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James B. Moran
University of Florida

Courtney L. Crosby
University of Texas at Austin

Taylor Himes
Texas State University - San Marcos

T. Joel Wade
Bucknell University, jwade@bucknell.edu

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and Content Analyses from Netflix

James B. Moran Ph.D.[1], jamesmoran320@gmail.com, Courtney L. Crosby Ph.D.[2],

clcrosby@utexas.edu, Taylor Himes[3], t_h215@txstate.edu, T. Joel Wade, Ph.D.[4],

jwade@bucknell.edu,

[1] University of Florida, Health Education and Behavior Department, University of Florida

[2] The University of Texas at Austin, 108 E Dean Keeton St, Austin, TX 78712

[3] Texas State University, 601 University Dr, San Marcos, TX 78666

[4] Bucknell University, 201 O'Leary Center, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, 17837

Corresponding Authors:

James B. Moran

Health Education and Behavior Department, University of Florida

Tel: 732-267-0450

Email: jamesmoran320@gmail.com or j.moran@ufl.edu

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***Dating Around*: Investigating Gender Differences in First Date Behavior Using Self-Reports**

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Abstract

In the current studies, we used both qualitative, quantitative, and content analysis to understand which first date behaviors individuals perceive as critical for landing second dates. In Study 1 (*N*=100), men and women reported tactics or behaviors that they believed someone of their gender would perform on a successful first date. We observed that men and women perceive similar behaviors as important to engage in on successful first dates. Study 2 (*N*=131) had men and women rate the perceived effectiveness of these tactics. When the behaviors are aggregated, men perceive women who engage in "Involvement" behaviors as better at obtaining second dates. In contrast, women perceive men who engage in "Etiquette" behaviors as more likely to land second dates. In Study 3, we coded the *Netflix* show, *Dating Around*, using the tactics from Study 1 to examine if engaging in these tactics more frequently predicted having a successful date. Results revealed that receiving a second date was not related to an individual's engagement in these tactics. This research is the first to attempt to empirically delineate tactics that occur on first dates and lead to second dates for men and women.

Lay summary: There needs to be more scientific knowledge on how to behave on a first date. We observed that men and women use similar behaviors to have a successful first date.

However, women find polite behaviors, and men find more touchy behaviors to be more

successful on a first date.

Keywords: first dates; dating; short-term mating; gender differences; *Netflix*

"First dates are interviews"

-Ryan Reynolds, National Lampoon's Van Wilder

Nearly 31% of adults in the United States of America are currently single (Pew Research Center (2020). This percentage is significantly higher than it was in the 1950s, when approximately 22% of Americans reported being single (Klinberg, 2013). These statistics suggest that a large portion of the American population may be going on first dates. Although individuals may choose to be single—embracing their singlehood (Park et al., 2020)—many individuals go on first dates with the hopes of forming long-term romantic relationships. Going on a first date allows people to assess whether they are attracted to their date and if they could see the relationship moving forward, as the quote "First dates are interviews" highlights (IMDB, n.d.). Therefore, understanding what behaviors men and women believe constitutes a "good" first date, and which behaviors are associated with securing follow-up dates is important for understanding human romantic relationships.

Dating and Relationship Formation

A common fundamental social motive for individuals is finding and securing a long-term mate (Kenrick et al., 2010); however, forming intimate close relationships can be a complicated experience. According to the Relationship Trajectory Framework (Eastwick et al., 2022), in order for romantic or sexual relationships to form, there needs to be multiple meetings, where

partners within the relationship are attracted to one another and self-disclose intimate

information. Although self-disclosure exists within all relationships, self-disclosure in romantic

relationships is essential in forming long-term intimate, romantic and sexual pair bonds (Altman

& Taylor, 1973; Carpenter & Green, 2015; Finkenauer et al., 2018). However, before this

multiple meet-up and self-disclosure can occur, individuals must have the first meet-up or a first date.

First Dates

A first date has been characterized as participation between two individuals in a shared activity, where one individual initiates and arranges the activity. First dates are different from friendship get-togethers because of the attraction and sexual overtones (Mongeau & Kendall, 1996). Additionally, men and women often perceive the goal of first dates differently. For instance, college-aged men report that a sexual encounter is usually the goal of a first date, whereas college-aged women's goals of first dates include intimacy or the formation of a romantic relationship (Mongeau et al., 2004). These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests women prioritize emotional stability and support over sexual consummation (Buss, 1989) whereas men prioritize sexual access (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Clark & Hatfield 1989; Schmitt et al., 2001, Wade & Mogilski, 2018) in long-term relationships.

Dates are usually scripted events, and both men and women feel anxiety when initiating a first date (Bartoli & Clark, 2006; McNamara & Grossman, 1991). There are also double standards associated with first dates in heterosexual relationships (Paynter & Leaper, 2016). For example, when a heterosexual woman initiates a first date, men view the women's behaviors as less intimate (Mongeau et al., 1994). Interestingly, dating is a somewhat novel experience despite usually being the first step in forming a romantic relationship. Dating emerged from a

working-class culture and first became a ritual during the 1920s (Bailey, 2004). For much of

human history; however, individuals were assigned romantic partners by their families, often

only being able to choose a partner who was living within the same small tribal setting, and who

had a reputation as a good social ally (Buss, 2003). Although family members still have a say in

potential dates (Allison, 2016), our modern environment allows for adults to match with

countless individuals whom someone could date, often available at any time from online dating

apps.

