



# Gendering desire in speed-dating interactions

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## Abstract

This study examines how potential romantic partners in speed-dating encounters use gender to both proffer and formulate mate-preferences as a means of establishing affiliation. Drawing on a corpus of 36 speed-dating interactions, a sequential discursive psychological approach was used to analyze how gendered mate-preferences were initially elicited and formulated, as well as the interactional effects of mate-preferences that were designed to appear complicit versus resistant to gender conventionality. The findings reveal that both mate-preference solicitations and formulations were categorically gendered and were treated as incipient or expected, suggesting that gendering mate-preferences is a normative action in first encounters by potential romantic partners. Further, mate-preferences that were marked as conventional rarely promoted an environment of mutual affiliation, whereas mate-preferences that were formulated as resistant to gender-conventionality did tend to function as a preliminary for affective affiliation. The study reveals that the gendering of mate-preferences is a responsive social practice with an interactional design that has relational consequences for the ways potential romantic partners create connection.

## Keywords

affiliation, categories, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, gender, mate-preferences, speed-dating

## Introduction

Within the last decade, research on speed-dating has emerged within experimental social psychology as an innovative way of studying the relationship between gender and initial romantic attraction (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008; Finkel et al., 2007; Fisman et al., 2006;

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Houser et al., 2008). Within this field of research, questions about gender have largely been modeled in terms of sex-differences with respect to mate-preferences. While men's and women's stated a priori mate preferences (on pre-event questionnaires) often reflect gender stereotypes about romantic desire (e.g. men report preferring physical attractiveness; women report preferring earning potential), these stereotypes virtually disappear when participants report on their preferences about actual people *after* live 'dates' with them (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008; Finkel et al., 2007; Fisman et al., 2006). Although it is the actual face-to-face interactions that seem to catalyze the breakdown of these gendered sex-differences, the interactions are often treated as experimental manipulations that remain unexamined in what Stokoe (2010a) has called 'an analytic black box' (see also Korobov, 2011). Rather than examining this 'black box', speed-dating researchers typically conclude that such discrepancies are evidence that men and women may lack introspective awareness about what influences their desires, judgments, and behaviors (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008).

In contrast, this study brings a discursive-conversation analytic perspective to the relevance of gender in speed-daters' formulations of mate-preferences. From a discursive perspective, it may be unsurprising that the kind of gender stereotypes found in the lab virtually disappear in actual face-to-face interactions, since lab instruments are designed to find gender and then smuggle it into the language of sex differences. In contrast, for discursive and conversation analytic researchers, gender is an artifact of actual talk, not measurement, which means its relevancy is for the participants to sort out, often as part of some social business that may have nothing to do with gender, *per se*. A discursive-conversation analytic approach examines gender not by analyzing sex/gender differences nor the stylization/performance of gender by select categories of people, but rather by demonstrably showing how gender is systematically occasioned in a variety of discourse practices, either explicitly or implicitly, in ways that are relevant or consequential for the business at hand (see Speer, 2005; Stokoe, 2004, 2006, 2008).

Examining gender as it is used to both proffer and formulate mate-preferences requires an analysis that treats it as a contextually sensitive discursive practice that is a designed and action-oriented response to the social business of local speed-dating interactions. People do not simply haul their a priori gendered formulations of preference to surveys or interactions, but rather selectively draw on a range of gendered categories, predicates, and activities to occasion and take up certain conversational objects, like mate-preferences, in contextually responsive ways. If there is an attenuation of gender stereotypical positions in actual interactions as compared to surveys, it may suggest that speed-dating interactions are sites where speakers resist category-bound stereotypes in order to engage in a broader interactive project, such as appearing idiosyncratic or authentic. Speer (2001) showed that men, when asked to account for their identities 'as men', tended to resist male stereotypes (see also Korobov, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009). As such, resisting gender stereotypical formulations of mate-preference may be useful in speed-dating contexts where idiosyncrasy is both part of the ingratiation ritual and perhaps useful in the establishment of affective affiliation. Since the actual speed-dating interactions have largely been unexamined, these possibilities have yet to be empirically explored.

The purpose of this study is to examine how gender is used to formulate mate-preferences in the unexamined interactional 'black box' of speed-dating interactions.

