Young Women's Dating Behavior: Why/Why Not Date a Nice Guy?

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The purpose of this study was to investigate why some women report a desire to date nice guys but prefer dating jerks. Specifically, young women's dating choices based on their reasons for dating in general and the attractive/unattractive traits that they perceive that a man possesses were explored. Popular texts offer evidence that young women may/may not select nice guys as dating partners because nice guys may/may not be able to provide them with what they want from their dating experiences. Scholarly texts offer evidence that the answer may lie in how the young woman perceives the nice guy—does he possess attractive or unattractive personality traits? The results of the present study suggest that reasons for dating (i.e., *not* wanting physical contact, wanting stimulating conversation, and wanting an exclusive relationship) and perceived personality traits (i.e., sweet/nice and physically attractive) influence a young woman's desire to date a nice guy, and that perceived personality traits are better predictors of her choice of a man to date than are reasons for dating.

KEY WORDS: nice guy; women; dating behavior; reasons; traits.

Women are not people that you have honest, reciprocal relationships with. You "keep" a woman. You "play the game" with a woman. There are certain things contrary to the spirit of true, honest companionship that a guy must do in order to attract and have women, and no woman will ever love you for who you are, no matter how nice a guy you happen to be. You must first have A, B, and C...regardless of the fact that A, B, and C (insert social status, money, etc.) have nothing at all to do with what a person is actually like.

Anonymous Man[3]

A common refrain among men is the observation that women do not like (or more appropriately, do not want to date) nice guys. Popular cultural texts that range from Kuriansky's (1996) *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dating* to Internet articles such as Overthelimit.com's "The Myth of the Nice Guy" (Guy in a Trenchcoat, 2002) suggest that women claim they want a "nice guy" because they believe that that is what is expected of them when, in reality, they want the so-called "challenge" that comes with dating a not-so-nice guy. Scholarly texts seem to echo this general claim, as does the opinion of the anonymous man.

> The gentle, compassionate man who reads magazine surveys indicating that his qualities are the very ones that most women prefer in a mate may be the same man who is repeatedly turned down by women who seek the company of more atavistic males....Women go for heroes while saying they want vulnerability and later try to persuade their partners to become more sensitive and vulnerable, rather than initially pursuing sensitive and vulnerable men (Desrochers, 1995, p. 376).

However, when women are asked about the subject, they almost always claim to desire a nice

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[3]The anonymous man's statement came from a personal email communication written November 4, 2003. Permission was granted by the author to use the statement in this paper and in subsequent publications if anonymity was guaranteed.

guy...so long as he is not *too* nice (Gray, 1997). What accounts for these contradictions? Are women both attracted to and repelled by nice guys? In short, why or why not date a nice guy?

Scholarly researchers who have attempted to shed light on the nice guy dilemma based their conclusions on one of three theoretical frameworks—evolutionary theory, sexual strategies theory, and social role theory. All three perspectives have produced somewhat consistent results with regard to mating preferences, however they fall short of accounting for factors critical to the nice guy phenomenon as it is articulated in popular culture. For instance, evolutionary theory assumes that young dating individuals are in a perpetual "ensure reproductive success" mode (i.e., to ensure the production of healthy offspring and the acquisition of resources to invest in those offspring; Schmitt, Couden, & Baker, 2001). However, according to anecdotal accounts, young women seem to be more interested in *unsuccessful* reproduction when in "casual dating" and "nonmarital, committed dating" modes (Beland, 2003; Moore & Gould, 2001).

Sexual strategies theory moderates the preoccupation with reproductive success by placing this tendency of dating individuals in a temporal context. That is, according to this theory, women develop short-term dating strategies such as using that temporal context to assess the long-term potential of a current partner (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Unfortunately, this perspective does not explain the anecdotal reality that nice guys seem to be chosen often for transitional dating and nothing more even though they demonstrate long-term mate potential (i.e., being kind and generous with their time and money; Wills, 2000). Social roles theory assumes that individuals are socialized to conform to stereotypic dating/mating expectations such as women's preference for men with maximum earning potential for long-term unions and men's preference for physically attractive women for short-term unions (Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999). The problem with social roles theory is that it assumes traditional dating/mating expectations (i.e., women are predisposed to wanting long-term relationships) and negates the more contemporary dating/mating orientations available to women, which range from purely sexual one-night stands (often spent in the company of "jerks") to completely asexual companion dating for which nice guys seem anecdotally to be destined (Williams, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to investigate why women report a desire to date nice guys but prefer to date "jerks." Specifically, young women's dating choices based on their reasons for dating in general and the attractive/unattractive traits that they perceive that a man possesses were explored. This issue was approached inductively and phenomenogically rather than deductively and theoretically. That is, the likelihood of dating a nice guy or a "jerk" was treated as an inferred event because it is related to a set of actions/interactions/perceptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, emphasis was placed on both popular accounts and academic explanations and conceptualizations of the nice guy phenomenon in order to demystify it, rather than rely on theoretical frameworks that do not seem to "get at" the problem adequately.

A first step toward demystifying the nice guy phenomenon is to understand the role of dating within the development of the romantic interpersonal relationship process. In *Venus and Mars on a Date*, Gray (1997) discussed dating in terms of a five-step strategy that moves romantic partners toward more committed relationships. He indicated that dating is a means of determining whether potential romantic partners can and will meet each other's long-term relationship needs. Knapp's (1984) relationship stages/phases approach provides an interpersonal communication foundation for Gray's popular interpretation of dating and relationship development without the "long-term" stipulation. Knapp's model describes relationships in terms of three phases (coming together, maintenance, and coming apart) in which dating plays a significant role during initiation, experimentation, and intensification—the coming together stages in which the participants meet, exchange information about themselves, spend time together, and become a couple (Alder & Rodman, 2003). Baxter and Bullis (1986) built upon Knapp's "coming together–coming apart" model by investigating turning points—events that are related to positive and negative changes in relationships. Among other things, respondents in their investigation identified the first meeting and the first date (i.e., the first time the respondents regarded themselves as going on a boy–girl date) as types of "get to know you time" events with positive relationship consequences (Baxter & Bullis, 1986).

