in cosmetic surgery (Frederick, Lever, & Peplau, 2007), and aspects of body image (Frederick, Peplau, & Lever, 2006, 2008; Lever, Frederick, & Peplau, 2006, 2007; Peplau et al., 2009).

An invitation to participate in a survey on attitudes toward money, sex, and love appeared continually on the front page of the financial news section and periodically on the website homepage (most participants came during times when the invitation also appeared on the popular homepage). To prevent the same individual from responding to the survey more than once, a software program denied multiple responses from any given computer. For other studies that rely on Internet methods, see Skitka and Sargis (2006) and Reimers (2007).

Given the broad-based appeal of the website, it provided a demographically diverse sample and an opportunity to compare men and women who differed substantially on money issues in close relationships. Over 70,000 participants completed the survey. Here we focus on the 17,067 unmarried and non-cohabitating heterosexual respondents (8,549 men and 8,518 women) between the ages of 18 and 65 who completed the items about dating and demographics. Among unmarried participants who had ever been on a date, 31% were not currently dating someone, 12% were currently dating or seeing more than one person, and 57% were dating or in a committed relationship with one person (average relationship length was 2.2 years [$SD = 3.1$]).

Because different questions had to be constructed for women and men based on heterosexual dating norms, we directed gay men, lesbian women, and married and cohabitating participants to a different set of questions.

Predictor Variables

Age. The mean age was 38 for men ($SD = 12$) and 35 for women ($SD = 11$). For some analyses, age categories were

created: 18 to 25 (23%), 26 to 35 (31%), 36 to 45 (21%), 46 to 55 (17%), 56 to 65 (8%).

Education. Participants indicated whether they had less than high school education (1%), a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED; 6%), an associate's degree or some college (34%), a 4-year college degree (33%), some postgraduate work (8%), or a postgraduate degree (18%). For regression analyses, these responses were coded 0 to 5. For other analyses, to facilitate presentation of the data, the educational groups were split into four groups that included high school degree or less, some college/associate's degree, a 4-year degree, or postgraduate work.

Income. Individuals reported their yearly personal income as falling into one of 15 income categories, with the minimum category being US\$0 to US\$4,999 per year and the upper category being US\$200,000 or more. We took the midpoint of the categories to create an interval scale for use in correlations (e.g., US\$50,000-US\$59,999 was coded as US\$55,000; the maximum category was coded as US\$250,000). A small subset of participants declined to report their income (4%). Men's median income range was US\$50,000 to US\$59,999 ($M = US\$70,000$; $SD = US\$49,000$) and women's was US\$40,000 to US\$49,999 ($M = US\$51,000$; $SD = US\$36,000$). For some analyses, the following income categories were created: US\$0 to US\$30,000 (20%), US\$30,001 to US\$60,000 (42%), US\$60,001 to US\$100,000 (25%), >US\$100,000 (13%).

Primary Outcome Measures of Interest

Likert-type scale items. The seven questions asked of men are shown in Table 1 and the eight questions asked of women are shown in Table 2. Responses were provided on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *somewhat agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). The questions assessed behaviors, attitudes, and expectations relating to paying on dates, including who offers to pay and who usually pays, beliefs about who should pay, how women want men to respond when women offer to pay, how men feel both when the other person pays or never offers to pay, and whether or not men expect sex if they pay for dinner, and whether women feel less pressured regarding sexual activity when they pay for themselves. To facilitate the presentation of the results, for some analyses we calculated the percentage of individuals who disagreed with the statements (scores of 1-2) versus the percentage who agreed (scores of 3-4); for regression analyses we used the full 4-point Likert-type scales. The items were not averaged because the items were designed to assess different attitudes, emotions, and behaviors relating to paying for dates, but did not necessarily represent an overarching construct (e.g., progressive vs. traditional attitudes).

Reported sharing of dating expenses by participants who have been together for 6+ months. In addition to the questions

Table 1. Men's Reported Behaviors and Attitudes Toward Paying on Dates.