Since mate-preferences are typically solicited rather than volunteered (Korobov, 2011), and given that speakers often answer solicitations by ‘going categorical’ (Stokoe, in press), it is quite possible that gendered categories will figure as a categorical option for managing speed-daters’ self-presentations. In Svennevig’s (1999) study of first interactions between previously unacquainted persons, he shows how speakers get acquainted in sequentially ordered ways through what he calls the ‘self-presentational sequence’. ‘Presentation-eliciting questions’ initiate the sequence and are generally personal (but not intimate) questions about the recipient’s membership or biography in some cultural community, which situates the recipient in relation to certain ‘inference-rich categories’ of people or ‘category-bound activities’ (see Sacks, 1992). These categories are not random, but are often about *specific* cultural memberships that position the person as an instance or (stereo-)type that is relevant for the current interaction (see Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984). In speed-dates, where compatibility is a relevant issue, it is likely that some presentation-eliciting questions will attempt to gauge the extent to which the other ascribes to certain culturally available, *gender-specific* notions of mate-preference. It is thus in the solicitation, initial uptake, and subsequent expansion of these sequences that gender is likely to be relevant.

Further, because gender-relevant presentation-eliciting questions about mate-preferences are apt to tread on delicate conversational terrain, they are likely to be formulated as ‘topic-proffers’ (Schegloff, 2007; Svennevig, 1999), in which a speaker proposes (rather than directly solicits) a recipient-oriented topic that prefers an expanded response in which the recipient is the main speaker and the one with authority. From the perspective of the questioner, it would make sense to use open-ended proffers to elicit potentially delicate gender-relevant mate-preference disclosures, since the open-ended nature mitigates the questioner’s stake or interest in the response (Edwards and Potter, 1992). For the recipient, however, it may not be in their best interest to offer a completely preferred response (Korobov, 2011). Because of ‘subject-side’ self-presentational risks (Edwards, 2005, 2007), if asked ‘so what are you looking for in a girl/guy?’, it may be common for second pair parts to not *immediately* feature expanded or authoritative answers; instead, the speaker may hedge, equivocate, or not really offer an answer at first, even though an answer may be highly relevant for determining if the speed-daters are compatible.

## **A discursive analysis of gender categories**

To examine the ways gender is relevant in the context of mate-preference talk, a sequential discourse analytic approach is used to analyze participants’ orientations to gender categories and gender category-bound activities/attributes (see Speer, 2005; Stokoe, 2004, 2006, 2010b; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). Broadly, a close discursive analysis of membership categories has been shown to be useful in the analysis of relationship construction, which entails a focus on the ways speakers conduct interaction and build relationships as members of particular relational categories, such as ‘friend’, ‘mother’, or for the present study, ‘potential romantic partner’ (see Mandelbaum, 2003; Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2008). Categories index (and are indexed by) culturally defined sets of category-bound activities, rights, obligations, and predicates that are expected for members of that category. Attention is paid to the ways speakers use relational categories as part of the business of creating topic alignment and

affective affiliation (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005). The task is to locate the central categories (and attributes of those categories) as they are sequentially oriented to by participants (see Stokoe, 2004, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, in press). Gender is likely to be a central ingredient in the categorical work around mate-preference disclosures, functioning as a rhetorical tool for launching, negating, and inoculating various versions of mate-preference.

In consonance with the current focus on speed-daters' apparent resistance to gender conventionality following live interactions, a discursive analysis of gendered categories may be particularly useful in analyzing sequences of talk that involve orientations to 'gender-appropriate behavior', which often feature speakers juxtaposing a gendered category with the features conventionally associated with that category (see Speer, 2005; Stokoe, 2004; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). Often, these juxtapositions or contrasts are used to make non-normative gendered behaviors, actions, or dispositions morally accountable, thus enforcing the status quo (see Speer, 2005; Stokoe, 2010b). Contrasts to gender-appropriate behavior may also be used to do 'differentiation' (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), which involves rejecting category membership by showing how one does *not* possess the conventional features of a category. Such contrasts may have the effect of establishing a style or set of preferences that appear to be an idiosyncratic reflection of personal taste or choice. As such, there may be an interesting point of connection between the sort of rhetorical work that contrasts to gender-appropriate behavior achieve and Eastwick and his colleagues' (2007) finding that speed-daters report preferring partners whose mate-preference desires appear idiosyncratic and fitted to their particular interaction.