Finally, the significance of a successful first date to relationship escalation is highlighted when first date scripts are taken into account. Laner and Ventrone (2000) found that first date scripts among

college aged individuals are well known to both sexes and highly predictable, and they speculated that adherence to formulaic scripts influences the long-term development potential of relationships. In short, dating is a necessary component of courtship, a requisite component of romantic relationship escalation, and behaviors specific to the first date must be enacted appropriately to get the whole ball rolling. As such, the interactive dynamic that occurs during early acquaintanceship (the time between the first meeting and just beyond the first date) seems to be significant when making predictions about relationship trajectories. Therefore, in order to respond to the central question of the present study, it made sense to focus on young women's perceptions of the nice guy and the "jerk" guy within the first meeting and first dating contexts.

A second step toward demystifying the nice guy phenomenon is operationalizing the "nice guy" and the "jerk guy" constructs. Multiple versions of the "nice guy" construct appear in scholarly research. For example, when asked to describe the stereotypic nice guy in a study by Herold and Milhausen (1999), female respondents perceived them as either losers (men who were needy, weak, predictable, boring, inexperienced, lacking confidence, and unattractive) or good guys (men who were polite and willing to wait for sex and who possessed a good personality, high standards, and morals). Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003) constructed their hypothetical "Nice Todd" as kind, attentive, and emotionally expressive—a man who is in touch with his feelings, doesn't go for that "macho stuff," and puts his partner's pleasures first in the bedroom. Instead of designing a prototypical nice guy, Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, and West (1995) manipulated prosocial and dominant qualities to determine which combination of traits was most desired by women for long-term relationships. They conceptualized the "nice guy" as altruistic (willing to concede to a partner's interests), agreeable (considerate, cooperative, generous, kind, and sympathetic), and nondominant (introverted, quiet, reserved, timid, and untalkative). In the present study the "nice guy" was presented as a man whom young women *should* want to date. Therefore, the "nice guy" was operationalized as a man who is easily recognized by young women as a "good guy" who is just a little "too nice"—a man who could be perceived as having a good personality and being agreeable, eager to please, and willing to wait for sex.

Conceptualizations of the "jerk guy" are as varied as were those for the "nice guy" in academic texts.

In one study, when asked to describe the stereotypic not-so-nice/jerk guy, female respondents noted the rebel who was described as mysterious, daring, arrogant, and dangerous; the macho man who was described as strong and confident; the fun guy who was described as adventurous, spontaneous, and outgoing; and the sexy guy who was described as charming, good looking, and sexually experienced (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003) created a composite of the macho man and sexy guy called "Jerk Todd" who was portrayed as somewhat insensitive, self-absorbed, and macho—a man who gets what he wants, doesn't go for that "touchy-feely stuff," and can tell his partner what he wants in bed. Jensen-Campbell et al. (1995) postulated that a man who has resources but is unwilling to share them is probably not an attractive mate, at least for a long-term relationship. Their prototypical "jerk guy" was nonaltruistic (watching out only for himself), nonagreeable (rude, selfish, uncooperative, unkind, and unsympathetic), and dominant (active, assertive, bold, talkative, and verbal). In the present study a "jerk guy" who was a viable dating alternative to the "good guy who is just a little *too* nice" was presented. In other words, appearing *dateable* (i.e., appealing enough to attract a dating partner) was a priority for the "jerk guy" because it is doubtful that many young women would respond on a questionnaire that they *want* to date a man who is arrogant, selfish, and unkind (due to the social appropriateness bias) even if they had done so in the past. Therefore, the "jerk guy" was operationalized as a man who is easily recognized by young women as a combination of the "fun guy" and the "sexy guy"—a "not-so-nice" man who could be perceived as exciting, physically attractive, charming, and assertive sexually . . . a potentially unstable combination (Cowan & Kinder, 1985).

One of the goals of the present study was to investigate the motive bias presented in popular texts as an explanatory factor for young women's dating/mating preferences. It made sense to include the perspectives of popular texts given that the "women don't date nice guys" myth seems to have originated and flourished there. Countless self-help books, magazine articles, bulletin boards/chat rooms, and websites have been dedicated to helping the nice guy become more successful at attracting women, steering women away from the relationship pitfalls associated with dating jerks, or creating an open forum for debating the myth. In those texts that specifically address the nice guy myth, there seems to be a clear bias toward a woman's motivation for dating as an

explanatory factor. That is, popular literature seems to be replete with accounts of a woman selecting Man X over Man Y because she seeks something specific from her dating experience.

Some popular texts propose traditional motives to explain why young women select one man over another to date. Traditional motives imply that the reasons for dating conform to acceptable sociocultural norms—expectations that women either want the benefits derived from dating a bad boy or are in search of permanent relationships (i.e., "husband hunting"). For example, the website columnist for *The Wet Spot*, Williams (1999), suggested that there are women who just prefer dangerous guys and do very well with them. According to Cowan and Kinder (1985), authors of *Smart Women Foolish Choices*, some young women are looking for excitement. They either want a man who will bring wild, stimulating, and unpredictable experiences into their lives or compatibility with a dating partner whose lifestyle matches theirs in terms of danger and chaos. Another website, www.sosuave.com, includes the comments of women who seek the long-term relationship advantages of dating nice guys. According to one 34-year-old woman,

> Until a woman is mature enough, really knows herself and is ready for a solid relationship, I believe she will gravitate towards the 'bad boys.' Those relationships don't last, which deep down inside is fine with her because she doesn't really want it to. However, when she grows up (as I have now) she changes her definition of what's interesting and attractive—the stability and predictability of a nice guy become magnetic (Nice guys vs. jerks, 2003, para 2).