	Even after I've dated a woman for a while, I usually end up paying for most of our dating expenses	If I pay the bill, I think that a woman should engage in some sexual activity in return	After the first few dates, women should help pay expenses	If a woman makes more money than I do, then she should pay more of our expenses	I'd stop dating a woman who never offers to pay any of our expenses	It bothers me when a woman tries to pay the bill on a date	I feel guilty if I don't pay the bill on dates
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Overall	82	16	64	34	44	35	76
Age							
18-25	80	21	65	34	47	39	81
26-35	81	18	68	36	53	31	74
36-45	82	14	63	33	42	35	74
46-55	84	12	61	34	37	35	74
56-65	84	12	59	33	30	36	74
Education							
High school	83	18	54	22	34	44	76
Some college	82	17	61	32	39	39	77
College graduate	82	16	67	35	48	31	77
Postgraduate	81	13	67	39	47	31	71
Income							
US\$0-US\$30K	76	20	66	37	45	37	76
US\$31-US\$60K	80	17	66	32	44	34	75
US\$61-US\$100K	83	15	65	34	45	32	75
>US\$100K	87	13	59	36	43	35	77
Sharing expenses							
Right from start	59	9	74	38	54	21	62
After about month	74	17	76	38	59	24	72
1-6+ months	84	16	66	37	49	32	76
I pay: OK	97	10	26	25	16	56	88
I pay: Wish shared	99	22	79	43	44	28	78

Note. Percentages for "sharing expenses" variable include only participants who have been together for 6+ months. For example, 80% of 18- to 25-year-old men say they end up paying for most dating expenses even after dating a woman for a while.

asked above, participants with a relationship partner for 6 months or longer answered the question, "About how long did you date before you started sharing expenses?" Participants could indicate a specified time period before or after the first 6 months of their relationship when they started sharing, or whether one partner pays all of the expenses (see Figure 1). If one person always paid, participants could indicate whether they were fine with this arrangement or would prefer to share expenses.

Volunteered Narrative Thoughts and Feelings About Dating and Who Pays

Participants were also given the opportunity to write a short paragraph-long narrative regarding their thoughts and feelings about paying for dates after completing the quantitative items. The women were asked the question, "Tell us how you relate to a man who never lets you pay for anything on a date versus to a man who expects you to help pay. Do you believe the power dynamics shift when you're paying? Tell us how that changes things." Overall, 2,091 women (25%) provided narratives, with the average length being 52 words.

The men were asked the question, "Tell us how you get women to start paying on dates when they haven't offered or insisted, or why you prefer to pay for everything yourself. Are you willing to spend more money on a date (or cover all expenses yourself) when you're sure the evening will end with sex?" Overall, 2,057 men (24%) provided narratives, with the average length being 33 words. Due to the fact that only a subset of motivated participants provided narratives, rather than systematically coding them using inductive techniques, we used the narratives only to help us better understand and illustrate the patterns in the survey results.

Results

Overview of Data Analysis and Data Presentation Strategy

We first present the overall percentage of men and women who agreed and disagreed with each statement related to paying for dates (Tables 1 and 2). The patterns identified in the percentages are then evaluated using linear regression analyses to examine the relative usefulness of personal characteristics (e.g., age)

Table 2. Women's Reported Behaviors and Attitudes Toward Paying on Dates.

	Even after I've dated a man for a while, he usually ends up paying for most of our dating expenses	When I help pay, I feel less pressure to engage in sexual activity	I always offer to help pay even on a first date	I think that I should pay if I make more money than the man I am dating	I think my date should pay if he makes more money than I do	It bothers me when a man accepts my offer to help pay for a date. I'd prefer that he reject my offer	It bothers me when men expect me to help pay for dates	It bothers me when men won't accept my money to help pay for dates
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Overall	58	32	57	32	51	39	44	40
Age								
18-25	55	22	63	35	52	37	39	44
26-35	54	29	63	31	49	39	42	38
36-45	60	34	53	28	49	40	45	37
46-55	63	43	48	33	55	40	50	39
56-65	67	46	38	32	60	46	54	40
Education								
High school	61	30	52	26	49	44	50	38
Some college	63	33	54	31	50	40	46	60
College graduate	57	29	58	32	52	38	43	61
Postgraduate	50	33	60	35	52	36	40	61
Income								
<US\$45K	61	30	57	36	54	39	44	43
US\$45-US\$90K	59	30	56	31	51	39	43	39
US\$91-US\$150K	53	36	57	29	49	38	45	39
>US\$150K	48	33	60	31	48	39	44	36
Sharing expenses								
Right from start	37	27	75	39	42	24	26	49
After about month	51	25	58	33	49	35	35	43
2-6+ months	61	23	51	32	52	38	43	37
Man pays: OK	96	27	28	27	73	63	73	20
Man pays: Wish shared	89	25	59	38	48	26	35	65

Note. Percentages for "sharing expenses" variable include only participants who have been together for 6+ months. For example, 55% of 18- to 25-year-old women say that men end up paying for most dating expenses even after dating for a while.

when predicting attitudes toward paying for dates when controlling for other variables (Table 3). Key assumptions of linear regression models were not violated. All skewness and kurtosis values ranged between $|0$ and 1.3 , with all but two values falling in the $|0$ to 1.0 range. Multicollinearity was low for both male and female analyses, with tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) scores ranging from 0.90 to 1.20.