The idiosyncrasy achieved through resistance to gender-appropriate behavior may also be an important method for establishing commonality or intimacy in the environment of expansion during self-presentational sequences concerning mate-preferences. Responses to topic proffers that *resist* gender-appropriate or gender-conventional displays of mate-preference may, in order to maintain alignment and promote affiliation, be met with reciprocal resistance to gender conventionality. Mandelbaum (2003) calls this conversational 'tit-for-tat', and documents it as an interactive method for constructing relationships whereby a speaker orients to a potentially problematic or non-normative activity in a reciprocal way, thereby rendering the potentially disjoining action as conjoining. Mandelbaum (2003) reveals how couples may engage in 'tit-for-tat' name-calling which, because of its reciprocal construction, is conjoining rather than adversarial. In related work, Jefferson et al. (1987) showed how speakers collaborate around the use of obscenity, and in so doing make covert proposals of intimacy. In short, potentially non-normative actions may set the couple and their interaction apart, providing a kind of special or idiosyncratic luster. Resistance to gender-appropriateness or conventionality may therefore promote an environment of *collaborative* resistance, thus providing an interactive method for creating uniqueness or intimacy between speakers.

This study also aligns closely with Stokoe's (2010a) recent conversation analytic work on speed-dating conversations. Although Stokoe's work focuses specifically on how couples talk about their relationship history and relational status, and not on the use of gender in mate-preference talk per se, it shares some important features with the current study, such as a focus on the reciprocal and sequential organization of disclosures

about sensitive topics, as well as a focus on the design features that manage the delicacy of such talk. The current study examines how potential romantic partners use gender in first encounters to occasion mate preferences. Should equivocal uses of gender emerge, the goal here is to examine them not as evidence for a lack of introspective awareness, but as contextually sensitive discursive practices designed to promote (or at times stymie) relational intimacy and mutuality between speed-daters. For research on the initiation of romantic heterosexual relationships, this suggests that in interactional contexts, it may be important to know how culture, here in the form of gender, is actively occasioned and how such occasioning impacts the genesis of close relationships.

## Data and method

The current study was modeled around a typical speed-dating event, which involves romantically available individuals attending an event where they participate in a series of uniformly short 'dates' (e.g. three- to eight-minute conversations) with other attendees. After the event, participants anonymously 'yes' or 'no' their dates; if two speed-daters 'yes' one another, a 'match' occurs and they are allowed to contact each other to presumably arrange a more traditional date. The data for the current study were derived from 36 speed-dates involving 12 participants (six male, six female), with each date lasting approximately six minutes. Participants were between the ages of 19 and 23, were enrolled as students at a large university in the southeast USA, and were recruited verbally through campus announcements. All participants gave full consent to be recorded and were given pseudonyms. Participants were offered a thorough explanation of what speed-dating was and how the six-minute conversations would work. The women remained seated in different rooms and would operate the recording devices while the men rotated every six minutes. Each of the 36 speed-dating conversations was audio recorded and transcribed according to Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions.

It is important to note that, unlike actual clients of speed-dating events, the speed-daters in this study took part in an event staged for research purposes. In order to mitigate this problem, care was taken to only allow participants who reported being 'presently open, interested, and available for a potential romantic relationship'. Each participant reported genuinely wanting to attend a speed-dating event, regardless of the reason the event was designed. It was also important that the analytic focus of mate-preferences be a relevant topic in 19–23-year-olds' dating lives. Were the analytic focus, for instance, on dating after divorce, dating with children, or how singles look for marriage partners (see Finkel et al., 2007), an older sample would likely be more appropriate. Finally, the event was conducted on campus rather than the more typical upscale bar/restaurant (where alcohol is often present/integral) in order to avoid the alcohol issue for underage participants and (importantly) because campus spaces are common sites where these particular participants connect and mingle with potential romantic partners. The current study aimed to create a quasi-natural, ecologically relevant, and self-contextualizing speed-dating context where sequences of talk about mate-preferences would be common and relevant occurrences between unacquainted potential romantic partners.

Analysis proceeded by culling from the corpus all instances of mate-preference talk, that is, instances where speakers were asked about or volunteered any features (personality,

physical, or otherwise) of actual or potential/imaginary partners. Twenty-eight sequences of mate-preference talk were identified across the 36 conversations. From this subset of 28 instances of mate-preference talk, all instances that contained direct and explicit use of gendered categories, terms, and activities were further extracted. As it turned out, all 28 examples were directly/explicitly gendered in these ways, and thus comprised the data for the current analyses. Part I of the analysis examines how initial questions were designed to elicit *gendered* mate-preference disclosures. In most cases (22 out of 28), speakers marked their gendered mate-preferences as normative or non-normative. Part II of the analysis therefore focuses on mate-preference disclosures that were positioned as normative, or complicit with traditional gender norms. Part III of the analysis considers gendered mate-preferences that were positioned as non-normative, or resistant to traditional gender norms. Three subtypes of resistance are identified in order of their commonality: 1) self-occasioned resistance, 2) resistance to being positioned as complicit, and 3) being positioned as resistant.