Other popular texts note motivations that liberate young women from the traditional sociocultural expectations when they select dating partners. These texts remove the constraints of role expectations and encourage women to look beyond dating as a means to a relationship end and to see it as an experiential end in itself. In other words, some popular texts advocate "dating like a man." In *Date Like A Man*, Moore and Gould (2001) urged women to change their traditional orientation toward dating in order to maximize their options. Specifically, the authors told women to stop dating like a woman (i.e., for the sole purpose of finding a husband) and start dating like a man (i.e., for the purpose of having fun). This shift in dating orientation can move young women away from seeking long-term, committed, and/or marital relationships and partners toward casual, recreational, and/or companion dating. And,

although casual, recreational, and/or companion dating relieves the pressure of "Finding Mr. Right" from every dating experience, potentially it can reduce this important relationship exploration stage to "Looking for Mr. Right Now." The author of an article in *Men's Health* highlighted this point when she answered the question "Do women actually go out just to get laid?" from one of her male readers with a simple "Yes" (Beland, 2003, fourth question).

A second goal of this was to explore the personality traits approach offered by past academic researchers as an explanatory perspective for young women's dating/mating preferences. According to popular literature, the answer to why young women choose to date not-so-nice, "jerk" guys rather than nice guys may lie within young women's motivations for dating—a desire to get something specific from the dating experience. However, scholarly researchers have provided evidence that the answer to the question may lie within the man—or more specifically, within the young woman's perception of the man as a good/nice guy or a fun/sexy guy. Which specific perceived qualities/traits make Man X a more/less attractive dating partner than Man Y?

In a review of literature on mate preferences, Feingold (1990) found 54 articles that chronicled the significance of physical attractiveness as an attractive trait in all dating situations. Speed and Gangestad (1997) found that, along with perceptions of young men as physically attractive, perceptions of them as well dressed, out-going, and self-confident significantly and positively correlated with young women's ratings of romantic popularity (i.e., "Who has the most dates and/or gets asked to the most date parties?"). Fifty-four percent of the female respondents in Herold and Milhausen's (1999) study reported that, given a choice, they would rather date the nice guy who was described as sexually inexperienced, nice, and somewhat shy rather than the not-so-nice guy who was described as physically attractive, fun, and sexually active. In a study of the traits most desirable in a casual sex partner and a romantic partner (i.e., boyfriend), female respondents listed qualities such as honest and trustworthy, healthy, warm and kind, attractive, agreeable, sociable, and emotionally stable (Regan, 1998a) as most important in both types of relationships. Finally, Stewart, Stinnett, and Rosenfeld (2000) found that women rated trustworthy/honest, sense of humor, kindness/understanding, exciting personality, and dependable as the most desirable traits in a dating partner.

Although it is a cultural phenomenon to cast one trait as desirable/attractive and another trait as undesirable/unattractive, perceptions that others possess an attractive or unattractive trait are in the eyes of the beholder—or more appropriately, vary with the dating circumstances of the beholder. That is, a woman may perceive X, Y, and Z traits as desirable for a casual sex partner, but less desirable (if not completely undesirable) for a steady boyfriend. For instance, the same women who do not discriminate on traits such as financial stability and kindness when it comes to dating in general (Li, Bailey, Kendrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002), may be more discriminating on traits like physical attractiveness when it comes to suitability for casual versus romantic dating relationships (Regan, 1998b). In addition, certain personality traits positively influence dating choices only in combination with other qualities. For example, Shanteau and Nagy (1979) found that women reported that they were more likely to date Man X rather than Man Y if there were perceived differences in the target man's physical attractiveness *and* his willingness to accept the offer to date. In other words, women were more likely to consider physical attractiveness as an important quality *if* getting a date with him was a "sure thing" rather than "no chance."

Temporal factors may influence the acceptability of a trait in other ways as well. Over time, desirable traits may become undesirable. That is, traits that made Man X desirable during the early initiation and experimentation stages of a relationship may make him less desirable during the latter intensification stage. In Stewart et al.'s (2000) study, an exciting personality was the only attractive quality desired in a short-term dating partner but not in a long-term relationship partner. From the "over time" perspective, being perceived as exciting may be advantageous for a young man within the uncertain and exploratory first date context. However, as later dates call for more relationship certainty and/or predictability, what was once perceived as "exciting" may be reinterpreted as "unstable." Felmlee (2001) posited a "fatal attraction" hypothesis for this influence of time on the perception of personality traits: certain traits that attract a young woman to a young man in the beginning of the relationship may repel her from the same young man as the relationship continues or sours over time. The five most common attractive to unattractive trait pairs found were nice to passive, strong to stubborn, funny to "flaky," outgoing to "over the top," and caring to clingy (Felmlee, 2001). The "fatal attraction" hypothesis may be used to explain why a young woman who was initially attracted to her nice guy because she thought he was "nice," over time may become eager to dump him because she views him as "too nice" (i.e., passive).

Given the evidence from popular culture and scholarly research, the following two hypotheses were tested in this study.

Hypothesis 1: There would be a relationship between young women's reasons for dating and their choice of men to date.

Hypothesis 2: There would be a relationship between women's perceptions of men's personality traits and their choice of men to date.

METHOD

Sample

An available sample of young women ($N = 95$) enrolled in introductory and interpersonal communication courses at a small east coast university was recruited for this study. The predominantly White sample of women were administered a three-part questionnaire in accordance with the institution's guidelines for the protection of human participants. The average age of the participants was 20.2 years ($SD = 2.56$); 51.6% of them were single, 45.3% reported being single but in a committed relationship, and 3.2% were married.

