Running Head: SPEED-DATING

**Speed-Dating**

Eli J. Finkel & Paul W. Eastwick[1]

Northwestern University

**Submitted: 12-3-07**

**Word Count: 2,476**

**In press,** *Current Directions in Psychological Science*

**Abstract**

Scholars have recently begun to harness the immense power of speed-dating procedures to achieve important and novel insights into the dynamics of romantic attraction. Speed-dating procedures allow researchers to study romantic dynamics dyadically, with regard to potentially meaningful relationships, and with strong external validity. This article highlights the strengths and promise of speed-dating procedures, reviews some of their most exciting contributions to our understanding of the social psyche, and illustrates how scholars can employ speed-dating and its straightforward variants to study topics relevant to diverse subfields of psychological science.

**Abstract Word Count: 89**

## Speed-Dating

In the late-1990s, Rabbi Yaacov Deyo invented speed-dating to help Jewish singles in Los Angeles meet each other. In Deyo's clever paradigm, individuals interested in meeting potential romantic partners go on approximately 10-to-25 very brief (e.g., 4-minute) "dates" with a series of desired-sex partners. After the event, participants report whether they would ("yes") or would not ("no") be interested in corresponding with each speed-dating partner again in the future. If two participants reply "yes" to each other, they are a *match*, and the host of the speed-dating event provides them with the opportunity to contact each other, perhaps to arrange a more traditional date.

Readers with no first-hand exposure to Deyo's speed-dating paradigm might become exhausted by the mere *notion* of going on 10-to-25 blind dates in one night. Fortunately, speed-dating bears little resemblance to traditional blind dates. A better analogy for a speed-dating event is a party or other social gathering where individuals hope to meet other singles. Compared to such social gatherings, however, speed-dating offers several advantages, including the assurance that the people they meet are also interested in meeting romantic partners, the ability to give to each partner unambiguous acceptance or rejection feedback without having to do so face-to-face, and the comfort of knowing that the suffering inflicted by a bad date will be mercifully brief.

What led to Deyo's invention of speed-dating? As the details of his life are somewhat hazy, we use guesswork to fill in the gaps: Deyo had long been a social psychology fanatic who delighted in those all-too-rare articles describing well-controlled studies in which scholars randomly assigned participants to go on blind dates with each other (e.g., Byrne, Ervin, & Lamberth, 1970; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottmann, 1966). Later, during the 1990s, he voraciously consumed the scholarly literature on interpersonal perception, becoming enthralled by Nalini Ambady's research on perceptions based on "thin slices" of social behavior (e.g., Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson,

2000; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992) and by David Kenny's research on perceptions at "zero acquaintance" (e.g., Kenny, 1994). This evidence that individuals can make accurate and differentiated social judgments based on strikingly brief social observations or interactions caused Deyo to conclude that singles could probably evaluate each other's romantic potential within a few short moments. He augmented the blind date with speed to help people meet romantic partners as efficiently as possible.

Of course, this "social psychology fanatic" theory of speed-dating's birth is fictional. It does, however, accurately situate speed-dating procedures squarely in the mainstream of social psychological theory and methodology.

## The Scientific Power of Speed-Dating Procedures

Speed-dating incorporates a variety of extant methodological and statistical innovations (see Eastwick & Finkel, in press-b; for a nuts-and-bolts manual for conducting speed-dating studies, see Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007). For example, importing the *speed* aspect of the "thin slices" and "zero acquaintance" literatures allows scholars to examine the opening moments of romantic attraction with supercharged efficiency (e.g., dozens of times during a 2-hour speed-dating event rather than just once during a traditional, 2-hour blind date) and to explore why a given individual desires certain romantic partners but not others. In this article, we discuss how scholars can use speed-dating to (a) study dyadic processes, (b) examine real relationships in real-time, and (c) enjoy strong external validity.

*Dyadic Processes*

One advantage is that speed-dating procedures allow scholars to study both members of a given dyad. Because romantic attraction involves two individuals simultaneously perceiving and being perceived, scholars may fail to investigate (or even recognize) important attraction phenomena if their methods do not allow them to consider the dyad as the unit of analysis.

Many widespread empirical procedures examine romantic attraction from only one person's perspective. For example, scholars may (a) present participants with information about a target person (e.g., a photograph and attitude information) and then assess participants' attraction to him or her (e.g., Byrne, 1971), or even (b) bolster psychological realism by having participants report their attraction for a research confederate (e.g., Dutton & Aron, 1974). Although such methods are powerful and valuable—especially insofar as they can readily accommodate diverse experimental manipulations—they fail to capture essential dyadic features of romantic attraction dynamics, such as the uncertainty and evaluation apprehension *both* individuals frequently experience during the interaction.