## Analysis

### Part I: Projecting gender in mate-preference queries

These first two excerpts feature paradigmatic gendered mate-preference initial queries. The first opens right as the speed-date begins, while the second begins following M's evaluation of his friend's nonchalant attitude and a transitional gap in line 2. In both excerpts, the initial query occurs in line 4 (in all examples, M = male and F = female).

(1) (F5M1)

- 1 F: so how are thou?  
 2 M: fine.  
 3 F: go:od.  
 4 → M: so Carol (.) what type of man do you look for?  
 5 F: heheh [heh.  
 6 M: [you kno(h)w hehe.

(2) (F4M1)

- 1 M: n'with her always mak'it seem like she don't care  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 F: [ye ]h.  
 4 → M: [s' ]so what do you like about a guy?  
 5 F: I like >tall dark ↑n'handsome<  
 6 F: [mh ]mmheh.

These first two excerpts reflect three common trends in the data with respect to the ways initial mate-preference queries were designed to appear *gender-relevant*. First, what seems initially most striking is that M's prompt in line 4 in both excerpts is formulated as a general query not about what F *specifically* likes in *particular* people or partners, but

rather is about what she *generally* likes about the categorically gendered class of ‘men’ and ‘guys’ (see Wiggins and Potter, 2003, for discussion of categorical vs. item descriptions). Excerpt 1 occasions the general gendered category by asking not only about ‘men’ but also about ‘types’, and excerpt 2 broaches not only the category ‘guy’ but asks about the generic class of them by using the indefinite article ‘a’ (‘a guy’) (see Stokoe, 2010b, 2010c, in press, for the ways categorical formulations are built using indefinite articles). Additionally, both prompts are initiated as ‘what’ wh- questions, where ‘what’ pulls for specific or concrete items that can be listed, thus making relevant categorical responses (see Stokoe, 2010c). Both queries also position F as having either a generalized action pattern or heterosexual preferential disposition (‘*look for*’ in excerpt 1; ‘*what do you like*’ in excerpt 2). The prompts are thus doubly categorical – M asks F to position herself as someone with a general preferential/action disposition (of ‘looking for’ and ‘liking’) for a categorical class of gendered objects (‘men’ or ‘guys’).

Counter-intuitive as it may seem to ask about general preferences when it is her specific preferences which are arguably most relevant, using generic and gendered categories to query about romantic desire does important interactional work. First, it mitigates the questioner’s stake or interest in the response (Edwards and Potter, 1992); M can appear open and somewhat un-invested in F’s response. Second, categorical questions also project an array of general responses, which help manage the recipient’s face. F is thus free to describe herself in terms of a broader gender categorical (or subcultural) affiliation, that is, as a categorical type of person who ‘likes’ or ‘looks for’ certain types of ‘men’ or ‘guys’. By allowing F to position her preferences via broad categorical affiliations, M’s question implicitly projects a range of culturally available gendered candidate responses (Pomerantz, 1988), which may be useful for F in resisting an overly personalized disclosure of gendered preference.

A second common feature of initial gendered mate-preference prompts was that they were often designed to appear transitionally relevant and connected to prior talk. In her analysis of relational status/history promptings, Stokoe (2010a) found that speed-daters’ probes often contained turn-initial indexicals (e.g. ‘so’) and trail-off tags (e.g. ‘or’). M’s ‘so’ indexical in line 4 of both excerpts positions his query as the kind of incipient action (Bolden, 2008) that may be expected in such conversations, suggesting that categorically gendered solicitations of mate-preferences may be pending actions waiting to happen in first encounters between potential partners. As such, gender becomes a normative and relevant resource for gauging initial compatibility.