Measures

The measures used in this study were developed as a result of several pilot tests and debriefings. Multiple versions of the questionnaire were administered to female students who were taking introductory human communication courses. Afterward, comments were solicited in order to create measures that more accurately reflected the young women's perceptions of the nice guy dilemma, and that were internally reliable and produced sufficient response variation. For instance, motivational items such as "wanting to date a man who is physically attractive" and "wanting to date a man who is sexually attractive" were dropped because they were redundant with certain trait items (i.e., "physically attractive"). Trait items such as "charming" and "a good kisser" were replaced with "romantic" and "someone my friends would like" because the former were less reliable than the latter. Several versions of the dating scenarios for the fun/sexy guy were written in order

to strike the right balance between not-so-nice guy and "jerk" guy qualities and to produce sufficient response variation. The scenarios also were changed from forced choice options (i.e., "Would you choose the man in this scenario for a second date—yes or no?") to Likert scale ratings because the results produced from the forced choice responses were too easily attributed to social appropriateness.

A three-part questionnaire was generated to assess the three variables of interest: reasons for dating (independent variable), perceived traits (independent variable), and the likelihood of dating the guys in Scenarios 1 and 2 (dependent variable). The first part of the questionnaire, which included Likert scales, asked respondents about their likelihood of going out on a date with a man for the following reasons: to go somewhere or do something interesting, to get to know someone better, because you are bored, to have fun, because you are lonely, because you want excitement, to have someone spend money on you, because you want physical contact, because you want stimulating conversation, and because you are looking for an exclusive relationship. Some of the reasons in this part of the questionnaire were generated to correspond with women's traditional and recreational motivations for dating as represented in popular texts (i.e., going out to "get laid," to find a permanent relationship, to have fun, and for excitement). Other reasons were generated specifically to define further the notion of "recreational dating" (i.e., to go somewhere or do something interesting and because you want stimulating conversation). Reliability for this measure was .77.

The second part of the questionnaire presented the respondents with nice guy and fun/sexy guy dating scenarios and asked them to rate on Likert scales their likelihood of going out on a second date with the men presented in the scenarios. Each scenario followed a formulaic pattern of first meetings and first dates for young adults: they meet at a party, exchange contact information, arrange a first date, and go out on a Saturday night dinner or movie date. However, the specifics of the date were manipulated in order to differentiate the nice guy and his dating behavior from the fun/sexy guy and his dating behavior. In the nice guy scenario, the young man possessed the a-little-too-nice/good guy traits (a good personality, agreeable, eager to please, and willing to wait for sex), was well dressed, complimented his date on her attire, took his date to a nice restaurant, and entertained his date with humorous conversation (behaviors that should be recognized as common to

the "a-little-too-nice/good guy" dating experience). Scenario 1 appears below.

> Thursday evening you meet a man at a mutual friend's house and spend the whole night engaged in lively and interesting conversation. Before the two of you part for the evening, he asks you for your telephone number and you give it to him. The next day he calls you to tell you that he had a great time talking to you the night before and asks you out for dinner. You agree to go out with him the following evening (Saturday night). The date is wonderful. He greets you at your door appropriately dressed and compliments you on your attire. He takes you to a very nice restaurant where you enjoy good food and lots of humorous conversation. At the end of the evening, he walks you to your door and says, "I had a really good time tonight. Can I call you again tomorrow?" You say, "yes" and, happily, he leaves.

In the fun/sexy guy scenario, the young man possessed the fun/sexy guy traits (exciting, physically attractive, charming, and assertive sexually), presented his date with a rose, took his date to a movie, and kissed his date at the end of the evening (behaviors that should be recognized as common to a "fun/sexy guy" dating experience). Scenario 2 appears below.

> Thursday evening you meet a very attractive man at a mutual friend's house and spend the whole night engaged in lively and interesting conversation. Before the two of you part for the evening, he asks you for your telephone number and you give it to him. The next day he calls you to tell you that he had a great time talking to you the night before and asks you out for a movie. You agree to go out with him the following evening (Saturday night). The date is wonderful. He greets you at your door looking better than he did when you met him and presents you with a single red rose. He takes you to a popular movie and, on the drive home, you enjoy more entertaining conversation. At the end of the evening, he walks you to your door and kisses you passionately. Afterward, he looks deeply into your eyes and says, "I had a great time tonight. I'll call you tomorrow." He waits for you to say, "okay," then he leaves.

According to the results, the participants were able to differentiate the two dating scenarios and reported a greater likelihood of going on a second date with the nice guy ($M = 9.26$, $SD = 1.15$) than the fun/sexy guy ($M = 8.12$, $SD = 2.13$). A paired sample t test indicated that the differences between these mean ratings were significant, $t = 4.94$; $df = 94$; $p < .01$.

The final part of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate on Likert scales their impressions

of the men presented in the two dating scenarios. First, women rated the nice guy according to 10 personality traits (intelligent, physically attractive, funny/witty, strong, confident, romantic, aggressive, sweet/nice, exciting, and someone my friends would like), then they were asked to rate the fun/sexy guy using the same traits presented in a different order. This method of presentation was chosen in order to avoid fixed responses. Although some of the traits were referenced explicitly within the text of the dating scenarios (such as physically attractive, funny/witty), other traits had to be inferred (such as sweet/nice, strong, exciting). Seven perceived traits were chosen because they fit the dating scenario and corresponded with the qualities that scholarly texts suggested that attract women to dating partners. The remaining three perceived traits (i.e., strong, confident, and aggressive) were chosen because they fit the dating scenario and ostensibly referenced the "fatal attraction" hypothesis. Cronbach's alpha for these measures were.82 for the nice guy's ratings and.85 for the fun/sexy guy's ratings.

Procedure

At the beginning of class, female students were asked if they would like to participate in a study about young women's dating behavior. They were informed that no extra credit would be given in exchange for their participation nor would they be penalized in any way for not choosing to participate. At the end of class, a letter of consent was read and distributed along with the three-part questionnaire. The parts of the questionnaire were administered in the order that they were discussed earlier (10 reasons for dating, 2 dating scenarios, 10 personality traits for the nice guy, 10 personality traits for the fun/sexy guy). The questionnaires were completed in class within 5–10 minutes and returned to the administrator. Other than age, classification, and relationship status, no identifying information was collected. The participants were thanked and encouraged to keep their letters of consent for future reference.