People are now able to meet a potential partner without ever leaving their home. Instead

of meeting individuals through mutual friends or at work, people are now meeting each other

online. A national survey by the Pew Research Center (2016) found that among 2,001 adults,

12% of Americans used online dating sites, and 9% of adults have an online dating app on their

phone. Further, the usage of dating websites by young adults (aged 18-24) tripled from 2013 to

2015, and usage by middle-aged men and women (aged 55-64) doubled. With a growing number

of people using online dating to make decisions regarding whom to date or whom to have sex

with, researchers now have an array of behaviors to explore.

Current Research

Research has yet to examine the psychology involved in first date behaviors, which is the

central goal of the following studies. In Study 1, we sought to obtain and organize a list of acts

that men and women believe are good tactics to use on a first date in order to secure a second

date. The second goal (Study 2) was to assess the effectiveness of these acts and examine if there

are gender differences. The third goal (Study 3) of this research was to use the *Netflix* show

Dating Around—a TV show that follows one person going on five-first dates before choosing

one individual who they would like to go on a second date with—to assess if the individual who

received the second date actually used the acts deemed effective in Study 1 and Study 2 more

often. Using this dating show allowed the research team to observe and assess the efficacy of

acts perceived by sampled individuals from the general U.S. population as necessary for having

successful first dates, rather than only relying on self-report data or following people on actual

first dates, which might not be allowed by IRBs. This research is the first to empirically

investigate first date behavior differences between men and women.

Study 1

In Study 1, we conducted an act nomination procedure to assess the tactics men and

women perceive as necessary for their gender to engage in to have successful first dates. An act

nomination procedure is a mixed-method that prompts participants to define or list acts of

interest for a particular research study. The purpose of act nomination procedures is to group and

quantify how individuals conceptualize specific constructs without imposing common lexical

restraints or definitions on them (Buss & Craik, 1983). A successful first date for the purpose of

the current research was operationalized as a first date that led to a second date. We hypothesized

that men would be more likely to report acts that follow a man's cultural script of dating. For

instance, men might be more likely to report wanting to pay for the date (Lamont, 2014). This

notion also supports evolutionarily-informed conceptualizations of dating, which shows that

women often value a partner's financial prospects (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). It was also

hypothesized that women would be more likely to report being flirtatious on first dates, since

men report greater desire for attractive and flirtatious partners when thinking of a long-term mate

(Meltzer et al., 2014).

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 100 individuals (women = 65.0%; M_{age} = 22.94, SD_{age} = 6.32)

who were attending a private northeastern university in the United States (60%), or who were

recruited from Facebook (40%). The majority of the sample was White (89.0%), identified as

straight (97.0%), had sex before (95.0.%), and were in a relationship (52.0%). All procedures were IRB approved.

Materials and Procedure

Participants received a Qualtrics survey that first presented the participants with an informed consent. After consenting, they were then given a demographic questionnaire asking about age, sex, race and whether or not they were in a relationship. Similar to other act nomination surveys (Buss & Craik, 1983; Moran et al., 2020; Moran & Wade, 2017; Wade & Vanartsdalen, 2013), the participants were instructed to list five behaviors that someone of their gender has performed or could perform on a first date if they are interested in going on a second date with a person. The participants were specifically asked:

"Please think of people you know of your own gender (sex) who have gone on a

successful first date. A *successful* first date is a date that will lead to both parties involved wanting to go on a _second date_.

With these individuals in mind, write down five acts or behaviors that they have performed (or might perform) that reflect or exemplify their plan to have a successful first date. Be sure to write down acts or behaviors. An act is something that a person does or did, **_not_** something that they are. Do not say "he is smooth" or "she is love-struck." These are not behaviors. You should describe acts or behaviors that someone could read

and answer the questions: "Did you ever do this?" and "How often have you done this?"

Results

Participants provided a total of 474 acts (women = 305 acts, men = 169 acts). If a

response was not clear (e.g., asking hypothetical questions), it was dropped. Duplicate or

redundant responses were collapsed into one response. This resulted in 24 unique act

nominations for women and 18 unique acts for men (see Table 1 for list of acts). Ultimately,

these acts provide researchers with an inventory of tactics that people associate with a successful

first date.

Study 2 was conducted to assess the perceived effectiveness of these acts. It should be

noted that many of the acts nominated by both men and women were the same or similar.

However, to allow for possible nuances in men's and women's perceptions of these acts, we kept

the acts separate in Study 2.

Table 1. First date tactics perceived as important by men and women

Tactic Nominated by Men	Frequency	Tactic Nominated by Women	Frequency
Have a deep conversation	13	Telling Jokes/Being Funny	29
Pay for the date	12	Asking Questions	17
Laugh/Humor	11	Be Polite/Respectful	16
Have eye contact	7	Dress well & wear makeup	15
Compliment her	7	Smiling	14
Dress well	7	Make eye contact	12
Ask good questions	7	Pay	12
Be Polite	6	Listen	11
Listen	6	Kiss	9
Smile	5	Ask for a second date	9
Open/Hold the door	4	Flirt	8
Creative Fun Date idea	4	Limit phone usage	8
Show interest	4	Hold Hands	7
Pick her up/Drive	4	Be on time/Be Punctual	7
Be Punctual	3	Hold the door open	6
Good body language	3	Be happy/Be Positive	5
Be silly/fun	3	Make good conversation	5
Be kind	3	Compliment him	5
		Don't get too drunk	4
		Be talkative	4

Be attentive	4
Drink Alcohol	3
Pick a nice location	3
Be open minded	3

Note: Numbers indicate the nominated frequency of each tactic. Higher numbers indicate that an act was nominated more frequently.

