

Study finds that rejecting unsuitable suitors is easier said than done

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You're at a slumber party with your friends. One friend asks "if a guy at school asked you out, but you weren't really attracted to him, would you go?" You laugh and shake your head no: "Why would I, if he's not my type?"

Or imagine you're at school, sitting in the cafeteria. A guy who you think

is attractive but who has some unsuitable [personality traits](#) comes up and asks you out. You say yes, even though what you really meant to say was no. "Why did I do that?" you wonder.

According to new research from the University of Toronto and Yale University, rejecting unsuitable [romantic partners](#) is easy in hypothetical situations, but not so when considering a face-to-face proposition.

"When actually faced with a potential date, we don't like to reject a person and make them feel bad, which is not necessarily something that people anticipate when they imagine making these choices," says the study's lead researcher, psychology PhD candidate Samantha Joel. "The fact that we underestimate how concerned we'll feel about hurting the other person's feelings may help to explain why people's dating decisions often don't match up with their stated dating preferences."

The study came in two parts. In the first, [participants](#) completed their own dating profile. Then they were given three profiles which supposedly belonged to other participants. Participants were split into real and hypothetical situations. Those in the real situation were told that the potential dates were in the lab next door and could meet them. Those in the hypothetical situation were told that the potential dates were unavailable, but to imagine the possibility of meeting them.

Participants selected their favourite profile of the three. They were then given additional information about the potential date - including a photo of an unattractive person, and a completed questionnaire that suggested the potential date wanted to meet them. The participants completed the same questionnaire: those in the real situation were told that it would be presented to the potential date and those in the hypothetical situation were to imagine the potential date receiving it.

The researchers found that those in the real situation were more likely to

accept the date from the unattractive suitor. When asked, the participants said they were concerned about hurting the potential dates' feelings.

In the second part of the study, the researchers surveyed participants' willingness to accept dates with individuals whose qualities or attributes were undesirable because of habits or traits, rather than physical unattractiveness. These deal-breaking attributes included, for example, opposite political or religious views. Instead of being presented with photos, participants received a questionnaire that suggested that their chosen dates were incompatible with them, based on prior reports they gave. They then filled out the same questionnaire and were told it would be presented to the potential date. Again, those in the hypothetical situation were more likely to reject the dates than those considering a face-to-face proposition.

"I think it's incredible that people care so much about not hurting the feelings of potential dates who they haven't even met if they think they'll actually meet them," says Joel. "Next, I'd like to explore how much this concern might come into play when people make later, perhaps more serious relationship decisions."

The study "People overestimate their willingness to reject potential romantic partners by overlooking their concern for other people" was recently published in *Psychological Science*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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