RESULTS

Several statistical procedures were used to analyze the data. Frequency tables were constructed to reflect young women's perceptions of the variables of interest. Pearson correlation matrices were generated to obtain a general sense of the strength and direction of the relationships present among

Table I. Mean Reasons for Dating Ratings

Reasons for dating	M (SD)
Want to go somewhere or do something interesting	6.98 (2.27)
Want to get to know someone better	8.79 (1.34)
Bored	4.25 (2.04)
Want to have fun	7.98 (1.72)
Lonely	5.46 (2.54)
Want excitement	6.80 (2.20)
Want someone to spend money on you	3.18 (2.28)
Want physical contact	4.27 (2.58)
Want stimulating conversation	6.59 (1.90)
Want an exclusive relationship	7.10 (2.39)

the variables of interest. Stepwise regression analyses and factor analyses were run to test hypotheses. Stepwise regression analyses were run to assess which specific reasons for dating or perceived personality traits contributed the most to the variation in likelihood of dating. Subsequently, multiple regression analyses were run using the reasons for dating and perceived personality traits factors as independent variables to determine if they could explain further the variation in likelihood of dating. And finally, principal component factor analyses were run on the independent variables to look at their interrelationships and for underlying factors.

Table I shows the mean ratings for reasons for going on a date. On a scale of 1–10, where 10 was the highest possible rating, the actual highest rated reasons young women indicated for dating were to get to know someone better ($M = 8.79$, $SD = 1.34$) and to have fun ($M = 7.98$, $SD = 1.72$). The lowest rated reason indicated for dating was wanting someone to spend money on them ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 2.28$). Table II contains a comparison of the average ratings of the perceived traits of the men in both dating

Table II. Mean Perceived Personality Trait Ratings for Nice Guy and Fun/Sexy Guy in Dating Scenarios

Perceived traits	Nice guy from Scenario 1 M (SD)	Fun/sexy guy from Scenario 2 M (SD)
Intelligent	8.29 (1.18)	6.82 (1.56)
Physically attractive	7.38 (1.63)	8.63 (1.77)
Funny/witty	7.73 (1.84)	7.32 (1.82)
Strong	6.42 (2.19)	7.60 (2.06)
Confident	7.48 (2.05)	9.05 (1.30)
Romantic	7.49 (2.04)	7.81 (2.07)
Aggressive	3.31 (2.09)	8.39 (1.72)
Sweet/nice	8.74 (1.39)	7.01 (1.99)
Exciting	6.84 (1.88)	7.91 (1.64)
Someone my friends would like	7.94 (2.03)	7.27 (2.17)

scenarios. On a scale of 1–10 where 10 was the highest possible rating, the top rated traits attributed to the nice guy were sweet/nice ($M = 8.74$, $SD = 1.36$) and intelligent ($M = 8.29$, $SD = 1.18$). The lowest rated trait attributed to the nice guy was aggressive ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 2.09$). The top rated traits attributed to the fun/sexy guy were confident ($M = 9.05$, $SD = 1.30$) and physically attractive ($M = 8.63$, $SD = 1.77$) whereas the lowest rated trait attributed to the fun/sexy guy was intelligent ($M = 6.82$, $SD = 1.56$).

Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data. A relationship was found between the likelihood of dating a nice guy and reasons for dating and between the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy and reasons for dating. Table III contains a comparison of the correlations between the reasons for dating and the likelihood of dating a second time the nice guy and the fun/sexy guy. Table IV shows the standardized beta of the reasons for dating for both men in the dating scenarios. Pearson correlations indicated that the likelihood of dating a nice guy a second time was positively related to wanting an exclusive relationship, $r = .24$, $p < .05$. Stepwise regression analyses revealed that not wanting physical contact (due to the negative correlation obtained with that reason for dating), wanting stimulating conversation, and wanting an exclusive relationship predicted an increase in the likelihood of dating a nice guy, $F(3, 90) = 5.54$, $p < .01$, however the variables did not contribute very much to the overall prediction, $R^2 = .13$.

Pearson correlations at the .05 level indicated that the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy a second

Table III. Correlations Between Reasons for Dating and Likelihood of Dating Nice Guy and Fun/Sexy Guy in Dating Scenarios

Reasons dating	Nice guy from Scenario 1 r	Fun/sexy guy from Scenario 2 r
Want to go somewhere or do something interesting	.02	.27*
Want to get to know someone better	.18	.19
Bored	−.01	.15
Want to have fun	−.04	.35**
Lonely	.06	.21*
Want excitement	.05	.17
Want someone to spend money on you	−.12	.22*
Want physical contact	−.16	.26**
Want stimulating conversation	.16	.01
Want an exclusive relationship	.24*	.26*

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table IV. Standardized Beta Weights of Stepwise Regression Model for Reasons for Dating and Likelihood of Dating Nice Guy and Fun/Sexy Guy in Dating Scenarios

Reasons for dating	Nice guy Scenario from 1[a] β	Fun/sexy guy from Scenario 2[b] β
Want to go somewhere or do something interesting	.06	.10
Want to get to know someone better	.10	.00
Bored	.04	.07
Want to have fun	−.07	.33
Lonely	.08	.11
Want excitement	.09	−.03
Want someone to spend money on you	−.06	.16
Want physical contact	−.27	.14
Want stimulating conversation	.23	−.09
Want an exclusive relationship	.28	.22

[a]$R^2 = .13$; $F(3, 90) = 5.54$; $p < .01$.
[b]$R^2 = .16$; $F(2, 91) = 9.78$; $p < .01$.

time was positively related to wanting to go somewhere or do something interesting, $r = .27$, being lonely, $r = .25$, wanting someone to spend money on them, $r = .22$, and wanting an exclusive relationship, $r = .20$. Pearson correlations at the .01 level indicated that the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy was positively related to having fun, $r = .43$, and wanting physical contact, $r = .26$. Stepwise regression analyses indicated that, although reasons for dating, such as having fun and wanting an exclusive relationship, were the best predictors of increased likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy, $F(2, 91) = 9.78$, $p < .01$, again, they did not contribute very much to the overall prediction, $R^2 = .16$.