The large sample size provided the power to detect even miniscule effects, leading us to set $p < .001$ as the criterion for statistical significance. Even with this more stringent criterion, however, beta values as small as .05 in linear regressions were statistically significant because of our large sample size. As a rough guide, we suggest that β values of $|.10|$ or greater be considered potentially meaningful.

Who Reports Actually Paying on Dates—Men, Women, or Both?

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, consistent with our first hypothesis, almost all men (82%) and the majority of women (58%) agreed that even after dating for a while, the man ends up paying for most of a couple's dating expenses. These findings indicate that although traditional gender roles are still widely practiced in dating, a minority of men and women

have equality in sharing expenses. In contrast to our hypotheses regarding age and education, these patterns were consistent across different age, education, and income groups although men with higher incomes tended to report paying more of the dating expenses (see Tables 1 and 3).

Although men and women agreed that men generally paid *more* of the expenses, overall, a slight majority of women claim they always *offer* to pay some share, even on a first date (57%; see Table 2). Older women were less likely to report always offering (Table 3; $\beta = -.17$), perhaps reflecting a more traditional view of gender and relationships.

Among people in relationships for 6 months or longer, there is support for our second hypothesis insofar as about one fourth of men and women say they shared expenses right from the start (see Figure 1). The majority agree that expenses did become shared sometime within the first 6 months although a third of the women state that sharing did not start until at least 4 months of dating. Even after 6 months, however, 28% of men say they always pay, yet only 14% of women agree that their partner still pays for all dating expenses. Of the men who always pay, 38% wish expenses were shared while the rest are fine with the arrangement; among women who say their partner always pays, 36% wish expenses were shared and the rest are fine as is.