A third and more general feature of these initial prompts is that they were often designed as topic proffers (Schegloff, 2007) that initiate self-presentational sequences (Svennevig, 1999). Topic proffers generally increase the probability of topic expansion and speaker affiliation. However, because of the subject-side risks of expansive disclosure between strangers, recipients may offer second pair parts that do not immediately offer expanded, authoritative, or polarity aligned answers. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) have found that this sort of dispreference is a common second to first-turn proffers about personal matters, since hedges and delays ward off potential negative identity inferences; for example, in the case of speed-dating that the speaker has certain gendered desires or certain gendered categorical preferences that are incompatible or off-putting. Managing the press of the topic proffer thus becomes a crucial preliminary for negotiating initial interpersonal affiliation.

For instance, consider the way F manages the topic proffer in both excerpts. Rather than responding with an expanded *personal* self-presentation, F's initial response in excerpt 1 ('you kno(h)w hehe') is an example of what Stokoe (2010c, in press) calls a 'common knowledge component' plus embedded laughter, which proposes that the speakers intersubjectively share knowledge about an extant social/cultural order – in this case, F proposes that she and M both share membership in the category of people who understand what females would 'look for' in 'a man'. Note that this sort of categorical packaging response avoids expanded *personal* self-disclosure, thus signaling a dispreference for M's topic proffer. In excerpt 2, F engages in the same project, this time using the three-part idiomatic phrase 'tall dark n' handsome', which is hearably a candidate category of general female mate-preference (see Stokoe, 2010b, 2010c, in press, for the ways idiomatic-sounding phrases are used to construct shared category membership). 'Tall, dark, and handsome' is, by virtue of its idiomatic quality, an obvious and colloquially shared exemplar of general female preference. What is crucially important here is the interactive work that common knowledge components and idiomatic phrases do, particularly during the early stages of self-presentation. It is not simply that F is inviting M to share in the category of people who value stereotypically gendered candidate mate-preferences. Rather, by responding to personal queries in ways that package general or common knowledge about membership in particular categories, F is interactively delaying the giving of the sort of more personalized or idiosyncratic mate-preference disclosure that M's proffer is designed to elicit.

Consider the way each of these features – categorical gender formulations, incipient action, and the management of topic proffering – is plainly visible in the following initial mate-preference query.

(3) (F4M5)

- 1 → M: alright lemme ask like (.) what type of dudes do  
 2       you get along with?  
 3     F: I get along with (.) uh well heheh (.) I don't know

Like in both the first two excerpts, M begins with a broad topic proffer that prefers an expanded and personalized response that is initially avoided. It's designed with the turn-initial indexical 'alright' which indexes incipient action, and follows with a wh- 'what' query that is again doubly gender categorical – it asks F to account both for the ways she generally 'get(s) along with' (general heterosexual preferential disposition) a generic and gender categorical class or 'type' of objects ('dudes'). In short, these three design features seemed crucial for segueing into mate-preference talk. To bolster this point, consider the next excerpt where the initial proffer omitted the gender categorical object of preference.

(4) (F3M5)

- 1     M: school's tough (0.5) so you (.)li'what about  
 2       you (.) what do you like?  
 3     F: like?  
 4 → M: in a guy.  
 5     F: o::h heheh (.) I'm not sure.

M's initial proffer in lines 1–2 omits the mate-preference object ('guy'). Instead of producing a relevant self-identification, F initiates clarification in line 3 by echoing the lexical item 'like?' with rising or questioning intonation, thus attending to the incompleteness of M's initial query. Insertion or clarification sequences (see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995) like these were common ways of handling initial mate-preference proffers that omitted gender categorical preference items. In line 4, M produces the relevant categorical gender item 'guy', to which F produces the beginning of an answer rather than further clarification. The categorical gender item seemed to be a necessary preliminary for topic expansion.

The importance of the categorical gender item can be seen in examples where the initial proffer asks about more than one categorical item.

(5) (F6M1)

- 1 M: I really like it here (.) this room.  
 2 (0.5)  
 3 → M: so Jess what do you look for from a guy?  
 4 F: [hmmph  
 5 M: [for personality (.) let's say.  
 6 → F: HUH (.) guys >from guys<?  
 7 M: from guys.

