
Etiquette Can Be Murder

Who, at one period or another, has not loved? Even in minds which seem to derive no pleasure from anything, there must have been felt the power of love, compelling them to seek happiness by sharing life with another; to look with another's eyes; to be joyed by another's pleasures, and be pained by another's griefs.

Hird and Barnes, *The Lady's Book of Manners*, circa 1890

Dating Etiquette

Valentine's Day is fast approaching, and I admit to being a real Grinch about this particular holiday. I find it overhyped, over-commercialized, and overly exclusive, since it tends to make anyone who is not currently lucky in love feel left out. However, in an effort to get more into the spirit of the season, I thought it might be interesting to consult my shelves of etiquette manuals and see how our attitudes about dating have changed through the years.



In the 1800's, people had a rather idealized view of love, and especially of women. According to *Titcomb's Letters to Young People Single and Married* (Timothy Titcomb, 1858), "next to the Christian religion, there is nothing that will tend so strongly to the elevation and purification of young men, as female society."

Women were considered pure and untouchable, and etiquette manuals contained instructions such as, "No girl should permit a boy to be so familiar as to toy with her hands...or encircle her waist with his arm. Such impudent intimacy should never be tolerated for a moment." (Alex

M. Gow, *Good Morals and Gentle Manners*, 1873). Unmarried women were strictly chaperoned, and a man did not walk arm-in-arm with a girl unless he intended to marry her—and even that was considered a rather bold declaration of his intentions.

By the 1920's, rules had been somewhat relaxed. Lillian Eichler's *New Book of Etiquette*, written in 1924, explains that there is no reason why a young woman may not have men friends just as she has women friends, "if they are properly circumspect in conduct." But even among engaged couples, any public display of affection was considered ill-bred. The couple was encouraged not to indulge in "terms of endearment and caresses."



By the time 1933's *No Nice Girl Swears* by Alice-Leone Moats was written, petting was permissible, although women were reminded that, "a reputation for being a heavy necker doesn't really add to a girl's popularity." And guys were warned that just because a girl kissed you goodnight, there was no need to indulge in any "wowie, hot-cha" comments about her the next time her name was mentioned in a group of boys. (Allen and Briggs, *If You Please*, 1942).



Things have of course changed in modern times. When asked about the advisability of kissing on a first date, a book on *Urban Etiquette* by Charles Purdy written in 2004 explains that the decision on both kissing and whether or not to have sex on a first date is "yours and your date's to make together." And *White Trash Etiquette* by Dr. Verne Edstrom (Yes, that's a real book, written in 2006, and I have a copy) recommends only that you do not "commit adultery at the same motel where your sister-in-law works."

Clearly attitudes have changed, and more permissiveness is the current rule of thumb. But what occurred to me while looking up all these examples is that over the years, nothing much has really been altered. Men and women are still nervously looking for guidance on how to date and what the proper rules are for their current society, and etiquette books are still trying to provide guidelines about what to expect and what is acceptable.

In fact, as Ms. Eichler expressed in 1924. "Just as words die from our language and others are brought into it, just as skirts soar to the knees one season and tumble to the ankles the next, so do the formalities and outward gestures of etiquette vary according to the times. Although the *spirit* of etiquette remains always essentially the same, the *expression* of etiquette—the rules of conduct which govern social life and our associations with one another—is forever adjusting to new conditions."

So if, on this upcoming Valentine's Day, you are feeling unsure of yourself or the proper etiquette for how to treat your romantic partner in today's society, just realize that you are in the same condition as all the generations that came before—and that consulting a current etiquette book might help!



Happy Valentine's Day!

Latest News

Just an update on the latest news: While I am waiting to hear from agents about representing *The Chess Player*, I have started working on a new novel (tentatively titled *The Talent Show*). It also features etiquette teacher Dorietta Mosely as she investigates two new murders in the fictional village of Pinewood, NC.

I am currently making plans to attend this year's Killer Nashville convention, and am considering making reservations for Bouchercon at the Opryland Hotel. I also have a new Instagram account, which you can find at [Lucinda Gerlitz \(@gerlitzlm\)](https://www.instagram.com/gerlitzlm).

I would love for my readers to introduce themselves! You can drop me a note on my contact page at www.LucindaGerlitz.com.

And I couldn't resist another cat photo. This is Izzie taking a nap in my purse.