Study 2

In Study 2, we investigated the perceived effectiveness of the tactics uncovered in Study

1. We hypothesized that women would perceive men engaging in acts that were focused on being

attentive and emotionally accessible as more effective than men would on first dates, since

women report emotional accessibility as a preference in long-term relationships (Buss &

Schmitt, 1993; Wade & Mogilski, 2018; Walter et al., 2020). Additionally, we hypothesized that

men would report women engaging in acts that signal attractiveness as more effective on first

dates than women would (Meltzer et al., 2014; Walter et al., 2020).

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 131 individuals (women = 73.3%; M_{age} = 21.51, SD_{age} = 5.49)

from a private northeastern university in the United States (46.7%) or who accessed the link from

Reddit (53.3%). The majority of the sample was White (83.2%), identified as straight (89.3%),

had sex before (80.9%), and were single (56.5%).

Materials and Procedure

Participants received an online Qualtrics questionnaire. They were then given an

informed consent, and after agreeing to participate, they were asked to rate the nominated acts

from Study 1 in terms of their effectiveness using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = ineffective to 7

= most effective). The acts being rated were counterbalanced to be displayed as either a woman

(α = .90) engaging in acts to get a second date, or a man (α = .84) engaging in acts to get a second date. Participants then filled out a demographic survey and were debriefed. All procedures were IRB approved.

Results

A 2 (participant gender) × 18 (tactics by men) Mixed Model Repeated Measures

ANOVA revealed a non-significant effect of participant gender on the tactics nominated and

conducted by men, $F(17, 113) = 1.43$, $p = .134$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$. This result suggests that men and

women do not differ in how effective they perceive men engaging in these acts on first dates to

be. However, several of the tactics ratings differed from one another: $F(17, 113) =$

9.24, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.58$ (see table 2 for differences in Bonferroni corrected comparisons (.05/18

= .002).

Table 2. Gender differences in perceptions of men engaging in

Tactics	Men M(SD)	Women M(SD)	Total M(SD)
Have a deep conversation [a]	5.09(1.54)	5.40(1.51)	5.31(1.52)
Pay for the date [b]	6.00(1.23)	6.50(0.71)	6.37(0.91)
Laugh/Humor [a b c]	6.45(0.65)	6.55(0.76)	6.55(0.73)
Have eye contact [ad]	5.97(1.38)	6.06(0.97)	6.04(1.01)
Compliment her [a]	5.83(1.22)	5.89(1.11)	5.87(1.14)
Dress well [a]	5.94(0.99)	5.93(0.93)	5.93(0.95)
Ask good questions [c]	6.03(0.82)	6.26(0.86)	6.20(0.85)
Be Polite [c]	6.03(1.15)	6,47(0.76)	6.35(0.90)
Listen [c]	6.20(1.02)	6.55(0.74)	6.45(0.83)
Smile [c]	6.06(1.02)	6.55(0.74)	6.46(0.83)
Open/Hold the door [a bd]	5.06(1.50)	5.46(1.30)	5.25(1.36)
Creative Fun Date idea [a c]	5.86(1.00)	6.05(1.04)	6.00(1.02)
Show interest [c]	6.30(0.92)	6.59(0.62)	6.52(0.73)
Pick her up/Drive [a b cd]	5.00(1.55)	5.05(1.62)	5.04(1.60)
Be Punctual [a b]	5.51(1.36)	5.89(1.03)	5.78(1.13)
Good body language [a]	5.89(1.21)	5.94(1.01)	5.92(1.06)
Be silly/fun [a]	5.57(1.26)	6.27(0.96)	6.08(1.09)
Be kind [c]	5.80(1.49)	6.46(0.81)	6.28(1.07)

the nominated male acts from Study 1

Note: Mean(Standard Deviation). Tactics with the same superscripts were significantly different from one another. For example, "have a deep conversation" was significantly different from men "laugh/humor".

A 2 (participant gender) × 24 (tactics by women) Mixed Model Repeated Measures

ANOVA revealed a significant effect participant gender on the tactics nominated and conducted

by women, $F(23, 107) = 2.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.37$. An independent samples t-test with

Bonferroni corrections (.05/23 = .002) for the women's nominated tactics revealed a difference

between men and women in perceptions of women hinting for a second date $t(129) = 3.96$, $p <$

.001, where men rated women hinting at a second date ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 1.04$) as more effective

than women did ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.30$). Holding hands was trending toward that direction $t(129)$

$= 2.89$, $p = .001$, where men ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.45$), rated women holding hands as more effective

than women ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.74$) perceived this act.

Factor analysis. Next, we conducted two exploratory factor analyses (EFA) using a

promax rotation on the ratings of the tactics generated by the act nomination procedure

separately for the acts nominated by men and acts nominated by women, respectively.

Tactics nominated by men

For the 18 nominated acts by men, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling

adequacy was .86, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (153) = 937.36$, $p < .001$).

Both parallel analysis and a scree plot indicated a three-factor solution best fit the data. Indeed, a

factor solution of three proved optimal, accounting for 47% of the variance after removing

tactics that did not load at 0.30 or higher on a single factor (TLI = .871; RMSEA = .08). We used

0.30 as a cutoff threshold because we wanted to ensure that the tactics were highly consistent

with the individual factors, and because we wanted to reduce the scale down to as few tactics as

possible while still ensuring the adequacy of the individual factors (see Hair et al., (1998) for

discussion of cutoff thresholds). This resulted in 14/18 tactics and three factors being retained

after the exploratory analysis. We labeled these three factors according to the content of the

tactics that loaded on them: *Etiquette* (α = .83), *Involvement* (α = .78) and *Behavior* (α = .66).

