

Why Men Initiate Situationships: Motivations, Meanings and Modern Relationship Patterns

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INTRODUCTION

- This study explores how men experience and interpret situationships.
- 17 male participants went through 30-minute semi-structured interviews that explored 3 questions:
 - (1) How do men describe their situationship experiences?
 - (2) What motivates them to initiate or maintain these relationships?
 - (3) What emotional, relational, or psychological consequences arise from these experiences?Findings would support the emotional experiences and motivations in situations from the male perspective.

Research Question:

Why do men initiate situationships? How do these motivations reflect the male perspective around modern dating culture?

METHOD

Participants

- Recruited 17 males ages 18+

Procedure

- Data collection was conducted via zoom . Each participant partook in a 30-minute interview where they were asked a series of open and close ended questions about their situationship(s). Participants’ responses were later recorded.
- Once all interviews were conducted, researchers reviewed audio transcripts and identified any quotes that referenced the initiation of situationships.
- All quotes were then coded, and themes were later created that reflected male experiences and motivations for initiating situationship.

“He was like, ‘I just want friends with benefits’, and I was like ‘fine by me’.”

“I just met him on snapchat and he said I was cute, so I was like, ‘I’ll come over’, so that’s how it kind of started”

“I had strong feelings for her for a while being friends with her. I had kind of harbored feelings for a while... never thought she would have them for me”

“We flirted... there was a party one night...it just happened.”

RESULTS

Themes	Subthemes	Example
Situationships are initiated by rejecting traditional relationship scripts	Intentional avoidance of commitment	After ending a relationship, a man agrees to a “friends with benefits” dynamic with mutual friend.
	Contextual constraints that make situationships preferable or necessary	A soldier preparing for deployment meets a woman and initiates a situationship with her, opting for a connection that offers closeness and no commitment while he remains stateside.
Situationships are initiated as a way to meet emotional and validation needs	Seeking connection	A man initiates a situationship with a woman after experiencing feelings of loneliness.
	Intrapersonal vulnerability shapes initiation	A single man experiences emotional distress from his previous relationship and finds emotional consolation through situationship.
Mutual attraction and emotional reciprocity legitimize the situationship	Attraction and mutual reinforcement	A man initiates a situationship with a woman he’s attracted to after learning that she also finds him attractive.
Situationships emerge through gradual emotional and interactional momentum	Gradual relational escalation	A man initiates a situationship with someone after an increase in quality time
Situationships are initiated socially rather than strategically planned	Social contexts facilitate initiation	A man initiates a situationship after meeting a woman at a party

“It was an opportunity with someone that I really connected with. That doesn’t come around too much, so I guess that was my primary motivation”

“My sort of depression and feelings of loneliness, I sort of just grabbed onto whoever gave any sort of opportunity to start a relationship... sort of out of desperation”

“We always had a good time hanging out with one another, so we just started talking more and more and that’s how we initiated the situationship”

DATA ANALYSIS

- This qualitative study used a descriptive design, given that the study was exploratory in nature, in order to best understand how men describe the initiation of their situationships.
- Given this methodological design, reflexive thematic analyses as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2022) was used to address each of the research questions. The six steps of this analytic technique involve: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) generating themes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report.
- With the current study, two investigators trained in reflexive thematic analyses read and re-read each of the data-rich transcripts and began developing initial codes and then generating categories. Next, the reviewers refined the codes and categories, and then developing themes. Subsequently, the researchers re-read the transcripts to ensure that the themes that were identified were accurately represented by the data. Last, the themes were defined and named, providing descriptions that would best reflect the experiences and responses provided by the participants.

DISCUSSION

- These findings challenge the assumption that men initiate situationships to avoid emotional attachment. Instead, this study supports the idea that men in nontraditional relationships continue to seek connection and fulfillment of emotional needs. Male participants perceived situationships as preferable to traditional relationships because they offer similar benefits of physical and emotional intimacy without the expectation of long-term commitment. Despite this, the male experience within non-traditional relationships is emotionally nuanced, reflecting feelings of confusion, vulnerability, excitement and pleasure.

Future Considerations

- Future research should investigate situationships across diverse cultural contexts to understand how cultural influences affect motivations and experiences in non-traditional relationships. The study should specifically examine how cultural norms, societal values and media exposure influence an individual's choice to start or engage in situationships. This cross-cultural comparison would enhance the understanding of non-traditional relationship dynamics, clarifying if certain experiences and motivations are culturally specific or universally shared.

REFERENCES