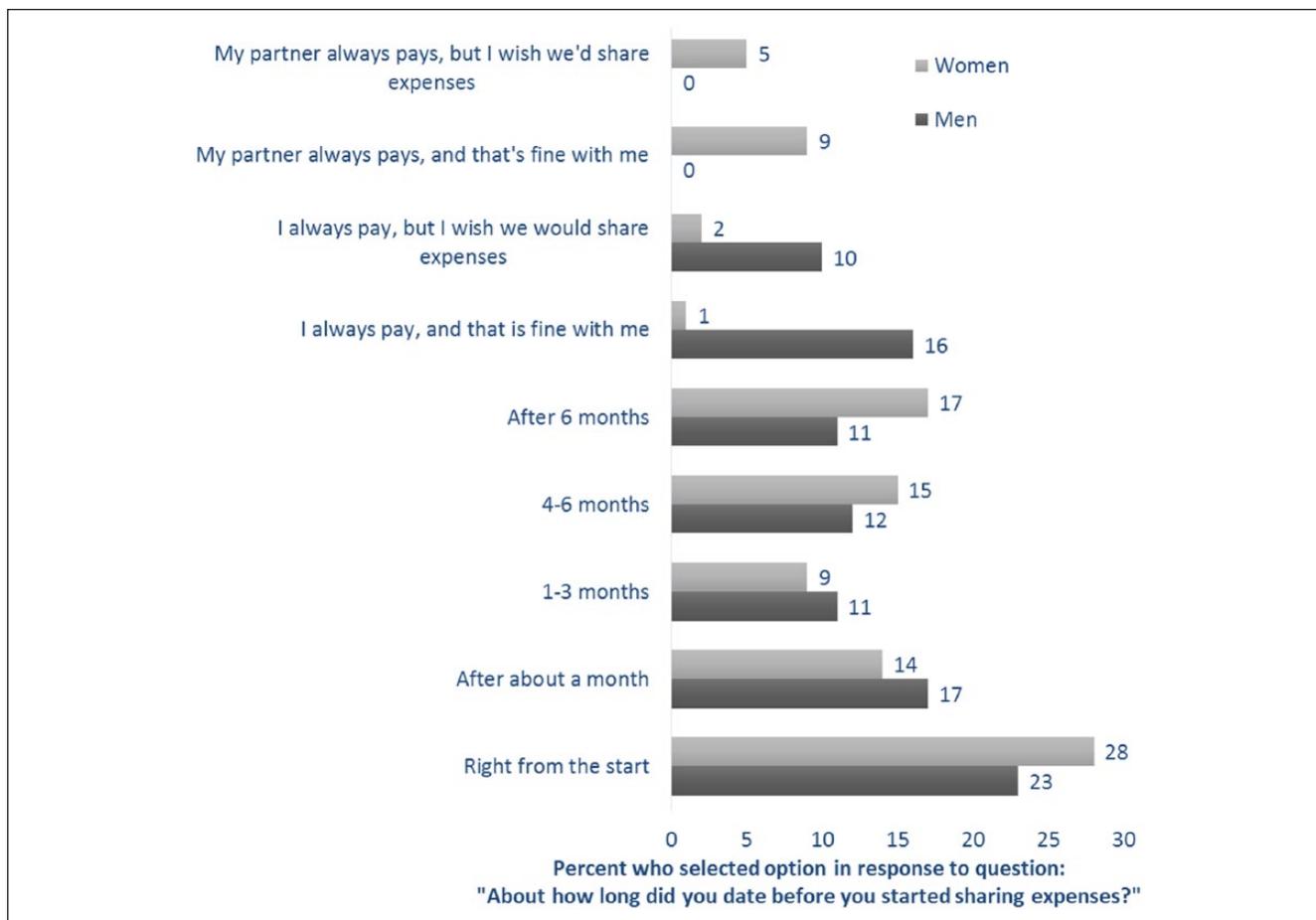


Figure 1. Men's and women's reports of whether they share expenses on dates and when they started sharing for people dating for 6 months or longer.

Men's and Women's Attitudes About Paying for Dates

Men's views. Do men expect to pay all expenses, or do they expect women to contribute? And how do they feel about the women who don't offer to share expenses? Overall, very few men could be described as true traditionalists: only 7% strongly disagreed with the idea that women should help pay expenses after the first few dates; another 29% somewhat disagreed. Approximately, one third of men reported that they were bothered when a woman tries to pay the bill on a date, and there was a weak negative association between education level and this attitude.

Some of these traditionalists explained their attitudes by linking them to chivalry and the culturally transmitted norms they believed they had learned. This 31-year-old explained, "I was raised a gentleman. My father always told me you treat the woman like a princess and you take care of her." A 19-year-old stated, "I usually tend to pay for everything myself because I believe in chivalry, which makes me part of a dying breed." In addition, some men paid as a way to

demonstrate their desirability as a partner and because it feels good to adhere to the norm because of what it communicates to the dating partner. A 34-year-old said, "I prefer to pay because it shows your date that you are financially secure." A 29-year-old added this insight:

I prefer to pay for everything because it makes me feel good about myself because I make decent money and it makes me appreciate how hard I have worked to earn the money I make, and I hope that the woman appreciates that too.

In contrast to these traditionalists, and contradicting the first hypothesis, a solid majority (64%) of men agreed that women should help pay. Age was weakly related to this belief (Table 3; $\beta = -.15$) but in the predicted direction. The percentage "strongly agreeing" with this statement by age group were 18 to 25 (21%), 26 to 35 (22%), 36 to 45 (16%), 46 to 55 (15%), and 56 to 65 (14%). This was especially true if their dates earn more: One third of men (34%) were willing to say that women with a higher income should pay more of the expenses.

Table 3. Regression Analyses With Demographics Predicting Attitudes About Paying for Dates.

Men's responses							
	Even after I've dated a woman for a while, I usually end up paying for most of our dating expenses	If I pay the bill, I think that a woman should engage in some sexual activity in return	After the first few dates, women should help pay expenses	If a woman makes more money than I do, then she should pay more of our expenses	I'd stop dating a woman who never offers to pay any of our expenses	It bothers me when a woman tries to pay the bill on a date	I feel guilty if I don't pay the bill on dates
Age β	.01	-.09	-.07	-.03	-.15	-.01	-.05
Education β	-.06	-.04	.10	.10	.09	-.09	-.06
Income β	.12	-.02	-.06	-.01	.00	.02	.04
Adjusted R^2	.01	.01	.02	.01	.03	.01	.01
Model F	38.78	29.97	48.63	30.35	84.85	22.91	15.45

Women's responses								
	Even after I've dated a man for a while, he usually ends up paying for most of our dating expenses	When I help pay, I feel less pressure to engage in sexual activity	I always offer to help pay, even on a first date	I think that I should pay if I make more money than the man I am dating	I think my date should pay if he makes more money than I do	It bothers me when a man accepts my offer to help pay for a date. I'd prefer that he reject my offer	It bothers me when men expect me to help pay for dates	It bothers me when men won't accept my money to help pay for dates
Age β	.10	.17	-.17	-.02	.05	.05	.12	-.03
Education β	-.09	.02	.05	.08	.03	-.04	-.06	.01
Income β	-.07	-.01	.03	-.01	-.04	.00	-.01	-.02
Adjusted R^2	.02	.03	.03	.01	.00	.00	.02	.00
Model F	67.24	82.40	89.27	17.77	8.29	11.99	49.71	3.30

Note. Positive β values indicate that individuals who were older, were more educated, and had a higher income were more likely to agree with the statement in the column. All β values that were .05 or greater were significant at the $p < .001$ level. All F values for the overall regression models were significant at the $p < .001$ level except for the last item for women (it bothers me when men won't accept my money to help pay for dates). The degrees of freedom for all men's items were (4, 8250) and were (4, 8173) for all women's items.

