

From First Kiss to Forever:

A Scientific Approach to Love

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2. First Date Interactions: Does Gender Play a Role?

Researchers have noted that women are more selective when it comes to choosing their dating partners.¹ Therefore, it is important that the interaction on the first date is positive and a connection is made.

In studying the conversations between men and women, researchers have found that a good connection is created when the conversation is aligned toward women and away from men, with women engaged in the encounter.² However, other research has suggested that men are expected to play the dominant role in a conversation, with women merely acting as supporting characters.² As there are conflicting reports, this area still warrants investigation. The interaction scenario which leads to the best outcome based on first impressions is important to study, as this could potentially help guide daters in the right direction.

Non-verbal behavior is another area in which gender differences have been highlighted. Karl Grammer (1989) states that, as females have an overall higher investment in

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a relationship, they also have a greater risk. Being that this is the case, they tend to be more indirect and "...employ non-committal non-verbal invitation, in this way exerting control."³ Males, then, are left to interpret their messages.

There is evidence which suggests that gender stereotypes are still prevalent in modern dating encounters.⁴ As a result, when it comes to the beginning of potential new relationships, specifically the events of the first date, more research is needed.

A study conducted through the Self-Awareness and Bonding Lab (SABL)⁵ examined differences between males and females on first dates. All participants took a researcher-designed survey which consisted of demographic questions, as well as 30 statements detailing potential behaviors of a romantic partner on a first date. An example of such a behavior was, "He/she hugs you when he/she meets you." Participants were told to rate each behavior on a 5-point Likert scale to elicit their perception of how attracted their potential partners were to them. All answers were confidential. Rather than provide you with the specific statistics, those which were found to be significant will be highlighted below, along with take-home tips.

DISCLAIMER: The take-home tips reflect the data found as a result of this specific study, and do not reflect my personal beliefs. I would like you to be informed by the research. In addition, as a majority of the sample was heterosexual, the data are presented in terms of a date involving a male/female dyad.

Below is the list of behaviors that **FEMALES view as signaling attraction** on the part of their dates. Therefore, if a male displays the following behaviors, a female will view them as a positive indication of the date's physical attraction to her.

1. Date maintains a lively conversation
Take home (for partner): Maintain the flow of the conversation (Have a plan A, B, and C)
2. Date spoke mostly about the participant (in this case, the female)
Take home (for partner): Women like when the conversation is centered on them
3. Date discusses future plans
Take home (for partner): Show that you are thinking far beyond tonight
4. Date makes positive comments about your physical appearance
Take home (for partner): Compliments can go a long way
5. Date focuses on similarities
Take home (for partner): Try to relate to her on some level and focus on what you have in common
6. Date offers to pay
Take home (for partner): Be chivalrous, offer to pay
7. Date suggests extending the evening
Take home (for partner): Don't be too quick to get out of there. Don't plan a second date that evening with another woman!
8. Date attempts to hug or kiss you at the end of the evening
Take home (for partner): Women infer your feelings for them based on attempts for physical contact
9. Date calls a few hours later to schedule another date
Take home (for partner): If you like her, let her know...and quickly!

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The following are what **MALES view as signaling attraction** on the part of their dates. Therefore, if a female displays the following behaviors, the male will view her as signaling that she is attracted to him.

1. Date talks about herself
Take home (for partner): Go ahead women, share! **MATCH**
2. Date diverts the conversation to sex
Take home (for partner): Don't be afraid to let your guard down
3. Date attempts to split the cost of the meal
Take home (for partner): This isn't 1950, offer to pay! **MISMATCH**
4. Date doesn't initiate contact, but responds right away
Take home (for partner): Don't make the first move, but be responsive. (Personally, I take issue with this).

You will notice from the first set of results, that both men and women view it as a positive indication of attraction when the woman talks about herself. However, there is a clear mismatch when it comes to paying for the meal. Women want men to offer (as it signals that they are attracted to the women), whereas men want women to offer to split the cost of the meal.

Below are the behaviors that **FEMALES view as signaling LESS attraction** on the part of the males during the first date.

1. Date shakes hand upon meeting
Take home (for partner): Go in for the hug
2. Date focuses on differences between you two

during conversation

- Take home (for partner):** Don't highlight your differences, focus on similarities
- 3. Date discusses past relationships
 - Take home (for partner):** Don't bring up the past
- 4. Date waves goodbye at the end of the date
 - Take home (for partner):** Again, go in for the hug
- 5. Date doesn't initiate contact, and upon your initiation, responds a few days later
 - Take home (for partner):** If she contacts you, respond to her right away!
- 6. Date doesn't initiate contact, and upon your initiation doesn't respond to you
 - Take home (for partner):** If you like her, don't ghost her

Finally, below are the behaviors that **MALES view as signaling LESS attraction** on the part of the females.

1. NOTHING!
 - Take home (for partner):** They will always think you like them!

Based on the findings it appears as if women, to a larger extent than men, use behaviors as cues of their dates' attraction to them. This makes sense as previous research has shown that women tend to be the pickier sex.² The results suggest that females are much more selective and potentially judgmental about behaviors when on a first date. Males didn't allow any behaviors to serve as a signal that their date was less attracted to them, whereas females read into many of their date's behaviors as a negative indication of their feelings. This is important, because, with a better understanding of what our actions

signal to others, we can tailor our behaviors to influence the type of first impression we make.

TAKE HOME TIPS/QUESTIONS

- **What "deal breakers" have there been for you on previous first dates? Why might these have been "deal breakers"? Think about why each "deal breaker" presented an issue for you. Knowing these will help you understand a little more about yourself and what you are looking for in a partner.**