Like the previous excerpts, M's proffer in line 3 contains the typical design features. However, there is a transition space repair at the end of M's turn, where he inserts 'personality' as another candidate preference item. F therefore has at least two candidate options that she can attend to: the category 'guys' or the item 'personalities'. Granted, it may be partially ambiguous whether M is asking about 'guys' or 'personalities' (as two distinct options) or whether he is asking about 'guys' personalities'. Like the previous excerpt, her response in line 6 is telling of how she hears it; her response is yet another insertion or clarification sequence that *selectively* echoes a previously stated lexical item (here, the category 'guys' and not 'personalities'). F's selective attending of the *categorical* gender item ('guys'), and M's subsequent ratification of it in line 7, further points up the primacy of the categorical *gender* item as a potentially useful preliminary for topic expansion around mate-preferences.

In sum, initial solicitations of mate-preference were overwhelmingly built using categorically gendered topic proffers that were constructed as incipient actions. Proscribing gender as a way of marking initial queries seemed to work to ensure that the object of description, here mate-preferences, is formulated in known and/or jointly recognizable ways and also, perhaps, as a way for the speakers to show that they are appropriately gender aware. In short, it was as if the speakers made a tacit agreement that if they were going to talk about their attraction preferences, they were going to agree to use gender categories to do so. Further, initial responses to gendered mate-preference proffers were also categorically gendered, which worked interactively to delay the provision of an account of *personal* preference, thus attending to the subject-side risks of self-presentation (Edwards, 2005). This next section focuses on what happens during the environment of expansion when the categorical gendered preferences are interactively unpacked.

## Part II: Normative mate-preference: The trouble with complicity

In most cases, the gendered mate-preference positions were, in the environment of expansion, marked either as what would be normatively expected from members of the speaker's gendered category or as what would *not* be normatively expected for the gendered category in which they've been positioned. In this section, we focus on examples where speaker's mate-preferences were marked as normative for their gendered category, and the effect this had on the interaction. In this first excerpt, although F admits that she typically ends up with 'scrawny guys', she delicately formulates a preference for guys that are 'taller' than her, and marks this preference for 'taller' as a normative 'girls' preference.

(6) (F6M1)

- 1 M: so like with you (.) r'ya inta'uh:: muscular  
 2 guys: or: uh would'ya date somebody shorter or:?  
 3 F: well it's not that I go:: for (.) a muscular  
 4 or tall kind [but ( ) you know.  
 5 M: [yea:h  
 6 F: y'know heheeh ((laughing)) I always end up with  
 7 like scrawny guys(heh)heheeh hhy'know (.) so but  
 8 yeah I dun'know if I'd take someone shorter  
 9 than me.  
 10 M: why not?  
 11 F: I dunno (.) maybe I-I'jus don't think I would >it'd be  
 12 weir::d(hh)< I would feel like big n'girls don't like  
 13 feeling big (.) y'know what I mean?  
 14 M: well I would (.) a few inches I could accept (.) feeling  
 15 short isn't threatening.  
 16 (2.0)  
 17 F: I just don't like it (.) as a preference.

M's proffer is built as an incipient query about F's preference for two gendered categories of 'guys' – 'muscular' and 'shorter'. F's reply across lines 3–4 and 6–9 is built as an interesting three-part concession (see Antaki and Wetherell, 1999):

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 'it's not that I go for a muscular or tall kind' | [proposition] |
| 'I always end up with like scrawny guys'         | [concession]  |
| 'I dun'know if I'd take someone shorter than me' | [reprisal]    |

The initial proposition is a disclaimer that attends to the subject-side risk of appearing to have a pre-established mate-preference for guys with the features 'muscular' and 'tall'. Lurking, however, is the possibility that though she may not seek these types out in general, she still nevertheless prefers them. To mitigate this, her concession reveals that she actually 'always ends up' with a preference category ('scrawny') that may not be conventionally preferable. Her reprisal, however, realigns her preferences with gender

conventionality, as she displays uncertainty (thus problematizing) the idea of dating a shorter guy. She marks a gendered preference for ‘shorter’ as not only ‘weird’ for herself (line 12), but as *normatively* weird for her gender category, as it is the kind of thing ‘girls don’t like’ (lines 12–13).

M immediately disaffiliates with F’s stance using the turn-initial contrastive ‘well’ in ‘well I would’ and goes on to position F’s resistance to shorter guys as ‘threatening’, which by extension positions her mate-preference for taller guys as the result of insecurity. There is a rather pregnant transitional gap in line 16, followed by F’s case softening ‘I *just* don’t like it’, a move that attends to the whiff of adversarial disaffiliation that is lurking. The softener ‘just’ and qualification ‘as a preference’ (i.e. ‘as a rule for me’ rather than ‘as a rule for everyone’) work to mitigate the potential for interactive trouble by underscoring the personal, and thus uncontestable, fact that these are simply her own preferences. The key point here is that even though F initially resists appearing to have a pre-established preference for traditionally desirable male physical features with a disclaimer and a nod to the non-conventional particulars of the ‘scrawny’ guys she actually dates, F’s personal (and *normatively*) construed gender preference for ‘taller’ results in interactional trouble.