Speed-dating procedures overcome this limitation, as each speed-date involves two participants who simultaneously explore their romantic potential with the other person. For example, a heterosexual speed-dating event attended by 20 men and 20 women would include 400 separate dyadic interactions. Among other advantages, this efficient accumulation of dyadic interactions allows scholars to harness the power of the statistical procedures underlying Kenny's (1994) social relations model. For example, scholars can distinguish among three independent reasons why Laura experienced sexual desire for Tim following their speed-date: (a) Laura tended to have a crush on all the men at the event (her standards are low), (b) all the women at the event tended to have a crush on Tim (he is consensually desirable), or (c) Laura experienced some unique "chemistry" with Tim that stimulated her desire for him beyond her desire for the typical man and beyond the desire of the typical woman for Tim.

Speed-dating data also provide scholars with an optimal means of exploring inherently dyadic processes such as reciprocity of liking. Such reciprocity can emerge in two distinct ways: *dyadic reciprocity*, which refers to the desire that two individuals share uniquely with each other, and *generalized reciprocity*, which refers to the tendency for individuals who generally desire others to

be desired in return (Kenny, 1994). One recent speed-dating study (Eastwick, Finkel, Mochon, &
Ariely, 2007) revealed a positive dyadic reciprocity effect (if Laura romantically desired Tim more
than she desired the other men, he desired her more than he desired the other women) and a
negative generalized reciprocity effect (if Laura romantically desired the men at the event more
than the other women did, those men desired her *less* than they desired the other women at the
event) (see left half of Figure 1). Neither effect differed by participant sex, and both were robust
beyond any physical attractiveness effects.

These results suggest that unselective romantic desire smacks of desperation and turns people
off, although this adverse consequence may be unique to romantic contexts. Three other studies
employing dyadic interactions with strangers in nonromantic contexts (see Kenny, 1994) yielded
both positive dyadic and positive generalized reciprocity effects: Individuals who platonically
liked others were liked in return, regardless of whether their liking was selective or unselective
(see right half of Figure 1).

*Real Relationships*

A second advantage of speed-dating is that it allows social scientists to study initial attraction
dynamics between two individuals who could plausibly pursue a meaningful romantic relationship
together in the near future. Scholars can study such dynamics in real-time (rather than with
retrospective reports or with hypothetical scenarios) and with regard to consequential dating
behaviors. Participants' behavior on their speed-dates (which can be videotaped and coded), and
their "yessing" and emailing decisions, can powerfully influence their romantic lives over the
ensuing days, weeks, and beyond.

A recent speed-dating study (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-a) explored the possibility that
reports about hypothetical relationships may not map onto actual relationship dynamics by
reexamining the well-replicated and well-publicized findings that men prefer physical

attractiveness in a mate more than women do and that women prefer good earning prospects in a mate more than men do (e.g., Buss, 1989). When reporting before their speed-dating event on their preferences for an ideal partner and for a speed-dating partner—abstract, hypothetical partners, as in previous research—men stated that they preferred physically attractive partners more than women stated that they did, and women stated that they preferred partners with strong earning prospects more than men stated that they did (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-a; see left half of Figure 2).

But the story does not end there: Speed-dating procedures allow scholars to ask whether these sex differences in *stated preferences* also emerge with respect to actual, flesh-and-blood partners. Meta-analyzing across 17 different measures of romantic attraction from the speed-dating event and the ensuing month (e.g., "yessing," date initiation, romantic passion), no reliable sex differences emerged in the degree to which speed-daters' judgments of targets' physical attractiveness or earning prospects inspired their romantic attraction in those targets (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-a; see right half of Figure 2). These null effects for sex were not moderated by participants' pursuit of short-term versus long-term mating goals, and they could not be explained by participants settling for nonideal partners due to fear of rejection.