Hypothesis 2 was supported as well. A relationship was found between the likelihood of dating a nice guy and perceived traits and between the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy and perceived traits. Table V contains a comparison of the correlations between the perceived traits and the likelihood of dating a second time the nice guy and fun/sexy guy in the dating scenarios. Table VI shows the standardized beta for the personality traits for both men in the dating scenarios. Pearson correlations indicated that the likelihood of going out on a second date with a nice guy was positively related to perceptions of the man in Scenario 1 as intelligent, physically attractive, romantic, sweet/nice, exciting, and someone their friends would like, at or below the .01 level, and

Table V. Correlations Between Perceived Personality Traits and Likelihood of Dating Nice Guy and Fun/Sexy Guy in Dating Scenarios

Perceived traits	Nice guy from Scenario 1	Fun/sexy guy from Scenario 2
	r	r
Intelligent	.40**	.30**
Physically attractive	.42**	.48**
Funny/witty	.21*	.32**
Strong	.18	.47**
Confident	.13	.20
Romantic	.29**	.48**
Aggressive	−.07	−.19
Sweet/nice	.59**	.59**
Exciting	.36**	.59**
Someone my friends would like	.41**	.64**

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$

funny/witty at the .05 level. Stepwise regression analyses indicated that perceptions of the man in Scenario 1 as sweet/nice and physically attractive were the best predictors of an increase in the likelihood of dating the nice guy, $F(2, 92) = 31.75, p < .01$, and that the magnitude of the contribution to the overall prediction was substantial, $R^2 = .40$.

Pearson correlations at the .01 level indicated that the likelihood of going out on a second date with a fun/sexy guy was positively related to perceptions of the man in Scenario 2 as funny/witty, intelligent, exciting, physically attractive, romantic, sweet/nice, strong, and someone their friends would like. Stepwise regression analyses indicated that the best model for predicting an increase in the likelihood of

Table VI. Standardized Beta Weights of Stepwise Regression Model for Perceived Personality Traits and Likelihood of Dating Nice Guy and Fun/Sexy Guy in Dating Scenarios

Perceived traits	Nice guy from Scenario 1[a]	Fun/sexy guy from Scenario 2[b]
	β	β
Intelligent	.08	.00
Physically attractive	.50	.12
Funny/witty	−.04	−.05
Strong	−.12	.08
Confident	−.09	−.15
Romantic	.03	.04
Aggressive	−.05	−.10
Sweet/nice	.27	.23
Exciting	.09	.23
Someone my friends would like	.16	.33

[a]$R^2 = .40; F(2, 92) = 31.48; p < .01.$
[b]$R^2 = .46; F(3, 91) = 27.95; p < .01.$

dating a fun/sexy guy contained perceptions of the man in Scenario 2 as someone my friends would like, sweet/nice, and exciting, $F(3, 91) = 27.95, p < .01$, and again, the magnitude of the contribution of those variables combined to the overall prediction was substantial, $R^2 = .46$.

To address the relationships among the independent variables and the underlying factors that account for the results of the regression analysis, the 10 reasons for dating contained in the first part of the questionnaire were factor analyzed and broken down into three factors. A categorizing system that identifies the properties that emerged from the reasons within each factor was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and the factors were labeled low, moderate, and high commitment. The reasons for dating that indicate "low commitment" were wanting to go somewhere or do something interesting, because they were bored, because they want to have fun, because they were lonely, because they wanted excitement, because they wanted physical contact, and because they wanted stimulating conversation. The only reason for dating that indicates "moderate commitment" was wanting stimulating conversation. This reason for dating did not meet the extraction criterion for the low or moderate commitment factors, therefore it was classified under both categories. The final factor was designated "high commitment" because wanting an exclusive relationship was the only reason for dating that it contained. Wanting to get to know someone better and wanting someone to spend money on them met the extraction criteria for all three categories and, thus, were not classified according to any of the commitment factors.

The reasons for dating in the "low commitment" factor reflected a casual, short-term attitude toward dating that makes it synonymous with recreational dating. No significant results were produced for the nice guy, but the low commitment factor was responsible for some variation in the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy, $R^2 = .12; F(7, 86) = 2.78; p < .05$. The reason for dating in the moderate commitment factor seemed to reflect the women's desire for a member of the other sex "just to talk to." No significant results were found for the nice guy or the fun/sexy guy and the moderate commitment factor. The high commitment factor was found to explain very little of the variation in the likelihood of dating a nice guy, $R^2 = .05; F(1, 93) = 5.58; p < .05$, and a fun/sexy guy, $R^2 = .06; F(1, 93) = 6.69; p < .05$.

The 10 personality traits attributed to the nice guy and the fun/sexy guy in Scenarios 1 and 2,

respectively, were factor analyzed and resulted in two factors: "attractive" and "unattractive" traits. For the nice guy in Scenario 1, seven traits were classified as "attractive" (traits that young women would perceive as favorable in a dating partner)—physically attractive, funny/witty, strong, confident, romantic, exciting, and someone their friends would like. Only one trait was classified as "unattractive" for the nice guy in Scenario 1 (traits that young women would perceive as unfavorable in a dating partner)—aggressive. Two traits met the extraction criteria for both the "attractive" and "unattractive" categories for the nice guy—intelligent and sweet/nice. This suggests that being perceived as intelligent and sweet/nice may be "fatal attraction" qualities for the nice guy. That is, being perceived as intelligent and sweet/nice may be an asset for the nice guy on the first date, but may be perceived as a liability on latter dates. For the fun/sexy guy in Scenario 2, eight traits were classified as "attractive"—funny/witty, intelligent, romantic, someone their friends would like, exciting, physically attractive, sweet/nice, and strong. One trait was classified as "unattractive" for the fun/sexy guy in Scenario 2—aggressive. One trait met the extraction criteria for both the "attractive" and "unattractive" categories for the fun/sexy guy— confident. Again, this suggests that being perceived as confident may be a "fatal attraction" quality for the fun/sexy guy. Therefore, being perceived as confident may attract a young woman to a fun/sexy guy in the beginning of a relationship and then repel her from him as the relationship continues or sours over time.