This next excerpt begins right after the speakers have disclosed their ages. M then segues to an incipient proffer about F’s preferable dating age for the generic gendered category ‘a guy’.

(7) (F5M1)

- 1 M: so what age range would’ya want for dating a guy?  
 2 F: I uh obviously would want men older than me (.)  
 3 I’ve never dated younger.  
 4 M: why is that?  
 5 F: I dunno (.) I guess I’m sexist (.) >well that’s not  
 6 sexist< ageist hhhhhhe.  
 7 M: mhmm (.) girls tend to want older.  
 8 F: well I prefer older men cause I feel like um people my  
 9 age (.) I’m 23 (.) I feel like people in my age are kinda  
 10 still inta’da party things (.) but I’ve been doing that  
 11 since I was sixteen so:: I’m kinda over it (.) I’m  
 12 looking for more (.) like for him to have his own house  
 13 (.) n’a nice car ya know?  
 14 M: hmm.  
 15 F: yea::h.  
 16 M: sa’whadda do for fun ’round here?

In line 2, F’s answer is *selectively* type-conforming (Raymond, 2003), as F only recycles ‘would want’, but then breaks form in switching the gendered object of preference from ‘a guy’ to ‘men’, where ‘men’ indexes an arguably more developmentally mature gendered category than ‘guys’. Her use of ‘obviously’ marks her preference as normative, or what anyone would assume she (or people in her category) would want. It is interesting, therefore,

and perhaps the first sign of trouble, that M asks for an account ('why is that?') of a preference that F has just normalized as obvious. Her handling of this (lines 5–6) involves an initial softening display of uncertainty ('I dunno'), then a 'guess' that her preference may be the result of a general 'ageist' prejudicial disposition, a claim that is softened with an initial self-repair (from 'sexist' to 'ageist', showing that her explanation is not well thought out) and with terminal knowing laughter which signals an awareness of its potential trouble. F's self-deprecatory admission of ageism attends to the subject-side risks of both F's preference and the reason for it. M's response of 'girls tend to want older' in line 7 skips over the more recent ageism/sexism topic and selectively re-attends to her personal preference for 'older', and now treats it as a normatively expected (scripted) action preferential pattern for the category 'girls'. In what follows (lines 8–13), F offers an extended account for her preference, which is noteworthy since what is 'obvious' (line 2) and normative (line 7) is rarely accounted for. Lurking, potentially, is the idea that though her preference for 'older' is common for her gendered category, it may nevertheless reflect something aberrant about her interest in a mate. Her account in lines 8–13 shows that her preference for older is a reflection of her own maturity compared to people her age, thus attending to the subject-side of her self-presentation. However, F goes further than this, stating that this type of older man also owns his own house and a nice car, and follows this with the 'common knowledge component' ('ya know'), which connects car/house with mature and thus packages them together as the known desirable features of 'older'. While being done with the party scene, and thus potentially a bit more mature, is arguably gender-less, owning a house and a nice car are gender-relevant activities for a conventional category of men that may be seen as more established, features that fit the cultural stereotype of heterosexual female preference, that is, heterosexual females tend to report being attracted to features which signal 'earning potential' (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008). So while F's preference for 'older' is not constructed as evidence of wanting to be taken care of by a man, her gendered preference nevertheless appears complicit with the stereotypical desire to be aligned with socioeconomic status. In lines 14–16, there are minimal response tokens, and then a topic shift. Like the last excerpt, and like the majority of excerpts where males preferred conventional features like 'thin' or 'attractive' or where females preferred the conventionally desirable male qualities of traits like 'adventurous', 'funny', or 'ambitious', there was a dearth of affective affiliation in the environment of expansion around gender *conventional* mate-preference disclosures.

### *Part III: Non-normative mate-preference: Affiliation via coordinated resistance*

*Type 1: Self-occasioned resistance.* The most common method of resistance involved speakers occasioning their own resistance to gender conventional behavior or mate-preferences. In this first excerpt, F resists the categories 'typical clingy girl' and 'cook' and instead formulates a preference for a range of category-bound activities (i.e. watching football with her 'man') that promote affiliation.