The full list of tactics grouped according to their factor are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Gender differences in perceptions of women engaging in the nominated female acts from Study 1

Tactics	Women M(SD)	Men M(SD)	Total M(SD)
1. Telling Jokes/Being Funny [a]			
2. Asking Questions[b]			
3. Be Polite/Respectful[c]			
4. Dress well & wear makeup [dc]			
5. Ask for a second date [abce]			
6. Make eye contact[ce]			
7. Pay [abc]	3.06(1.83)	3.69(1.48)	3.52(1.60)
8. Listen [abcde]	6.17(1.01)	6.14(0.88)	6.15(0.91)
9. Kiss[e]	5.29(1.62)	4.46(1.69)	4.69(1.70)
10. Smiling[e]	6.26(1.04)	6.28(0.92)	6.28(0.94)
11. Flirt[e]	6.14(1.09)	5.87(1.07)	5.95(1.07)
12. Limit phone usage[e]	6.23(1.14)	5.93(0.99)	6.01(1.04)

13. Hold Hands[bc]	5.06(1.45)	4.10(1.72)	4.36(1.72)
14. Be on time/Be Punctual [abcd]	5.19(1.23)	5.58(1.18)	6.11(1.01)
15. Hold the door open[e]	3.31(1.69)	3.75(1.64)	3.63(1.66)
16. Be happy/Be Positive [ade]	6.03(1.04)	6.26(0.82)	6.20(0.89)
17. Make good conversation[e]	6.37(0.97)	6.45(0.71)	6.43(0.78)
18. Compliment him[e]	6.09(1.15)	5.61(1.26)	5.74(1.22)
19. Don't get too drunk[c]	5.71(1.15)	5.51(1.54)	5.74(1.16)
20. Be talkative[ce]	5.80(1.21)	5.72(1.16)	5.74(1.17)
21. Be attentive[e]	6.15(0.92)	6.14(0.85)	6.14(0.87)
22. Drink Alcohol [abdc]	3.60(1.53)	3.65(1.51)	3.63(1.51)
23. Pick a nice location[e]	5.40(1.50)	5.35(1.13)	5.36(1.22)
24. Be open minded	5.63(1.11)	5.94(1.06)	5.85(1.08)

Note: Mean(Standard Deviation). Tactics with the same superscripts were significantly different from one another. For example, "telling jokes/being funny" was significantly different from women "ask for a second date". ** $p < .002$

Table 4. Men's tactics on a first date factor loadings

Men's Tactics	Factor 1: Etiquette	Factor 2: Involvement	Factor 3: Behavior
Listen	**0.85**	-0.18	0.15
Be Polite	**0.84**	0.14	0.10
Be Kind	**0.79**	-0.23	0.19
Show Interest	**0.55**	0.08	-0.15
Have a deep conversation	**0.44**	0.21	-0.14
Have eye contact	-0.13	**0.84**	0.12
Good body language	-0.10	**0.72**	-0.07
Smile	0.10	**0.63**	0.01
Laugh/Humor	0.01	**0.55**	-0.10
Be silly/fun	0.06	**0.38**	0.22
Ask good questions	0.24	**0.35**	0.01
Pay for the date	0.04	-0.12	**0.82**
Open/Hold the door	0.18	0.16	**0.53**
Creative Fun Date idea	-0.08	0.21	**0.33**

Note. The tactics that make up each factor are bolded in the respective factor column, the cross-loadings for the other two factors are not bolded. For example, "Pay for the date" is classified as part of the *Behavior* factor; however, it cross-loads at .04 on the *Etiquette* factor and -.12 on the *Involvement* factor.

Tactics *nominated by women*

We followed the same factor analysis procedure outlined above for acts nominated by women. For the 24 nominated acts, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .84, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi2$ (153) = 1150.90, $p < .001$). Both parallel analysis and a scree plot indicated a three-factor solution best fit the data. Indeed, a factor solution of three proved optimal, accounting for 39% of the variance after removing tactics that did not load at 0.30 or higher on a single factor (TLI = .896; RMSEA = .053). This resulted in 21/24 tactics and three factors being retained after the exploratory analysis. We labeled these three factors according to the content of the tactics that loaded on them: *Etiquette* ($\alpha = .89$), *Involvement* ($\alpha = .53$) and *Behavior* ($\alpha = .57$). The full list of tactics grouped according to their factor are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Women's tactics on a first date factor loadings

Women Tactics	Et	Factor 1	Factor 2
Listen			
Make good conversation			
Be attentive			
Asking Questions			
Be Polite/Respectful			
Smiling			
Be on time/Be Punctual			
Be open minded			
Be talkative			
Make eye contact			
Be happy/Be Positive			
Limit phone usage			
Telling Jokes/Being Funny			
Don't get too drunk			
Pick a nice location			
Flirt			
Hold Hands			
Compliment him			
Drink Alcohol			
Hold the door open			
Pay			

Factor 3

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Note. The tactics that make up each factor are bolded in the respective factor column, the cross-loadings for the other two factors are not bolded. For example, "Flirt" is classified as part of the *Involvement* factor; however, it cross-loads at .12 on the *Etiquette* factor and -.29 on the *Behavior* factor.

Gender differences. A series of 2 (participant gender) × 1 (tactics for men and women) ANOVAs revealed significant gender differences towards men's *Etiquette*, women's *Involvement*, and women's *Behavior*. For men's *Etiquette* and women's *Behavior*, women had higher means than men, indicating that they perceived women engaging in the tactics subsumed by these factors as more effective for having a successful first date than men. For women's *Involvement*, however, men had higher means, indicating men perceived women engaging in the acts subsumed by this factor as more effective for a successful first date (see Table 6). The lack of sex differences towards men's *Involvement,* men's *Behavior,* and women's *Etiquette* indicates

that men and women agree about the impact that the tactics subsumed by these factors have on

perceptions of the success of a first date.