That those sex differences which emerge so reliably when participants report on hypothetical partners disappear when they report on flesh-and-blood partners raises a fascinating question: Do individuals have accurate introspective access to their preferences in a live romantic context? Because each NSDS participant met ~12 opposite-sex speed-daters, she (or he) had a unique score (an *in-vivo preference*) representing how well her judgments of each partner's physical attractiveness or earning prospects predicted her romantic attraction toward that partner. Remarkably, stated preferences were not correlated with in-vivo preferences, suggesting that those preferences individuals report regarding hypothetical partners may not predict whom they desire

after a face-to-face meeting (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-a). At a broader level, individuals seem to lack accurate introspective access to the preferences they will exhibit when encountering potential dating partners (see also Iyengar, Simonson, Fisman, & Mogilner, 2005; Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007); this lack of insight echoes classic research suggesting that individuals are frequently unable to report accurately *why* they exhibit a particular response (e.g., "liking") to a stimulus (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

*External Validity*

A third advantage of speed-dating procedures is that they exhibit stronger external validity than do many other highly controlled procedures for studying romantic attraction. For example, speed-dating is an activity that millions of people pursue outside of the laboratory. One benefit of speed-dating's widespread appeal is that scholars can access impressive participant samples. One study employing a diverse sample of 10,526 real-world speed-daters ($M_{Age}$ = 33) revealed that attraction to speed-dating partners is driven more by generally agreed-upon mate values rather than by idiosyncratic or similarity-based mating tendencies and more by observable characteristics such as attractiveness, height, and age than by less observable characteristics such as education, religion, or the desire to have children (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). The size and diversity of this study's sample make its conclusions all-the-more compelling.

Given speed-dating's appeal across sociodemographic categories, scholars can readily employ it to investigate how race and ethnicity moderate romantic attraction. For example, one study demonstrated that individuals who grew up in geographical locations characterized by relatively strong (versus weak) opposition to interracial marriage are more likely to prefer same-race over different-race speed-dating partners (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, in press). Although this finding emerged in a sample of Columbia University graduate students, scholars could collaborate with speed-dating companies to examine whether it replicates when comparing

events hosted in locations characterized by strong versus weak opposition. Speed-dating scholars could employ similar procedures to replicate other race-related findings, including the finding that female speed-daters tend to prefer same-race over different-race partners more than male speed-daters do (Fisman et al., in press; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005) and the finding that White speed-daters who report that they endorse many aspects of "conservative" (but not "liberal") political ideology prefer White to racial minority partners, whereas their liberal counterparts actually prefer racial minority to White partners (Eastwick, Richeson, & Finkel, 2007).

## Potential Limitations of Speed-Dating

Although many researchers have become avid supporters of speed-dating's scientific potential, such procedures, as with all methodological innovations, should be evaluated with caution (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-b; Finkel et al., 2007). For example, although speed-dating possesses strong external validity in certain ways, it might lack it in others. After all, speed-dating events do differ in several notable ways from traditional ways that romantic partners meet, and these differences might appeal only to a small subset of singles. Such external validity concerns, however, are hardly unique to speed-dating. Scholars have yet to establish (a) how romantic relationships beginning at church socials differ from those beginning at work, at the beach, or on the subway (e.g., perhaps relationships beginning at church benefit from spiritual rather than sexual compatibility, whereas relationships beginning at the beach show the opposite pattern); or (b) how the personalities of individuals who meet partners in one setting differ from the personalities of individuals who meet partners in others (e.g., perhaps speed-daters have exceptionally strong—or exceptionally weak—social skills). Future research could fruitfully explore whether certain means of meeting partners are better-suited to some people than to others.

A second potential concern is that speed-dating might fail to foster romantic attraction. The scholarly value of speed-dating procedures would diminish substantially if speed-daters only

rarely become attracted to each other or initiate postevent contact (relative to parallel frequencies in other contexts). Fortunately, preliminary evidence suggests that speed-dating may be an especially effective means of introducing people who subsequently pursue follow-up dates with each other (Eastwick & Finkel, in press-b; Finkel et al., 2007).

## Concluding Comments

In the decade since Rabbi Deyo invented speed-dating, it has become a major phenomenon extending well beyond Western culture. Its core structure is readily amenable to adaptation, even for populations that might not generally encourage dating. For example, devout Muslims have adapted speed-dating procedures to include parental chaperones (MacFarquhar, 2006). Entrepreneurs have also adapted speed-dating procedures for nonromantic activities such as speed-networking, speed-interviewing, and speed-friending. Given that speed-dating procedures and its nonromantic variants involve dyadic processes, real social dynamics in real-time, and strong external validity, they promise to help scholars unearth new insights into the social dynamics relevant to research domains such as decision-making, prejudice, emotion, memory, social development, and personality to name but a few. For example, cognitive or social psychologists could employ speed-friending procedures to study the association of interpersonal liking with subsequent memory for the interaction, and industrial/organizational psychologists could employ speed-networking procedures to study whether individuals' likelihood of exchanging business cards depends upon each dyad's personality similarity. The possibilities are endless.

# Footnotes

**References** ($N = 19$)

Ambady, N., & Rosenthal, R. (1992). Thin slices of expressive behavior as predictors of interpersonal consequences: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 111*, 256-274.

