

Dear Scared:

This is my advice to you. Don't mortgage the farm for that cad. The good news is that chapter five will assure you that people your age who are dating are having fun doing it.

Happy dating, Linda

Dear reader, please take a minute and fill in the following check list to describe how you feel about dating. Of course, it is perfectly fine to have multiple feelings about dating, so go ahead and check away.

**What words do you associate with dating?
(check all that apply)**

- Fun
- Intimidating
- Risky
- Time Consuming
- Expensive
- Disappointing

I asked two hundred survey respondents this same question. They were all single and over the age of fifty, and I learned a lot from their responses. Go ahead and answer this question yourself. Then read on and learn how others responded and what our responses might mean to our approaches to dating. Yes, use a pencil or pen because you will need to refer back to this section later. Don't skip this part. Which words would you associate most with dating?

If you had some trouble deciding which words to choose, you're not alone. Some of the people who responded to this survey question chose many words. If the word fun wasn't at least one of your choices, keep your spirits up; this book should be of help to you. Let's look at what might be behind each of these choices.

Fun

Maybe you associated dating with fun. Your definition of fun could mean anything from uproariously entertaining to just comfortable. Dating someone who has a similar sense of humor can lead to lots of

shared laughter. Sharing a topic of interest might not lead to giggles, but it's certainly entertaining to talk with someone who is interested in some of the same things you are. Having fun on a date doesn't always mean witty repartee. Just feeling at ease with someone is often enough reason to be interested in a second or third date. If you did not select the word fun, using that very old rule of sociability—showing interest in a person's job, hobbies, children, and travels works on a date. Smiling at someone is usually mimicked back to you. We can all memorize a few jokes to share. Showing interest, smiling, and telling a few jokes can all lead to having fun on a date.

Intimidating

If you choose the word intimidating, you might be associating dating with rejection or other negative experiences of the past. When you check your self-esteem gauge, if the thought of even trying to date makes your mouth go dry, it's time to give yourself a pep talk. It may be helpful to keep in mind that there are no perfect people out there in the dating world. Why do you think you need to be a Hollywood star to deserve a date? Most of us are intimidated by someone who seems to be out of our league, i.e., smarter, richer, better looking, and more socially adept. Would your feelings of intimidation lessen if you attempted to date someone with a similar lifestyle as yours? If you're not sure what a similar lifestyle means, how about someone in your neighborhood or someone close to your own age? Finding people with whom we have things in common is bound to reduce feelings of intimidation.

Risky

The word risky could have many interpretations in the dating world. Some of you don't want to risk having your heart broken. Others don't want to risk intimacy because of sexually transmitted disease fears. If you have experienced physical or emotional abuse in a past relationship, you might see dating as a very real risk to your physical and mental health. As LaterDaters™, we are much better prepared for all the risks I've just mentioned. We're more logical than we were as emotionally-driven teenagers. Condoms are no longer kept behind the pharmacist's counter. Remember wondering who you could get to buy them for you? Surprise, you're legal now! Abuse is much less likely to be tolerated

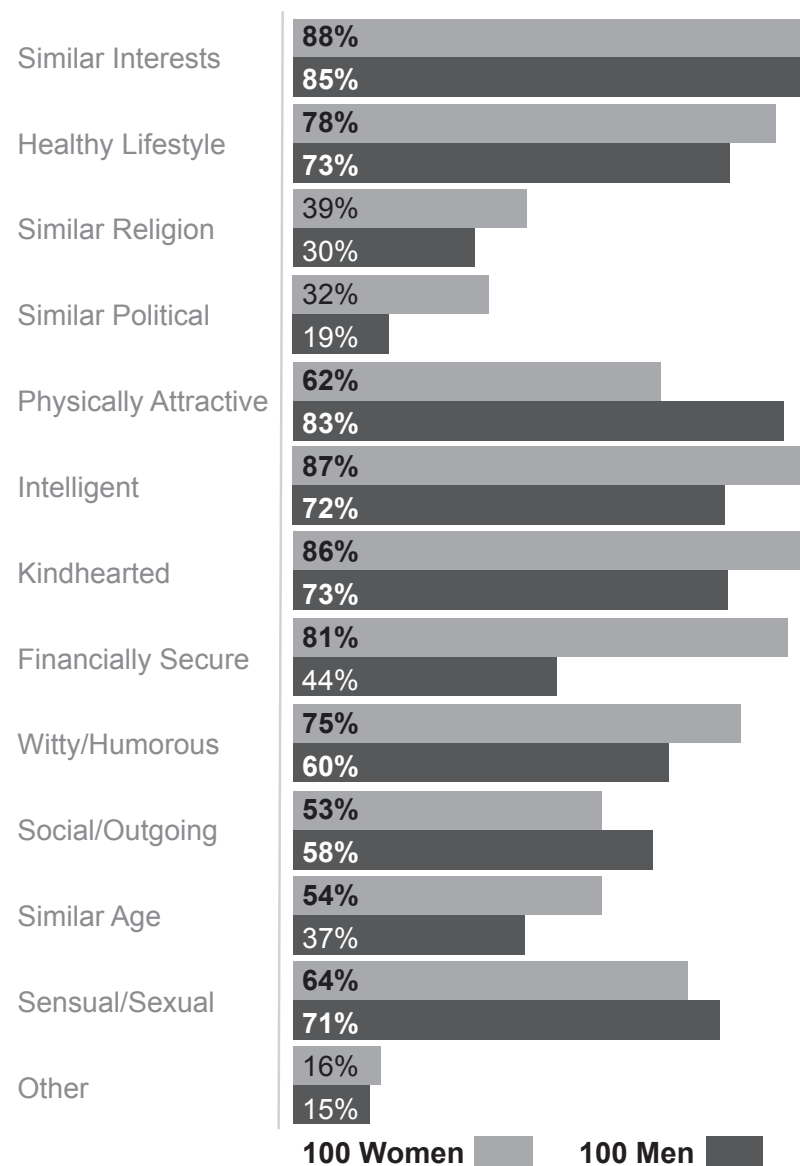
informed me that, based on the combination of traits I selected, there wasn't one single eHarmony sweetheart for me in the entire country! This, I will admit, was a little disheartening. When I tried again in 2007, there were at least fifteen men in the St. Paul/Minneapolis metropolitan area that I could contact. A male friend of mine had the same sad fate back in 2005, only to see his options improve as the site grew. A sixty-year-old woman, who has been emailing me her dating experiences, used eHarmony and was handed one name of a seventy-five-year-old man in another state as her only perfect match. As membership grows in any on-line service, so do your chances of finding some wonderful people to date. We LaterDaters™ are hard to match up because we are seeking so many more qualities in a sweetheart than younger daters.

