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a girl's life

Dating, Interrupted

by Jovie Baclayon / Issue 70, 04-11-2005

"I have a non-date tomorrow," I tell my roommate. "Haha. A non-date? What's that?" she responds. "You know, it's a date, but not. Well, sort of." I don't know how better to explain it, but that's the only word to describe what this is: non-dating.



First, there was the "M" word. Then there was the "L" word. Ladies and gentleman, allow me to introduce you to the newest word terrorizing single people everywhere, the "D" word." Dating. In a world where we have Sweet 'n Low, tan-in-a-can, botox and reality television, it's no wonder that the idea of "substitutes" has proliferated the dating world. How often have you heard both men and women say, "We're not dating. We're just *hangin' out*," or "We went out but it wasn't a *date-date*," or "I'm seeing someone but we're not *exclusive*." The fear of dating has even spawned a new term, "the non-date."

The anatomy of a Date

For sanity's sake, let's adhere to the following definitions.

Date: a social and/or romantic rendezvous generally planned at least two days in advance that revolves around something (dinner or a movie, not the television)

Non-date: a casual, somewhat spontaneous meeting with romance potential when expenses (if any) are often willingly shared; the non-date can end politely if things are not working out or extend if they are; can also refer to a rendezvous with a dating partner when you don't go anywhere or do anything in particular

Dating: social and/or romantic rendezvous beyond the third date; implies multiple dating partners

GETTIN' IT RIGHT

- Traditional Date Behavior vs. Non-Date Behavior
- A date will pick you up; A non-date will meet you there.
 - A date is usually made at least two days in advance (women dislike spontaneous dates); A non-date is more spontaneous.
 - The male usually pays all expenses on a date; On a non-date, expenses are willingly shared.
 - On a date, hold hands, cuddle, kiss, be playful; On a non-date, "this space is mine, that space is yours."
 - A guy will walk you to your door at the end of a date; A guy will let you out at the curb at the end of a non-date.
 - Group dates in odd numbers, a non-date; Group dates where everyone is coupled, a date.
 - Sex on a non-date? Forget about it! Sex on a date-date? Just not on your first, please.

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Hanging out: see DATING

Exclusive: monogamy, DOES NOT MEAN MARRIAGE

Seeing each other: see EXCLUSIVE

To Date or to non-date, that is the question

Many of my girlfriends consider me a professional non-dater, meaning it's "normal" that after a few dates, my non-boyfriend and I cuddle on the couch and watch a movie instead of going out. This is fine every now and then, but what I, and many others like me, fail to realize is that it can create a false sense of intimacy. Without communicating with your partner, you may find yourself exclusively non-dating someone who is not exclusively dating you, and you're headed for a conversation neither of you is prepared for yet.

In the early stages of a relationship, non-dates can be good and bad. Going to a museum or a movie or meeting for coffee or happy hour is all part of the getting-to-know-you phase. The upside to a non-date is that both people generally feel more comfortable and are able to just be themselves. It allows partners to become friends and open up. However, keeping things strictly platonic can result in friendship or nothing at all. I went on a string on non-dates with a good-looking guy who was attentive and fun, but I didn't feel any sparks. I kept hoping that my feelings would manifest the next time we hung out. After a while, he got tired of trying and stopped calling.

"Non-date" can also refer to the date-before-the-first-date. I initiated a non-date at Houston's with a guy I met while inebriated at a sports bar. It was ideal because I wasn't sure if I would remember him and besides, I didn't want this guy to know where I lived without an adequate screening process. We met there, paid separately and afterward, he asked me out on a real date. Perfect.

Who's afraid of the big bad Date?

In 2003, the Census Bureau reported that one-third of men and nearly one-quarter of women between the ages of 30 and 34 has never been married. Many are focusing on career or education; others are hesitant about getting into a serious relationship. They're afraid of hurting someone or being hurt themselves. The non-date, and subsequent non-boyfriend or non-girlfriend, is viewed as a way to have a relationship without subjecting either party to possible heartbreak. But who are we kidding?

I have a friend who swears she won't date again because of the heartache that followed her last relationship. Many associate dating with pain, obligations and expectations, or date with the sole purpose of marriage. It's no wonder so many are afraid. We lose sight of the fact that dating is supposed to be fun and helps us understand our needs and ourselves. So until you are in a mutually exclusive relationship, date and date often! You have to admit you're missing out on a big part of life by denying romance all together. It's fine to tell yourself you're going on a non-date to take the pressure off, but whether you're dating, non-dating or just plain hanging out, don't let fear take over.

Have fun. Relax. Date.

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