Ambady, N., Bernieri, F. J., & Richeson, J. A. (2000). Toward a histology of social behavior: Judgmental accuracy from thin slices of the behavioral stream. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 32, pp. 201–271). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Buss, D. M. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 12*, 1-49.

Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.

Byrne, D., Ervin, C. R., & Lamberth, J. (1970). Continuity between the experimental study of attraction and real-life computer dating. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16*, 157-165.

Dutton, D. G., & Aron, A. P. (1974). Some evidence for heightened sexual attraction under conditions of high anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30*, 510-517.

Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (in press-a). Sex Differences in Mate Preferences Revisited: Do People Know What They Initially Desire in a Romantic Partner? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (in press-b). Speed-dating: A powerful and flexible paradigm for studying romantic relationship initiation. In S. Sprecher, A. Wenzel, & J. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of relationship initiation*. New York: Guilford.

Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., Mochon, D., & Ariely, D. (2007). Selective versus unselective romantic desire: Not all reciprocity is created equal. *Psychological Science, 18*, 317-319.

Eastwick, P. W., Richeson, J. A., & Finkel, E. J. *Is love colorblind? Political orientation and interracial romantic desire*. Manuscript submitted for publication, Northwestern University.

Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., & Matthews, J. (2007). Speed-dating as an invaluable tool for studying romantic attraction: A methodological primer. *Personal Relationships*, *14*, 149-166.

Fisman, R., Iyengar, S. S., Kamenica, E., & Simonson, I. (in press). Racial preferences in dating. *Review of Economic Studies*.

Iyengar, S. S., Simonson, I., Fisman, R., & Mogliner, C. (2005, January). *I know what I want but can I find it? Examining the dynamic relationship between stated and revealed preferences.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), New Orleans, LA.

Kenny, D. A. (1994). *Interpersonal perception: A social relations analysis*. New York: Guilford.

Kurzban, R., & Weeden, J. (2005). Hurrydate: Mate preferences in action. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 26*, 227-244.

MacFarquhar, N. (2006, September 19). It's Muslim Boy Meets Girl, but Don't Call It Dating. *New York Times,* p. A1.

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review, 84*, 231-259.

Todd, P. M., Penke, L., Fasolo, B., & Lenton, A. P. (2007). Different cognitive processes underlie human mate choices and mate preferences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *104*, 15011-15016.

Walster, E., Aronson, V., Abrahams, D., & Rottmann, L. (1966). Importance of physical attractiveness in dating behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4*, 508-516.

**Recommended Readings**

Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (in press-a). (See references)

- An in-depth speed-dating exploration of sex differences in romantic partner preferences and the disconnect between stated and in-vivo preferences.

Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (in press-b). (See references)

- An overview of why speed-dating has so much promise as a tool for studying initial romantic attraction and early relationship development.

Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., & Matthews, J. (2007). (See references)

- A conceptual and methodological primer—a "how-to guide"—for scholars interested in conducting their own speed-dating studies.

Fisman, R., Iyengar, S. S., Kamenica, E., & Simonson, I. (2007). (See references)

- An excellent study investigating the roles of race and gender in "yessing" decisions.

Kurzban, R., & Weeden, J. (2005). (See references)

- This first-ever speed-dating publication does a superb job illustrating the power of speed-dating procedures.

Figure 1. *Dyadic and Generalized Reciprocity Correlations[a] in Platonic and Romantic (Speed-Dating) Contexts.*
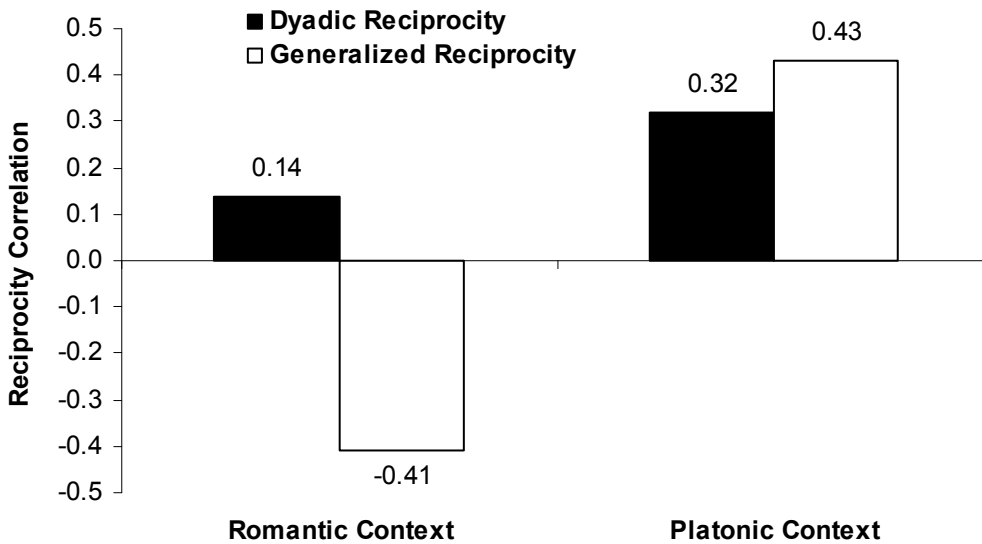