Interestingly, just about the only quality never mentioned on the returned surveys was "He/she would make cute babies." As we all know, men and women date for a wide variety of reasons. They are seeking certain qualities in that person who could become their life partner, but at our age, almost no one is planning to start or add to their family. At the same time, sensual or sexual was a quality selected by many of the people who responded to the survey. Biology tells us that mating is for reproduction, but it certainly serves other purposes as well. When we were young we were scared to death that fooling around would result in pregnancy; many of us married and fooled around to create a family, and now we get to fool around for fun. Don't disgust your children with this information because they want to believe that their parents are just around to help with the grandchildren, play some golf or bridge, and maybe take a cruise or two. We may be biologically useless to our species, but we're still looking for companionship, romance, love, sex, and maybe even marriage. The truth is that most of us are savvy about sex, but are dullards when it comes to dating.

In this chapter we'll see what qualities two hundred single men and women over the age of fifty are looking for in the people they date.

In analyzing the chart on page 45, we can see that there are many qualities that both sexes seem to desire in one another. Similar interests topped the charts for both men (85 percent) and women (88 percent). The following qualities also received high responses: healthy lifestyle (73 percent and 78 percent), kindhearted (73 percent and 86 percent), intelligent (72 percent and 87 percent). Similar religious or political

TABLE 6.1: QUALITIES FEMALES AND MALES ARE SEEKING IN A DATE



Respondents chose more than one quality. Bold numbers indicate qualities selected by more than half of the respondents.

TABLE 6.2 QUALITIES SOUGHT COMPARED BY AGE GROUPS

Ages ▶ Perceptions ▼	50-55 N=45	56-60 N=60	61-65 N=47	66-70 N=30	71-75 N=15	75 + N=8
Similar Interests	91%	89%	91%	80%	69%	63%
Healthy Lifestyle	82%	81%	66%	77%	69%	63%
Similar Religion	59%	33%	26%	27%	23%	13%
Similar Politically	27%	23%	30%	27%	31%	0%
Physically Attractive	80%	70%	74%	70%	62%	63%
Kind-hearted	78%	81%	81%	83%	77%	63%
Intelligent	76%	84%	89%	63%	77%	75%
Financially Secure	73%	65%	55%	57%	62%	50%
Witty/Humorous	69%	75%	72%	63%	62%	38%
Social/Outgoing	42%	58%	60%	67%	46%	63%
Similar in Age	40%	47%	45%	53%	46%	25%
Sensual/Sexual	71%	72%	68%	57%	46%	31%
Other	20%	18%	13%	10%	8%	25%

N = number of respondents in each age group

Respondents chose more than one quality.

Bold numbers indicate qualities selected by than 50%

LaterDating™ thing isn't an impossible feat. There certainly were survey respondents that marked every single quality and then added to the list with lots of other qualities that they think are necessary, such as doesn't gamble or drink (see the other column numbers). But similar interests takes the lead whatever our age group or gender. We seem to share more in terms of what we are looking for than not.

Once, on a date at a coffee shop, the man I was with summarized the problem of adult dating by using the analogy of a five-hundred-piece puzzle. Both people come to the date looking for lots of qualities in the other person. The list of qualities is so long that the chance of two people finding them all in one human being is unlikely. His solution was to just let some of those pieces "drop to the floor." Decide what is of primary importance to the big picture and forget the rest.

I learned a lot about myself from that coffee date. He was complimentary to me during this date, but he was also honest and observant. He said he thought I was probably a rigid person. I've always admitted to being a type A, but rigid threw me. After thinking about this for a day (I'm a little slow), I realized he was correct—I have trouble letting any puzzle pieces drop to the floor. I had searched for every possible defect in my future Mr. Wonderful. *The only defects I hadn't seen were my own.* I began the search then and there.

Do we learn from the mistakes made in past relationships? Do we become more or less accepting of defects in partners? Do we demand more or less from future relationships? The next section should help answer those questions.

Those people in the survey who have never been married generally identified fewer qualities (with the exception of similar age) when compared with those who've been married once or twice. Could this be that old truism: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me"? Does divorce make us more aware of relationship pitfalls and make us more demanding in our future dating choices? Please note that the number of respondents who have been married three times is very low (four). Similar interests were chosen the most frequently by all of the times-married groups. The 123 respondents who were married once had the highest percentages in every quality column (except the physically attractive column). This would indicate that those people who have been married once have a longer list of