Table 6. Gender differences in tactics by actor gender and participant gender

	Factor	Men M(SD)	Women M(SD)	Mean Difference Women's Mean – Men's mean	*F*-value	*p*-value
Acts nominated by men	Etiquette	6.07 (0.88)	6.52 (0.56)**	0.45	11.90	< .001
	Involvement	6.01 (0.74)	6.25 (0.65)	0.24	3.18	0.077
	Behavior	5.33 (1.02)	5.64 (1.01)	0.30	2.28	0.133
Acts nominated by women	Etiquette	5.90 (0.62)	5.95 (0.68)	0.06	0.18	0.672
	Involvement	5.22 (0.88)	4.81 (0.90)*	-0.41	5.42	0.021
	Behavior	3.19 (1.51)	3.72 (1.29)*	0.53	4.00	0.048

*Note:*** : $p < .01$;
*: $p < .05$

Study 3

Study 2 revealed that men and women differed in their perceptions of which acts are

effective for successful first dates; however, there were not significant gender differences toward

every tactic nor towards every factor. Most importantly, the factor analysis from Study 2

revealed that both men and women's acts can be classified into three broad categories: (1)

Etiquette, (2) *Involvement* and (3) *Behavior*.

In Study 3, we used the *Netflix* show, *Dating Around*, to assess which of these categories

is more predictive in securing a second date. *Dating Around* is a reality dating show where one

person goes on five separate blind first dates in the same venue, and then picks one individual to

go on a second date with (see Method Section for more information). We predicted that men who

engaged in more *Etiquette* and *Behavior* actions would be selected more often by women for a

second date. This prediction is based on women's preference for emotional access and

involvement (Buss, 1989), and our exploratory results from Study 2. Second, we predicted that

women who engaged in more *Involvement* would be selected more often for a second date by men.

Method

Dating Around

Dating Around is a reality dating show from *Netflix*. There have been three seasons, filmed in New York City, New Orleans, and Brazil. The show follows six singles as they navigate five blind first dates. The show's mission is to "Find one perfect match worthy of a second date." One thing, in particular, is that the producers of the shows did not want a show that focused on obnoxious behaviors encountered during the dates such as drink-throwing. Instead, they reported wanting real people interested in dating, which may be why they sought out people from coffee shops, libraries, and public places (Brickner, 2020). On the dates, the main dater is placed at a restaurant or bar and is tasked with dating five different people (the datees). The five dates are at the same location, and the main dater wears the same thing. It should be noted that the datees never interact with one another. After the date, the main dater picks a few of the datees to go to a second location, this all takes place during the same session of the date. This is meant for the datee and dater to get extra time with one another. However, each episode ends with the main dater meeting with only *one* datee to have their second date. That one datee, was the most successful on the first date, and then got a second date.

Dating Around is a reality television show about a primary dater going on a first date and

choosing someone for a second date. Therefore, it was the perfect show for the current research

team to examine dating-relevant behaviors because Studies 1 and 2 focus on studying the

underlying psychology engaged in during successful first dates. Based on the reports from the

producers of *Dating Around*, the show is not scripted (Brickner, 2020). The only thing that is

forced is that the primary dater must wear the same clothes and hairstyle on each date. In addition, the primary dater must also go on dates at the same restaurants/bar. Although the producers report that this was due to editing, we find it essential to describe for other researchers because it creates a quasi-controlled date. Although the producers and *Netflix* did not intend to execute a traditional psychological experiment, controlling what the primary dater wears and where they eat while keeping the environment consistent across the dates minimizes third variables that we would potentially need to also consider (e.g., the color of clothing, going to different bars) in the current set of studies.

Furthermore, we chose this show to code because of the exact nature of the show. In Studies 1 and 2, we documented behaviors men and women perceive as important to engage in on a successful first date. While it would be ideal to study and analyze actual first dates of people not on a TV show, this show allowed us to code a first date and see what behaviors were used the most to get a second date. The nature of the show design allowed us to easily apply the behaviors men and women reported from the first two studies and assess them outside of a laboratory setting. *Dating Around* is more closely related to Studies 1 and 2 than other shows like *Love is Blind*, *Are You the One*, *Married at First Sight*, or *The Bachelor* for these reasons. Other shows focused on relationships tend to have similar design commonalities that Dating Around does not. In other dating reality shows, the contestants live, interact, and compete with one another for a main person's attention.

Additionally, these shows focus on inconsistent environments for individuals going on

the dates. For example, some dates might go to a vineyard and drink wine while others go rock

climbing or jet skiing. Basically, these shows introduce confounding variables which diminish

the validity of the variables we would be coding. *Dating Around* does not have those problems. It

sends people on realistic, feasible dates. *Dating Around* is portrayed as more authentic because the dates are one-on-one, and the other datees are not competing against one another to land a subsequent date.

Dating Around **"participants."** The daters ($N = 72$, primary daters $n = 12$; datees $n = 60$) on the show consisted of men or women residing in the city in which the show was taped. For this study, we only coded the *Dating Around* episodes for New York and New Orleans. Of the daters there were 39 men and 33 women, and only 11 individuals mentioned their age ($M = 29.82$, $SD = 3.98$, range = 26-36). The daters consisted of 68.1% straight, 18.1% gay, 6.9% as lesbian, 1.4% as bisexual, 2.8% as no label and 1.4% as not classified.

