



Jake Teeny's *Psychophilosophy of Dating*

DISCLAIMER: Like any scientist, I must caution that the following advice will not apply to everyone. Research works by discovering how the average person tends to respond in situations, and as such, some of this advice may not always be applicable—to you or the other person. However, even if you don't consciously think the advice is having an effect, when it is successful, it works through the accumulation of subtle “nudges.” So just stick with it; over time, this advice is only going to benefit you ;)

Before the Date

Before a date, go somewhere by yourself and stand with your hands on your hips and your chest pushed forward (e.g., a Superman pose) for a handful of seconds. Enacting “power poses” like this makes us feel more confident as we often infer the thoughts and feelings of our psychology from our physical posture (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010).**

Research has shown that “dressing for success” is actually a thing: wearing clothes that have a symbolic value to us often nudges our psychology into adopting its meaning. So even if the date is something casual, dress clean and sharp—not only will you look like you put thought into your attire, but you yourself can draw strength from the clothes, too (Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

Nervous before the date? One research tactic that has been shown to reduce anxiety is to speak aloud both the negative emotion you are feeling and the reason for its presence. For example, you may say, “I feel nervous because I’m worried this date might not go well.” Labeling your emotion like this can work to dispel it (Kircanski, Lieberman, Craske, 2012). But if this tip doesn't seem to be helping, just tell yourself that all those “nerves” you're feeling are because of your excitement, not your anxiety. Because the emotions are so similar, try interpreting them positively (Brooks, 2014)!

Try to plan your date for a bright and sunny day. Research shows that people will misattribute their pleasure with the weather to their general happiness and mood. For example, when it's sunny, people say they are living happier lives compared to when it's raining (Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

During the First Date

Although you may be dreading that you'll make a mistake while out, research shows that people are actually rated as *more* attractive after making a slight goof-up—what's known as *the pratfall effect*. You look a little more “human” to them after the blunder, and the slight humor that follows is always a plus (Aronson, Willerman, & Floyd, 1966).

**Recent research has come to challenge these findings (i.e., they have failed to replicate the psychological effects of these “power poses”). However, research on the study of *embodiment*—the way in which our physical posture influences our psychology—has been shown in a variety of studies. So if the “Superman pose” isn't doing it for you, try assuming a pose for a moment that conveys power and strength to you.



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Control your body posture while interacting with the person. Slumped shoulders are going to convey doubt (both to yourself and the other person), while arching back projects confidence. But in addition to nonverbal communication, paying attention to your natural posture can help you decipher your emotions (e.g., were your knees pointed toward the door the whole time? That means you weren't really interested in this person even if you wanted to be; McGinley, Nicholas, & McGinley, 1978).

Interested in learning if your romantic interest is interested in you? If in a group setting with this other person, wait for something funny to happen and pay attention to where s/he looks when s/he laughs. People tend to make eye contact with those they feel closest to/*want* to feel closest to when they laugh (Chapman, 1975).

During the date, ask questions. You already know all your own stories and preferences, right? Thus, wouldn't it be more fun to learn about this exciting and new person? Research shows that people evaluate others more positively when their goal was to *learn* about this other person compared to expressing their own opinions and values (Baumeister, Hutton, & Tice, 1989). And furthermore, brain imaging shows that the same "reward centers" active during eating and sex also light up when people talk about themselves. So getting your date to chat about what s/he does and likes to do will make them enjoy their time with you even more (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012)! Plus, if you're out to eat, this is a great chance for you to shovel down some food while they talk...

Securing the Third Date

After a couple dates, tell your romantic interest that your friend "has concerns about the two of you being together." This will help implement *the Romeo and Juliet effect*, whereby being told you can't do something only makes you want to do it more. Just don't come on too strong with this; you don't want to make it sound like your friends don't like him/her (Wegener, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994).

Tell the other person that you want to play a psychology game where you stare into each other's eyes for a whole two minutes (it's longer than you think). In one study, randomized participants did this same task, either staring into each other's eyes or at each other's hands. For those who did stare into their partner's eyes (vs. those who didn't), they reported feeling greater affection, attraction, and passion for the other person (Kellerman, Lewis, & Laird, 1989).

Regardless of how fast you proceed physically into a relationship, a little physical contact is a good expression of your own liking (which generates liking in the other person). As well, a little bit of touching can elevate the other's heart rate and increase their desire for you (Williams & Klenike, 1993).

If you're going for date three, you're probably going for a series more of them. To help orient your interest toward a more longstanding romance, try peppering conversation with "why" questions; that is, more abstract considerations, even philosophical ones. Some research suggests that being put in an "abstract" mindset helps orient people's interpretations of their feelings ("is this lust or is this love?") toward the more long lasting emotion (Forster, Epstude, & Ozelsel, 2009).



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