DISCUSSION

To explain the nice guy phenomenon such that it is consistent with past scholarly research and popular cultural texts, two questions must be addressed. The primary question was, "Why or why not choose a nice guy as a dating partner?" A question of secondary importance was, "Is there support for the myth that young women prefer jerks as dating partners rather than nice guys?" Popular texts offer evidence that young women may/may not select nice guys as dating partners because nice guys may/may not be able to provide them with what they want from their dating experience. Scholarly texts offer evidence that the answers may lie in how the young woman perceives the nice guy—whether she perceives him as having attractive or unattractive traits for dating. The results of this study suggest that, although both

reasons for dating (i.e., *not* wanting physical contact, wanting stimulating conversation, and wanting an exclusive relationship) and perceived personality traits (i.e., sweet/nice and physically attractive) influence a young woman's desire to date a nice guy, perceived personality traits are better predictors of her choice of man to date than are her reasons for dating.

The easy answer to the question "Why/Why not date a nice guy?" may be that young women choose to date nice guys when they are perceived as possessing X combination of attractive personality traits and that young women reject nice guys as dating partners when they are perceived as possessing Y combination of unattractive personality traits. However, further discussion of that assertion is required. According to the factor analysis results of attractive perceived personality traits for a nice guy, a "good guy" that young women want to date is a man who is physically attractive, funny/witty, romantic, exciting, and someone their friends would like. Stepwise regression results indicated that being perceived as physically attractive and sweet/nice were the best predictors of a nice guy securing a second date and accounted for 30% of the variation in the dependent variable. However, physical attractiveness was listed among the traits in the attractive factor when the data were factor analyzed, but sweet/nice was not included among the other traits in either the attractive or unattractive factors. From the perspective of the "fatal attraction" hypothesis, a nice guy who is perceived as sweet/nice may be more appealing to a young woman when combined with perceptions of being physically attractive and may be less appealing to her when perceived alone. Stranger still, physical attractiveness was neither stated nor implied in the nice guy dating scenario even though some female respondents inferred it. Perceptions of being sweet/nice did not seem to fall victim to the fatal attraction hypothesis for the fun/sexy guy. For him, factor analysis showed that being sweet/nice was a highly desirable quality—as were the other two traits that increased his likelihood of getting a second date. Thus, achieving that "magic combination of desirable qualities that leads to subsequent dates" may be a more elusive proposition for the nice guy than for the fun/sexy guy.

Young women in this study seemed to perceive both nice guys and fun/sexy guys as sweet/nice because both types of young men in the dating scenarios conformed to young women's expectations for a first date. According to Laner and Ventrone (2000), six commonly expected first date behaviors for a man are ask the woman out, decide on the plans, buy

flowers for the woman, pick her up, pay all the bills, and make affectionate moves (such as hugging and kissing). Expecting all six of these behaviors may work against the nice guy because, according to Scenario 1, the nice guy performs the basic steps (i.e., asks the woman out, decides on the plans, picks her up, and pays all the bills), but goes no further. The fun/sexy guy in Scenario 2, on the other hand, also performs the basic steps (i.e., asks the woman out, decides on the plans, picks her up, and pays all the bills) and goes a little further [i.e., buys flowers for the woman and makes affectionate moves (such as hugging and kissing)]. The "fatal attraction" hypothesis may explain subsequent rejection of a nice guy because his sweet/nice guy caution may be read as loser/nice guy passivity. Again, when it comes to getting a second date, being considered sweet/nice has its advantages, but only in combination with other specific desirable personality traits and/or behaviors . . . and potentially only for a fun/sexy guy. Gray (1997) made a similar point in the following way.

> Every time a nice guy is rejected, he then mistakenly assumes it is because he was [too] nice. This experience is compounded by the recurring situation of a woman complaining about a past relationship. If she is complaining, then she tends to focus on what a jerk the guy was. So once again a nice guy can't figure women out and wonders why she got involved with a jerk. The answer to the question is that when she first met [the jerk] she thought he was nice (p. 174).

The answer to the second question regarding the nice guy dilemma, "Is there support for the myth that young women prefer jerks as dating partners rather than nice guys?," may be found in young women's perceptions of the dating experience. Significant correlations emerged between low and high commitment reasons for dating (such as wanting to have fun, *not* wanting physical contact, wanting stimulating conversation, and wanting an exclusive relationship) and an increase in the likelihood of dating fun/sexy guys and nice guys. Popular and academic texts claim that young women report wanting nice guys for committed relationships. However, regression analysis of the reasons for dating factors indicated that the high commitment reason for dating accounts very little for a young woman's desire to date a nice guy or a not-so-nice fun/sexy guy, and the low commitment dating factor was related only to an increase in the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy a second time. These results can be interpreted as dispelling the mythical status of the claim that young women prefer dating fun/sexy guys rather than nice

guys in at least two ways. First, being suitable for high commitment dating alone is not enough (by a long shot) to increase a nice guy's likelihood to progress into or beyond the experimentation stage of relationship escalation. Second, young women who are interested in frequent casual dating are not going to select a nice guy as a dating partner because he cannot meet her recreational dating needs. And, because the fun/sexy guy seems to be more suitable for low commitment dating, he is going to be chosen more often for it, which provides him with an increased opportunity to progress well into and beyond the experimentation stage. Of course, this creates the perception that young women do not want to date nice guys when the reality may be that they do not want a nice guy for "low commitment reasons" when the nice guy may have "high commitment expectations."