Coding

Two trained coders were instructed to watch 12 episodes of the show on *Netflix* (two seasons: (1) New York City, (2) New Orleans). Each season had 6 episodes. The coders were instructed to watch the episode and tally when the person seeking the date engaged in the various acts. The goal of the coding was to use as many of the tactics nominated from the previous studies as possible to discern if these tactics were effective in getting asked out on a second date.

Yes and nos. Coders recorded either a 1 = yes, or 0 = no, if the dater/datee was polite or held the door.

Count. Coders were instructed to count/ tally the number of times the person in the

episode engaged in the following acts: Told jokes (made the person laugh intentionally), asked

questions, kissed, asked for a second date, looked at their phone, held hands, and the number of

drinks they had.

Coder's perception. Our two coders were tasked with rating various acts as well. Coders were asked to report how open minded 1 (not at all) – 7 (very open minded) the person was.

Coders were also asked to report how often the person was positive, attentive, flirtatious, or good at making conversation, listening, smiling, and making eye contact from 1 (never) – 7 (extremely often).

Logistic analysis. We ran a series of logistic regressions to assess how each tactics factor originally nominated by men (Etiquette, Involvement, and Behavior) impacted receiving a: (1) second location invite and (2) a second date for male datees. We additionally ran logistic regressions to see how all of the original tactics nominated by men impacted receiving a: (1) second location invite and a (2) second date for male datees. For men's dates, we ran a series of logistic regressions to assess how the tactics subsumed by the *Etiquette* and *Involvement* factors that were originally nominated by women impacted receiving a: (1) second location invite and (2) a second date for female datees. None of the women in the episodes of *Dating Around* used for this study engaged in any of the *Behavior* factor tactics, so this factor was not applicable when evaluating if it impacted getting a second location invite or a second date for female datees. We additionally ran logistic regressions to see how all of the tactics originally nominated by women impacted receiving a: (1) second location invite and a (2) second date for female datees. Before running logistic regression analyses, we split the data by male and female datees.

We next removed the main daters from each dataset, so that we were only assessing the impact

of the factors on our outcome variables of interest for the individuals competing for second dates.

Predictor variables. The two coders had moderate reliability (Kappa = .78); therefore, we

averaged the codings together based on previous work (Syed & Nelson, 2015). For the analysis,

we assessed how summed counts of each of the acts listed above in their respective factors

predicted getting a second location invite or a second date.

Men's acts. The following acts were summed for the *Etiquette* factor for men: listening,

have deep meaningful conversation, and politeness. Eye contact, smiling, laughing, making jokes

and asking good questions were summed for the *Involvement* factor. The *Behavior* facet only

consisted of held the door because the "creating a fun date" and "paying for the date" acts were

not able to be coded—as it is unclear if men planned the dates, or who paid for the dates.

Women's acts. Women's *Etiquette* factor consisted of listening, making good

conversation, attentiveness, asking questions, being polite, smiling, being open minded, making

eye contact, being positive, and being funny. Being on time, talkative, and picking a nice

location were not included in the summation because they were not coded—as it is unclear from

the show if women had a say in the date's location, and if they were talking the same amount as

others on the date. The *Involvement* factor consisted of flirting, holding hands, and number of

drinks. Like for men, the *Behavior* facet only consisted of holding the door. However, as noted

above, none of the women daters held the door. As a result, this factor was not included in

subsequent analyses for the women datees.

Outcome variables. The show is designed to lead to a second date. However, there are

two aspects of a second date. If the first date is going well, the main dater can ask the datee to go

to a second location. This is counted as the first dependent variable: Asked to go to a second

location (coded as 1 = yes, 0 = no). At the end of the show, you then see the one person whom

the main dater has picked to go on an entirely new second date (coded as 1 = yes, 0 = no).

Results

Men as the Dater

Logistic regression analysis revealed no significant main effect of the *Etiquette* ($p = .37$),

Involvement ($p = .08$), or *Behavior* ($p = .61$) factors on landing a second location invite for the

male datees. Logistic regression analysis additionally revealed no significant main effect of the

Etiquette ($p = 1.00$), *Involvement* ($p = 1.00$), or *Behavior* ($p = 1.00$) factors on landing a second

location invite. Finally, logistic regression analysis revealed no significant main effect of any of

the independent behaviors on landing a second location invite for the male datees.

Women as the Dater

Logistic regression analysis revealed no significant main effect of the *Etiquette* ($p = .38$)

or *Involvement* ($p = .94$) factors on landing a second location invite for the female datees.

Logistic regression analysis additionally revealed no significant main effect of the *Etiquette* ($p =$

$.20$) or *Involvement* ($p = .48$) factors on landing a second location invite. Finally, logistic

regression analysis revealed no significant main effect of any of the independent behaviors on

landing a second location invite for the female datees.

General Discussion

The results from the three studies suggest novel and theoretically interesting gender

differences and similarities in men's and women's perceptions of first dates. For instance, men

and women tend not to differ in the acts they perceive their gender should engage in to have a

successful first date (Study 1); however, men perceive acts related to *Etiquette* to be more

important for women, and men perceive women's *Involvement* as more crucial for a second date

(Study 2) than women do. However, in reality, engaging in the acts more frequently may not

impact having a successful first date (Study 3).

Gender Differences and Similarities in Studies 1 and 2

Study 1 generated a list of unique and similar acts between men and women. These acts represent the first inventory of behaviors that men and women perceive will lead to a second date. There were many similarities between men and women. For instance, humor, compliments, listening, and being nice, was nominated by both men and women. These similarities represent both men's and women's similar behaviors in mating during the early stages of a relationship (Li & Kenrick, 2006). These behaviors have also been shown to be universally desired in long-term mates (Buss, 1989).