Some men were undoing gender in the sense that they expect some degree of financial contribution—or at least the offer—from their dates. On one hand, some men wanted women to contribute to expenses so they did not feel like they were dating a *princess*, *freeloader*, or *gold digger*. Men with these views wanted to pay for dates at first and demonstrate they are chivalrous, but then expected women to begin sharing the expenses once a dating relationship has been established. As one 25-year-old said it, “I’m fine with paying for the first few dates. However, if the relationships are supposed to be 50/50, then each partner is expected to invest in the partnership financially.” Some men arranged to take care of expenses at first to signal their desirability and serious potential as a partner, but then expected some degree of sharing. Here’s the reasoning of this 34-year-old: “On the first few dates I usually expect to pay for everything because I think it shows strong dependable commitment. Then, if everything works out, I expect my partner to take some responsibility.” Some men tailored their expectations based on relative income, but, as this 20-year-old makes clear, gender expectations trump economics:

It would depend on the situation too. If I make much more than she does (e.g., I make US\$59k and she makes US\$28k), I would

never ask due to the financial imbalance. But if I made US\$59k and she made US\$100k, I would still pay, but expect her to help.

Our single most surprising finding is that nearly half (44%) of the men said that they would stop dating a woman who never offers to pay any expenses on a date (see Table 1). As these two men, ages 31 and 32, said, “If she can’t even offer, then I don’t want to be with someone that cheap” and “I don’t try and get them to pay for anything. If she can’t figure it out on her own, she’s too self-entitled, too self-centered, and too dense to be worth dating, so I figure out a way to end it.” Older men, however, were less comfortable with this position (Table 3; $\beta = -.15$), with only one third of older men stating they would stop dating a woman who never paid although this is still a substantial minority of older men.

Women's views. There was definitely support for the hypothesis that many women would show resistance to change, despite the fact that a majority of women claim they offer to pay a share of expenses. As shown on Table 2, nearly two fifths of women resent it when men do accept their money. Even among these women who say they always offer to pay, nearly one third of these women (32%) said they would prefer that the man rejects their offers to pay, and one third (34%)

said they resent it when a man expects them to help pay. Overall, over two fifths feel bothered when they feel men expect them to help pay, and this was more true of older women than younger women (Table 3; $\beta = .12$).

Consistent with these findings, some women did not endorse egalitarian gender norms at all, seeing it as the man's responsibility to pay and preferring a man who pays because it says something about his values and his ability to provide for his family. For example, a 59-year-old woman said, "A man who pays for everything sends a message that he can take care of me, even if I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself," and a 29-year-old stated, "a man who never lets you pay for anything on a date was raised with conventional values, and it makes me feel special or that he thinks I'm worth it." The social costs for men can be high if they fail to pay for dates because some women judged men's masculinity, desirability, and character negatively. A 42-year-old woman reached a harsh judgment, "If a man expects me to pay, then he's not a real man," and a 33-year-old admitted, "If I have to pay, I typically won't go out with him again."

One 25-year-old woman explained why she still expects chivalry despite changing economic roles of men and women:

Paying is a display of chivalry. Women want to be taken care of . . . because in today's world women have more power more often. They want the opportunity to not have power and the safest place to do this is in a relationship, with someone you trust.

Men are in a bit of a bind, however, because there is no clear path for them to follow: another two fifths of women said they were bothered when men won't accept their offers to help pay for dates. Some women expressed that sharing expenses made them feel more equal. As a 26-year-old stated, "I think if you expect equality in your relationship, then there should be equality when paying for dates." A 28-year-old asserted,

I think that there is an undeniable power shift when a woman pays or offers to pay. As a woman, I am making a clear statement that I am not dependent upon his generosity and therefore not dependent upon him.

Some, like this 23-year-old woman, said they felt more respected by their dates when they paid:

When a man lets me pay or help pay I feel that he respects me and understands that I work hard for my money. When a man does not allow me to ever pay or help pay, I feel that he looks at me as someone who is beneath him.

For some of these women, it was simply a matter of fairness. As one 24-year-old explained, "We usually split the cost or pay every other time. That's how I believe it should be—Why should he have to pay when we are both enjoying

it?" It is a shared experience so it should be entirely shared, unless one partner is treating the other for a special occasion. Other women felt that it was a way of demonstrating their desirability to men and their ability to contribute as a financial partner to the relationship. A 24-year-old said, "It shows a man you're financially independent when the woman pays or offers to pay. . . . For me, I feel like I'm showing him I can make it on my own but can also take care of him."