*Note*. All four correlations are statistically different from zero. The Romantic Context correlations come from a speed-dating study (Eastwick et al., 2007), whereas the Platonic Context correlations come from the three previous studies employing one-to-one sequential interactions between strangers (see Kenny, 1994).

[a] Correlations are measures of agreement that can vary from -1.00 to +1.00. A value of 1.00 indicates complete agreement, and a value of -1.00 indicates complete disagreement; a value of .00 indicates that two scores are unrelated to each other. For example, the -.41 generalized reciprocity correlation in the Romantic Context indicates that the more individuals tended to experience nonselective romantic desire for others, the *less* they were romantically desired in return. In contrast, the .43 generalized reciprocity correlation in the Platonic Context indicates that the more individuals tended to experience nonselective platonic liking for others, the *more* they were liked in return. One cannot use multiplication or division operations to draw conclusions about correlations' magnitudes (e.g., one cannot assume that a correlation of .15 is half as large as a correlation of .30).

Figure 2. *Men's and Women's Preferences for Physical Attractiveness and Earning Prospects regarding Hypothetical Partners and Actual Partners.*
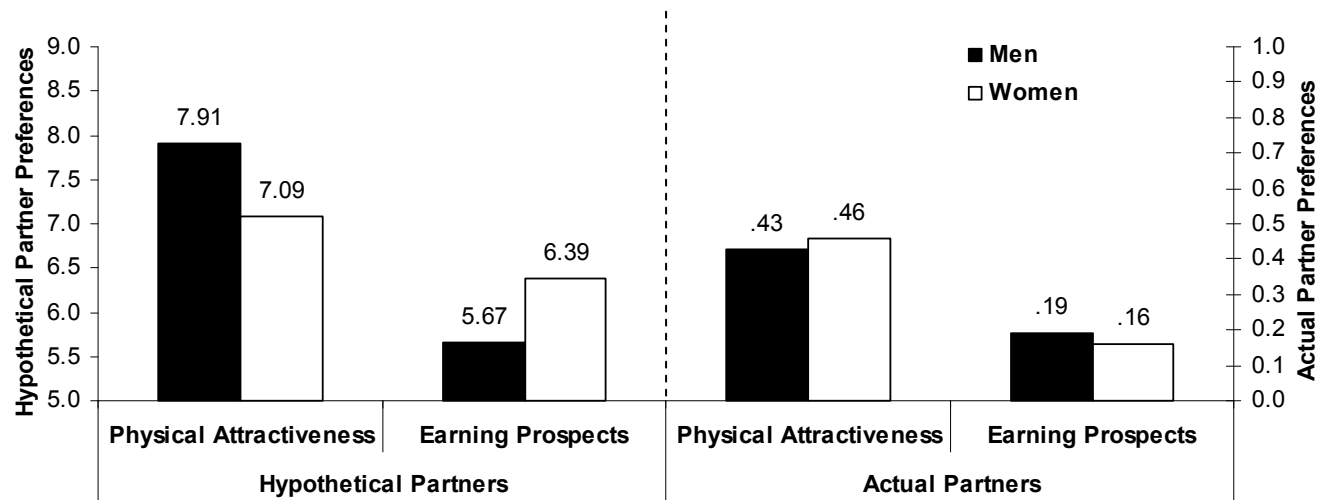


*Note*. Participants reported their Hypothetical Partner preferences for a given characteristic (physical attractiveness or earning prospects) on scales ranging from 1 to 9, with higher values reflecting stronger preferences for that characteristic. For clarity of presentation, these hypothetical ratings average across participants' preferences in an ideal partner and in a speed-dating partner. Participants' Actual Partner preferences reflect the correlation of their evaluation of a specific speed-dating partner's characteristics and their romantic attraction to him or her (across 17 measures of romantic attraction). The sex differences for Hypothetical Partners are statistically significant both for physical attractiveness and for earning prospects, but they fail to approach significance in either case for Actual Partners.