Interestingly, kissing and drinking were only nominated by women. Men may not have nominated these acts because they perceive them as ineffective or as coming off as too strong in sexual interest toward women (Ashmore et al., 2002). Hughes and collogues (2007) report that men use kissing as a way to stimulate sexual access from women and view kissing as a prelude to sex. Additionally, men's perception of kissing on a first date as coming off as too strong in sexual interest may be especially true in recent years due to the cultural shift following the #MeToo movement. That women only nominated alcohol use as important for successful first dates is novel; however, this nomination was modest as only three women nominated this act. Regardless, previous research suggests that the greater predictor of engaging in sexual intercourse after a first date is not when women or both partners drink; instead, it is only when men drink (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997). Women may perceive drinking as important for successful

first dates because they want to seem attractive to men, and more men than women engage in

alcohol consumption (Dawson & Archer, 1992). Additionally, women may want to seem

sexually accessible to men since men place more emphasis on sexual accessibility for

relationships than women do (Wade & Mogilksi, 2018).

Study 2 revealed that men and women differed in their perceptions of which acts are effective on successful first dates; however, there were no significant gender differences in ratings for every tactic nor for ratings for every factor. This evidence suggests that men and women may behave similarly on first dates, but men who engage in better *Etiquette*, and women who engage in better *Behaviors*, and *Involvement* may be more successful at landing second dates. These results support previous literature, which shows that women universally desire partners who are kind or caring (Buss, 1989). By engaging in acts subsumed by the *Etiquette* factor, men may be signaling their kindness potential as a long-term romantic partner. The finding where women perceive men engaging in "show interest" or "have a deep conversation" as effective on successful first dates is novel. Engaging in these acts may reveal a man's potential as a romantic partner who will invest resources and time in their relationship. Further, these acts may signal a man's capacity for being emotionally available, which has been shown to be a desired characteristic of women in romantic relationships (Regan & Berscheid, 1999; Wade & Mogilski, 2018). Men who are looking for long-term committed relationships should perhaps consider engaging in more of the acts subsumed by these factors.

Finding that men perceived women engaging in *Behavior* and *Involvement* as efficient in landing second dates is novel, but not particularly surprising in hindsight. The *Involvement* factor involves flirting, holding hands, drinking alcohol, or complimenting men. All of these acts may signal a woman's interest in short-term sex, which men desire more than women (Buss &

Study 2 revealed that men and women differed in their perceptions of which acts are

Schmitt, 1993), which also aligns with previous research on gender differences in sexual desires

and intimacy (Leiblum, 2002; Ridley, 1993; Stephenson et al., 2021).

Studies 1 and 2 provide valuable examples of how often the empirical study of human

dating centers around the study of heterosexual individuals (Lamon, 2021; Paynter & Leaper,

2016; Rose & Frieze, 1993). For instance, the instructions for the act nomination questions asked men and women to think about the other's gender. While this is certainly a limitation of the current studies, it is also a problem at large for individuals on the dating market. For example, research shows that cross-gendered mind reading (Haselton & Buss, 2000) may lead to the enforcement of heterosexual dating scripts when dating because dating scripts decrease the ambiguity between two people by providing men and women with clear actions that they can take to be successful on a date (Bartoli et al., 2006; Cameron & Curry, 2020). Using heterosexual scripts can alleviate anxiety and allow the individuals on the date to assess if they would like a second date.

Gender differences in first-date scripts also are stable across generations (Cameron & Curry, 2020) and the data presented in the current sets of studies reflect this. For example, one gender difference was that women liked when men were involved, which aligns with the dating script that men are perceived as the pursuers (Laner & Ventrone. 1998; 2000; Schleicher & Gilbert, 2005). This is also relevant for modern dating apps, where only one-fifth of women report messaging a man first on Tinder (Berkowitz et al., 2021). In our studies, men nominated paying for the date and holding the door, documented as scripted acts by heterosexual men in previous studies (Jaramillo-Sierra & Allen, 2013; Yoder et al., 2002). Ultimately, the results from Studies 1 and 2 provide evidence that scripts are still prominent on first dates. Although men and women report similar acts, they tend to endorse different behaviors on what they

perceive to be effective first-date behaviors.

Dating Around Findings

First, we should address that the show that was coded in Study 3, is produced, which is

why we observed null findings. Reality shows about dating similar to "*Dating Around*" (e.g., the

Bachelor) are notoriously popular for editing out scenes or guiding individuals towards liking

specific people in the interest of increasing television ratings. However, it should be noted that

the behaviors reported from Studies 1 and 2, were portrayed in the TV show. This suggest there

is a connection between how we behave and what is demonstrated on TV. Furthermore, this null

effect may also highlight the disconnect between what people desire in potential relationship

partners versus what they perceive as effective ways to behave on first dates. Mate preferences

are well documented (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993), but less is known about whether we are good

at knowing which acts the opposite gender deems attractive on first dates. Additionally, the

nonsignificant findings highlight recent work in relationship science that suggests the ability to

predict relationship formation and satisfaction is more complex than previously thought (Joel et

al., 2017).

For instance, machine learning and dating research have observed disparate findings.

First, in two speed-dating studies, singles completed a battery of measures that have been

observed as essential traits for romantic partners, as well as popular measures in relationship

science. The study found very little evidence of successfully predicting mating using machine

learning algorithms (Joel et al.,2017). Secondly, a study using a similar methodology in

established relationships of 11,196 romantic couples revealed that the only predictor of romantic

satisfaction was the person's perception of the romantic relationship (Joel et al., 2020).