Women were also wary of men who insisted on always paying for dates, seeing that as a red flag that he might be too controlling. This 56-year-old expressed the sentiment that "the man who assumes the role of paying for everything dominates the relationship and feels a sense of entitlement. He also reminds you of all the nice things he's done and how you are beholden to him."

There was some recognition of the contradiction between modern values and reliance on the traditional dating norms. A 33-year-old confessed, "If on a first date a man expected me to help pay, though I claim to be a liberal and independent, I'd be lying if I said I wouldn't be put off." One way of mixing traditional values and the changing role of women in society was to expect men to pay more, but to still be willing to chip in. A 42-year-old explained,

Maybe it's reverse sexism, but I feel uncomfortable with a man who expects me to help pay at the very beginning. After we have been dating a short time, I am happy to pick up the tab half of the time, but not at first.

Emotional Consequences of Paying for Dates for Men

Women were split in whether they follow the traditional norms of expecting men to pay or whether they rejected these norms and were bothered when the man insisted on paying, creating ambiguity for men regarding whether or not to insist on paying the check. Because men were raised with the convention that they pay, when men "undo gender" by not paying, the dominant response for most men is guilt.

Consistent with our hypothesis and the proposal people experience shame or guilt when they violate gendered social norms, the majority of men, three-fourths, agreed that they feel guilty when they don't pay the bill on dates, and there was little variation in reported feelings of guilt across age, income, and educational groups (Table 3; all β s $< .07$). Even among men who said that women should help pay for expenses, 72% of these men reported feeling guilty when the woman pays. Similarly, among the men who say that they would stop dating a woman who never offers to pay any dating expenses, 71% reported feeling guilty when women pay. As one 47-year-old stated, "I find that women want a man to pay and they make it up in other ways. I feel guilty about a woman buying me dinner, it must have something to do with my generation."

Do People Feel That Paying for Dates and Sexual Activity Are Connected?

In contrast to our hypotheses, the implied reciprocity of physical intimacy for being treated described by Zelizer (2005) was generally not endorsed by our respondents, especially not by the men. Only a minority of men and women explicitly connected sex and paying for dates. As shown in Table 1, one in six men believed that women should engage in sexual activity if the man pays the bill on a date, with 18- to 25-year-old men most likely to endorse this position (21%). Men who always pay for dates but wish expenses were shared, however, were twice as likely to expect sexual activity as men who always pay for dates and are okay with that arrangement (23% vs. 11%).

As an example of these differing attitudes, a 31-year-old man stated, "I never expect anything in return for paying for everything, except that she be kind and respectful and appreciative." A 44-year-old said, "She gets dinner whether or not I get dessert." A 33-year-old worded his objection to the idea that money and sex on dates were intertwined: "I don't spend more in order to get sex. I want a partner, not a whore." In contrast, some men, like this 38-year-old, admitted that they would spend more when sex seems assured: "I will spend a whole paycheck if I'm sure the evening will end with sex."

For women, about one third agreed with the statement, "When I help pay, I feel less pressured to engage in sexual activity," and there was a strong association between older age and feeling this reduced pressure (Table 3; $\beta = .17$). Only 22% of women ages 18 to 25 reported that paying reduced their pressure to be sexual, but this percentage climbed across the age groups, culminating in nearly half of women (46%) ages 56 to 65 reporting this reduced pressure.

These results suggested that some women clearly linked money and sexual intimacy. Interestingly, this link explains why some women choose to pay for dates, while others choose not to pay. Some women viewed sex as men's reward for paying. As one 23-year-old emphatically stated, "I should never have to pay for anything. He is getting this piece of ass!" This 23-year-old agreed, "If I have to pay, whatsoever, for a meal on a date, I will not be putting out." In contrast, other women reported paying for dates to avoid the pressure to be sexual on a date. A 43-year-old declared, "A man who always pays, always expects sex. If I pay, then I'm off the hook."

Discussion

Our data suggest there has been significant movement away from a monolithic cultural norm for dating and toward a more variable set of strategies and interactions. The data presented here support the notion that across age, income, and educational variations, many people's behaviors—and more so their attitudes—are disrupting old gendered assumptions about "who pays," and in that respect, those people seem to be attempting to undo gender, using Risman's (2009) definition.

