

Women may not be so picky after all about choosing a mate

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Men and women may not be from two different planets after all when it comes to choosiness in mate selection, according to new research from Northwestern University.

When [women](#) were assigned to the traditionally male role of approaching potential romantic partners, they were not any pickier than men in choosing that special someone to date, according to the speed dating study.

That finding, of course, is contrary to well established evolutionary explanations about mate selection. An abundance of such research suggests that women are influenced by higher reproductive costs (bearing and raising children) than men and thus are much choosier when it comes to love interests.

The new study is the latest research of two Northwestern [psychologists](#) whose well-reported work on speed dating offers unparalleled opportunities for studying romantic attraction in action.

Deviating from standard speed-dating experiments - and from the typical conventions at professional speed-dating events -- women in the study were required to go from man to man during their four-minute speed dates half the time, rather than always staying put. In most speed-dating events, the women stay in one place as the men circulate.

"The mere act of physically approaching a potential partner, versus being

approached, seemed to increase desire for that partner," said Eli Finkel, associate professor of psychology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern and co-investigator of the study.

Regardless of gender, those who rotated experienced greater romantic desire for their partners, compared to those who sat throughout the event. The rotators, compared to the sitters, tended to have a greater interest in seeing their speed-dating partners again.

"Given that men generally are expected -- and sometimes required - to approach a potential love interest, the implications are intriguing," Finkel said.

"Let's face it, even today, there is a huge difference in terms of who is expected to walk across the bar to say 'hi,'" added Northwestern's Paul Eastwick, the study's other co-investigator.

The study is forthcoming in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

Three hundred fifty undergraduates were recruited for the study's speed-dating events. In half of the events, the men rotated while the women sat. In the remaining events, the women rotated. Following each four-minute "date," the participants indicated their romantic desire in that partner and how self-confident they felt. Following the event, the students indicated on a Website whether they would or would not be interested in seeing each partner again.

When the men rotated, the results supported the long-held notion of men being less selective. When the women rotated, this robust sex difference disappeared.

The study draws upon embodiment research that suggests that physical

actions alter perception. In one such study, for example, participants who were told to pull an unrelated object toward themselves while evaluating Chinese ideographs rated them as prettier than participants who pushed an unrelated object away from themselves while viewing the symbols.

"The embodiment research shows that our physical activity and psychological processes interface in ways that are outside our conscious awareness," Finkel said. "In conjunction with this previous embodiment research, our speed-dating results strongly suggest that the mere act of approaching a potential love interest can boost desire."

The researchers suggest that confidence also may have affected the results. Approaching a potential date increases confidence, which in turn makes the approacher less selective.

The study presents a clear example of how inconspicuous gender norms (having [men](#) rotate and women sit) can not only affect the outcome of a study, but also skew the chances of a speed dater walking away with a potential match.

"Our society is structured in gendered ways that can be subtle but very powerful," Eastwick concluded. The study has implications both for companies that capitalize on the business of dating and for researchers concerned with how social norms may affect research.

More information: "Arbitrary Social Norms Influence Sex Differences in Romantic Selectivity," *Psychological Science*, www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0956-7976

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