Participants can report acts they believe are beneficial for a date (Study 1) and report acts they

think will be the most successful (Study 2). Whether these perceptions are accurate or not for the

perceived success rate for getting a second date (Study 3) is not clear.

     For instance, a new theoretical model called the Mate Evaluation Theory (MET;

Eastwick et al., 2022) argues that the evaluation of mates may encompass several times, which

may subsequently impact how one perceives future potential mates. Because everyone's dating encounters differ, individuals may develop predictable differences in how they perceive potential mates—this is referred to as the perceiver lens in MET. If this model is correct, there may be individual differences not evaluated or tested in this study that are responsible for our null results. Additionally, the nominated tactics found in Study 1 may become more important over time as a couple continues to interact with one another, and a first date may not be as important as the later dates. This supports previous research from the Singles in America project (2022), which reported that 60% of men and 70% of women find the second date more important than the first date. Additionally, the Singles in America project conveyed that over half (53%) of men report feeling an emotional connection by the second date, compared to only a third (38%) of women. Therefore, engaging in the mating tactics examined in this study may be more critical for later dating behavior.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research is novel and uses a mixed methodology, the first limitation is the novel methodology of coding the show *Dating Around*. The production suggests that the show is reality; however, there is the possibility that the show was heavily produced such that it is not reality. Previous research has explored human behavior using reality TV shows (e.g., *Cheaters*) to code jealous interrogations (see Kuhle et al., 2011). Although TV shows and reality dating are produced, the methodology used in this study can still examine aspects of our romantic and

sexual psychology. Previous researchers have argued that humans create media with their minds

which are composed of evolved cognitive mechanisms. These mechanisms then interact with the

art they create, which then helps inform their own behavior and attitudes (Fisher & Salmon,

2012). Additionally, it has been noted that movies, TV, and films are prominent sources of

gender portrayals, and research suggests that TV exposure is associated with gendered sexual

scripts (Seabrook et al., 2017). Therefore, although the show *Dating Around*, may not be a

controlled "experiment," it may still allow researchers to understand some aspects of human

behavior and how people's sexuality and dating decisions are intertwined with their culture.

Future research should use these actions and tactics to code other shows that have participants go

on dates like *The Bachelor* and *Are You the One?* Although these shows are set up differently

than *Dating Around*, seeing if the behaviors are valid in an uncontrolled environment where

people compete for love would be a novel area of research.

A second limitation that needs to be addressed is the demographic of these samples. The

samples were mostly western, White, identified as straight, and were young. Thus, future

research is needed to understand how people from other races, ethnicities, age demographics,

members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those who are polyamorous may engage in behaviors

to successfully garner second dates. For instance, bisexual individuals report pressure to conform

to heterosexual dating patterns (Wu et al., 2020). This demonstrates that understanding how

different characteristics may impact dating decisions is important because many behaviors that

may be seen as effective could be impacted by one's identity. For instance, the age of a dater is

important because older individuals still value their sexuality (Connor et al., 2020), and in one

study, older gay men reported that their decision to date tends to be based on past social ideals

rather than personal ideals (Suen, 2015).

The third and essential area of future research is the individual differences that may

impact a successful first date. For instance, individuals' scores on a measure that assesses casual

sex preference (Sociosexuality) or desires for long-term mates (Fear of Being Single) may

impact their dating by fostering desires to date solely for sexual reasons (Sociosexuality), or

creating worries that they may not find a partner (Fear of Being Single). Understanding a

person's media use or dating app history and success would be a practical use of research since

media and technology can be related to one's dating preferences and strategies (Moran et al.,

2017), and TV viewing is positively related to one's dating double standard, especially for men

(Paytner & Leaper, 2016). Additionally, alcohol intake may also impact a successful first date

because if one is too impaired, they may not be able to articulate their desires and concerns.

Lastly, measuring participants dating stress (Sullivan & Davila, 2022) has significant potential to

foster an understanding of whether those who experience greater distress during dating may not

be able to be successful on first dates in the future.

Lastly, a limitation that has future research implications is the creation of our dating

behavior tactics. We conducted a factor analysis to assess if these acts could aid in forming one

specific group of behaviors. We did not have the ability to assess if these behaviors assess how

dateable the person using these behaviors is. Therefore, future studies should use speed-dating

paradigms to assess if the nominated behaviors for a first date are actually indicating someone

who is "dateable." These studies should also assess how much compatibility one has with the

dateable person (Wilson et al., 2006), because there may be individual differences mentioned

above that may alter perceptions of compatibility and dateability.

Conclusion

The results from the three studies have important implications for researchers, clinicians,

dating app developers, and the public. First, the research outlined above aids the understanding

of successful first date behaviors. In Studies 1 and 2, we created a catalog of behaviors that could

inform future researchers' understanding of how these behaviors may be useful or may differ

under certain contexts. Additionally, our novel methodology may encourage researchers to use

other reality shows to understand human behavior. Secondly, dating can be viewed as a stressful

situation and lead to dating anxiety (Hope & Heimber, 1990), and clinicians now have a catalog

of behaviors that they can now use to understand if their clients are engaging in behaviors that

are perceived as useful which may mitigate stressful dating experiences. Understanding how men

and women differ in their behaviors on first dates, and what behaviors distinguish dates that will

be successful. Therapists working with single individuals may be able to shed scientific insight

into the relevant tactics people use, and before they go on their first dates, which may increase

individuals' likelihood of successfully acquiring a new romantic partner. Single individuals can

benefit from this research because many people are searching for their long-term romantic

partner and experience a lot of stress from dating. Like the quote by Ryan Reynolds suggests, "A

first date is an interview." This research presented here may help others better understand how to

ultimately pass that interview.

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