Limitations and Strengths

This survey provides a unique look at how men and women navigate the business of who pays for dates. The study, however, is not without limitations. Self-selection into surveys is a typical problem in studies conducted with college and community samples. The generalizability of the current findings is limited by the fact that participants were visitors to a news website who self-selected into this sample. People who elected to take the survey may differ from other people in the U.S. population (e.g., they may be more frequent Internet users). Although our sample was unusually large and geographically diverse, it was not nationally representative.

Nevertheless, these findings provide important clues to how people currently think about gendered exchanges when dating. Given that access to the Internet has grown remarkably in the last decade, the opportunity to participate in surveys such as this one is available to 95% of those between ages 18 and 29, 87% of those 30 to 49, 78% of those 50 to 64, and 42% of those 65 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Internet samples, including ours, tend to include a higher proportion of well-educated and higher income participants than the national population. This is probably less of a concern in this case given that income and education were generally unrelated to attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, Internet samples tend to be more diverse with respect to gender, age, socioeconomic status, and geographic region than nonprobability samples generated by many traditional data-gathering methods (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). The unusually large size of our sample allowed us the statistical power to explore many variables of interest. For a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of Internet research, see Fraley (2007).

Due to sharp restraints on the length of the survey, there were no data on traits such as political orientation, race/ethnicity, and religiosity. Assessing religiosity in future studies may be particularly important because religious attitudes and participation is linked to a wide variety of dating beliefs and practices (Bartkowski, Xu, & Fondren, 2011; Brimeyer & Smith, 2012; Burdette, Ellison, Hill, & Glenn, 2009; Irby, 2014). It would also be valuable to assess whether greater gender equality at the local or nation level is related to attitudes about paying for dates (e.g., Do some European countries with more liberal attitudes toward gender, such as the Netherlands, endorse more egalitarian beliefs and practices when it comes to paying for dates?).

It would also be valuable if future research was able to systematically design a scale that assesses different aspects of dating scripts, with subscales assessing reported behaviors, reported preferences for men's and women's actions, and emotional reactions to dating norm violations. Lamentably, there was no space to explore variations in "sharing" expenses, or to learn more about the coincidence, or irrelevance, of the start of splitting expenses with declarations of dating exclusivity. Still, relative to some previous studies that relied on

single items, we were able to assess various aspects of this dating interaction through multiple items measuring different attitudes and behaviors related to paying for dates.

Further limiting our understanding nuances involved in “sharing” expenses, women in this survey were asked if they “help pay,” signaling to them that paying is still seen by many as men’s primary responsibility. That phrasing for the item was selected by those with editorial control both because it’s how they perceived women really talk about this subject and also because they feared that if an item were worded, for example, “I always offer to pay, even on a first date,” there would be confusion about whether women were being asked if they were paying *all* expenses on a date or just a *fair share*. Their insistence on the “help pay” version of our items demonstrates how engrained these attitudes are. Try reversing any of our items, such as asking a woman to agree or disagree with the statement, “If I pay the bill, I think a man should engage in some sexual activity in return,” and the exercise drives home the point that we needed different questions for the sexes due to deeply entrenched gender standards in dating.

Finally, we are limited by only having reports of what people *say they do* with no way to judge their accuracy. In-depth interviews shortly after the paying for date interaction, conversational analysis, and ethnomethodological approaches would be useful in helping our understanding of how people really think and talk about this issue and how the social interactions unfold.

Concluding Comments: “Undoing Gender” or Token Gestures?

The more women contribute and the more men ask or expect them to help pay, the greater the breakdown of old assumptions. It is clearly no longer men’s exclusive responsibility to pay for dates. A solid majority of men (64%) said they expect some degree of financial contribution from women. Albeit fewer, but still a majority of women (56%) said they are not bothered by men’s expectations to share expenses.

The flipside of that statistic—the 44% of women who admitted they *are* bothered when men expect them to pay—reveals resistance to social change. Even among women who are willing to contribute, a substantial proportion of women indicated that they preferred to *choose* whether or not to help pay. Choice, although generally desirable, is only consistent with egalitarian ideology in this circumstance if both men and women get to choose whether or not to pay dating expenses, and that is obviously not the case.

Consistent with Goode’s (1980) point, our findings indicated that many women are resisting a change that is associated with loss of a female privilege: six in 10 women said men pay more (and eight in 10 men agree), even after dating a while, and one third of the women in relationships admitted waiting 4 to 6 months or longer before sharing expenses. More research is needed to explore the paradox of many women’s

support of ideals of equality while expecting men to pay more on dates.

Our narratives suggest some women are looking for cues of a man’s interest in a relationship while others are testing a man’s prowess as future providers (perhaps especially those women who plan to take time out of the work force in their childbearing years). Many women just declare they enjoy the spoils of chivalry.