Being perceived as sweet/nice and physically attractive were found to predict substantially the likelihood of dating a nice guy, and being perceived as someone their friends would like, sweet/nice, and exciting were found to predict substantially the likelihood of dating a fun/sexy guy. In terms of the social value of the specific qualities (e.g., sweet/nice, exciting, physically attractive), the nice guy myth does not seem to hold true. That is, on the basis of the social value of the perceived personality traits, the nice guy and the fun/sexy guy seem equally likely to be selected to participate in experimental relationship dating—the "fatal attraction" hypothesis, notwithstanding. However, if the dating experience is extended to the intensification stage (a point where the dating partners explore "coupledom" and the relationship is confirmed by others; Alder & Rodman, 2003), the fun/sexy guy may have the upper hand. When assessing the suitability of a nice guy for a one-on-one, first date, dating experience, the young woman relies on her own perceptions of his qualities. Thus, according to the results of the present study, if she perceives the nice guy as both sweet/nice and physically attractive, she is more likely to go out with him at least a second time. However, if the young woman is looking for someone for more than a one-on-one, first date, dating experience (i.e., dating situations that may involve interactions with friends and/or relatives), the perceptions of others (e.g., friends) become as salient as her own. Thus, according to the results of the present study, if she perceives the fun/sexy guy as sweet/nice and exciting *and* perceives that her friends will approve of him, she is more likely to go out with him a second time and potentially more often. Again, the claim

that women prefer dating fun/sexy guys rather than nice guys finds support.

Intriguing as these results may be, three limitations should be placed on their interpretations. First, the conceptualization of the "jerk guy" presented in Scenario 2 is an approximation of its manifestation in popular literature. In this study, the "jerk guy" was presented as a cross between the "fun guy" and the "sexy guy" from the Herold and Milhausen (1999) study rather than the bad boy/jerk guy alluded to in popular and other academic texts. As a result, the present study's fun/sexy guy may have displayed fewer negative qualities in his first date scenario than "jerk guys" in other studies that leads to conflicting conclusions about dating preferences. Although the present study's respondents were able to differentiate adequately among the traits of the nice guy and the fun/sexy guy, other than sexual forwardness, many of the negative, anecdotal, "jerk guy" personality traits were sacrificed in order to make the fun/sexy guy a viable dating alternative to the good guy/nice guy. Future researchers may need to reconcile the anecdotal "jerk guy" image with his real life dateability to get a better picture of young women's dating preferences with reference to the nice guy dilemma. Second, it is speculative at best to base relationship trajectories on first date scenarios and the probability of a hypothetical second date. Results of this study suggest that young women may be inclined to date anybody at least twice—requisite behavior during the experimental stage of relationship escalation. However, I did not factor in a cut-off period for experimentation. That is, the analysis cannot account for the point at which the young woman decides that continuing to date the nice guy and/or fun/sexy guy requires more physical or emotional investment in the relationship than she is willing to give or does not match her level of commitment expectations. Accurate predictions about relationship trajectories require comparisons of perceptions during salient moments (i.e., turning points), such as getting to know the young man on a first date versus negotiating the first opportunity for sexual contact on a future date. Therefore, although a young woman may find it appealing that the nice guy did not try to kiss her on their first date, she may not find him quite as appealing if two dates down the road he is still not "giving off any sparks." By the same token, accepting a passionate kiss on the first date from the fun/sexy guy may set the young woman up for increased intimacy on the second and third dates—a level of intimacy for which she is unprepared. Future researchers should compare first date versus future date nice guy and fun/sexy guy perceptions as a foundation for making predictions about relationship development. Third, it might be presumptuous to equate keeping a guy around for a second date and beyond with wanting him for an exclusive boyfriend relationship. I did not differentiate between wanting a young man for steady *boyfriend* dating and wanting a young man for regular *companion* dating. One implies a desire for an exclusive, romantic, committed relationship with the young man, whereas the other does not, even though a young woman may seek the same qualities in a young man for both types of relationships. For example, being perceived as sweet/nice (along with other qualities) seemed to be a trait that increased the likelihood of a second date for both the nice guy and the fun/sexy guy in the present study. However, Sprecher and Regan (2002) found that young women equally desired comparable qualities (i.e., warmth and kindness) in a steady dating partner, a boyfriend, and a platonic cross-sex friend. Just because a young woman enjoys going out on a regular basis with her nice guy, platonic, cross-sex friend does not mean that she will want him for anything more than a friend even though he possesses qualities that she wants in a boyfriend. Although comparisons can be made between the characteristics of casual and steady dating partners, those relationships may not be analogous in quality or function. As a result, future researchers should be cautious about conclusions based on incongruous relationship comparisons.

CONCLUSION

So, are young women both attracted to and repelled by nice guys? Do young women prefer dating "jerk" guys rather than "nice" guys? The answers to these questions are yes and no. It depends. The results of this study seem to indicate that young women equate nice guys who are physically attractive, funny/witty, strong, confident, romantic, exciting, and someone their friends would like with "good guys," but that being perceived as sweet/nice has the potential to turn that same nice guy into a "too nice," "loser guy." Young women appear to see fun/sexy guys as general purpose dating partners especially during the experimental phase, and they may be more willing to favor his personality traits over those of a nice guy when (they think) their perceptions of fun/sexy guy have been confirmed by their friends. However, dating a nice guy may require a more

serious attitude toward dating from young women and more confidence in their own ability to judge another's character accurately. Experience is usually the best teacher in social situations such as dating. And, finding a "good guy" prince among several possible "nice" suitors may necessitate kissing a lot of "loser" frogs—something that recreational dating young women simply may not have the time, patience, or inclination to do. In the end, young women may continue to claim that they find certain qualities in a "good guy" nice guy as highly desirable and that they want to be in a committed relationship with one man as their ultimate goal, but, at the same time, they seem content to spend "the meantime and in-between-time" going out with fun/sexy guys who may or may not turn into "jerks."

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