Many men seem to enjoy their part in chivalrous scripts, too. Chivalry benefits men because the early stages of dating are fraught with uncertainties and ambiguities, and the men seem more “at risk” of being ill judged than the women when it comes to the decision to pay or not pay. When he doesn’t know a woman well, a man cannot distinguish between the woman who would be offended if he takes the money she offers and the woman who would be offended if he refuses it. When there is no clear path to follow, the safest strategy is to follow traditional gender rules, regardless of whether he actually endorses the underlying norms.

Many men’s willingness to continue to pay a larger share of a couple’s dating expenses, even after a relationship has progressed, may be seen as a display of masculinity that is expected and underscores gender difference that both parties are likely to appreciate, as Ridgeway (2011) asserted. As one narrative vividly showed, gender can even trump relative economic means as a predictor of who pays: Some men may want to pay more even when she earns more (although a third of men thought that women should contribute more if she earns more). While many men want to demonstrate their romantic interest or commitment and/or their financial ability to pay, the narratives also made clear that “who pays” is a sensitive issue for men, too. They do not want to feel “used” by women, and they do not want to think they are dating a hypocrite who espouses one set of values while displaying another. Most important, in an era when men and women share breadwinning responsibilities in the home, men can use this aspect of dating interactions to screen out women whose behavior suggests they will not hold up their end of the bargain if the relationship progresses. Some men use this aspect of dating as a litmus test: If she has not offered to pay in over a month of incurring shared dating expenses, it is not a good sign for the future.

For nearly half the men in this sample, a woman’s failure to ever offer to pay was a deal breaker for these modern men. That, to us, is one of the most interesting statistics to emerge from our study. Imagine the scenario: If a man wants to break off a relationship for this reason, he is unlikely to announce why he has stopped calling. That leaves the abandoned woman left to ponder if he met someone new or if it was something personal about her that he did not like. It is highly unlikely that she would ever guess it related to her failure to pay up. Couples who might be good for each other may be losing relationship opportunities if the woman follows the traditional script with little thought about the consequences.

Bigger sea changes in the expected behaviors of men and women in relationships would have to be linked to a deeper breakdown of gender as the primary cultural frame that coordinates our social relationships. For example, we have seen no data that parallel ours that suggest that now the risk inherent in “asking for a date” is also a shared responsibility. As long as these two chivalrous behaviors, asking and paying, are linked, and as long as men are expected to perform the asking, there will be social and internal pressures on men to pay more. On a broader scale yet, gender disparities in pay and domestic responsibilities are slow to change, and are consistent with the current pattern of men’s paying more on dates. Why should women pay half if they don’t earn the same or if they won’t reap the benefits of a partner who does half of the housework?

So we are far from a conclusion that gender is irrelevant in determining who pays, but Risman (2009) is willing to consider gender is to some extent being undone where it is becoming less relevant. With this lesser standard in mind, we believe that our data clearly show that this part of gender standards is being “undone” by a substantial number of men and women.

The answers to one of our research questions are clear, and extend Ridgeway’s thesis: The social and economic changes in the domestic sphere *do* now start before a couple moves in together; in addition to shifting families to see “breadwinner” as a shared role, expectations have also shifted regarding women’s contribution to dating expenses. Although we don’t have the ability to test for changes across time, it is notable that fully a quarter of daters in relationships reported that they started sharing expenses “right from the start” and four in 10 were doing so after the first few dates, during which insecurities may have led to reliance on tradition.

Which people are “undoing” gender in this way? Across age groups, there were few differences, but some of the items suggested possible cohort differences. Younger men were more likely to state that they would stop dating a woman who never offered to pay for expenses, and younger women were more likely to offer to help pay. Overall, men ages 26 to 35 were most likely to endorse egalitarian ideals, as were men with a college degree or higher. Similarly, women ages 18 to 35 and women with college degrees or higher were most likely to endorse these ideals.

The weak association between education and income and paying behaviors is not that surprising. Women of all ages and across social strata are entrenched in the labor force, underlying the impetus for this change, while the deeply embedded ideals about gender are a resilient mass cultural framework that slows it down (Ridgeway, 2011). In the context of these competing forces, where impetus for change seems to be winning, an interesting solution emerged wherein many men’s willingness to absorb the price of early dates and more than half the costs later on keeps chivalry alive, gender roles distinct, and some privileges for both sexes intact.

Consistent with Zelizer’s (2005) general premise that a new combination of intimacy and economic activity is evolving, the data we have presented here suggest that the deep-rooted courtship ritual around who pays does not adhere rigidly to traditional gendered social norms. The transformation of the relative material and social power of women and men may be leading to a new age, even in the delicate financial interactions within the realm of early dating.

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