(8) (F5M4)

- 1 M: so whadda' lookin' fur in a guy?
- 2 F: I'm not a typical clingy girl y'know (.) if my man likes

- 3            football then I'd sit down and watch football n'b'all  
 4            GO TEAM with him.  
 5    M:    ohhhehehh that's awesome.  
 6    F:    I'm not like >why are you watching football today?< (.)  
 7            no (.) let's kick it together (.) you (.) your homeboys  
 8            (.) me and my homegirls (.) have a party (.) that's how  
 9            I want my family.  
 10   M:    hhhehaya' so you'd like t'have a party?  
 11   F:    YEAH I wanna be 'cept I don't cook (.) we'll just have  
 12            t'order food haah.  
 13   M:    WHAT (.) na' I can cook.  
 14   F:    SEE (.) look we could get married.  
 15   M:    I grill everything (.) I can (.) I grill everything  
 16   F:    will you marry me?  
 17            ((both laugh))

Rather than taking up M's actual question about what she would prefer in a 'guy', F supplies a category-based denial (see Stokoe, 2009, in press) in claiming what she is 'not'. She is *not* the normatively ('typical') generic type 'clingy girl', and punctuates this with the 'common knowledge component' (Stokoe, 2010c, in press) 'y'know', which positions M and F as sharing cultural knowledge about non-preferable types of 'girls'. F's initial category-based denial orients to the lurking possibility that M may have pre-established ideas about the kind of girl F might be, and by virtue of that category, what she might look for in a guy. To counter this possibility, she uses a modal (I'd) and iterative present tense (n'b'all) to formulate a general action pattern of appearing the type of 'girl' who would regularly sit down with her 'guy', watch football with him, and cheer with him – all activities that are designed as contrasts to the category 'typical girl'. Her resistance to the normative or typical 'girl' is further personified as she constructs imaginary and scripted reported speech (line 6) to distance herself from a type of regularly occurring complaint ('why are you watching football today?') from a typical 'girl'. Rather, she comes off as someone who wants to 'kick it' together with friends, which is yet another idiomatic phrase (Stokoe, 2010b, 2010c, in press) that indexes a nonchalant attitude of casual non-exclusive interaction, an idiom further bolstered by the referents 'homeboys' and 'homegirls'. These formulations come as additional contrasts to what M might have normatively expected from a 'typical clingy girl'.

Interestingly, in lines 11–12, she occasions yet another non-normative disposition (she does not cook), which unlike the preferences mentioned above, may be dispreferable to M, and thus more risky. That she points this dispreference out underscores the implicit assumption that it might be normative for him to expect this type of activity from her. Were it not potentially normative, she would not need to account for her resistance to it. In a way that continues the environment of affective affiliation that has been building with M's appreciations in lines 5 and 10, M formulates his own non-normative regularly occurring gendered action pattern ('I can cook'), but mitigates this by qualifying the action (cooking) as a certain subcategory of cooking (grilling) that is consonant with traditional gender norms. In sum, F and M are able to

establish mutuality and affective affiliation around a coordinated resistance to normative gender preferences. F's hyperbolic 'we could get married' and 'will you marry me?' are designed as staged exaggerations that play up their affiliation as uncanny or remarkable.

This excerpt features F occasioning and then resisting the appearance of a certain type of female ('complaining', 'moaning', 'naggin') that she formulates as not only common, but non-preferable. Her construction of it as non-preferential is occasioned creatively and circuitously by imagining these non-preferential features in a female that M *might* prefer, and then jokingly inviting M to collude with her in rejecting such features.

(9) (F6M1)

- 1 F: what do you look for in a lady?  
 2 M: oh ummhm (.) personality wise? I try to be open um  
 3 (.) to a balance between personality n' attraction  
 4 so (.) [personality wise  
 5 F: [attraction ( )  
 6 M: I don't know (.) like maybe genuinely happy no matter  
 7 what circumstances? easy to get along with? <overall>  
 8 F: not into the complaining women?  
 9 M: no hh. I don't like that (.) complaining (.) I  
 10 def'don't like that [n'  
 11 F: [gossipy n'all that?  
 12 M: oh yeah(hha) (.) no hehe  
 13 F: no hh. me'neither (.) it ain't worth th'time  
 14 M: f'real n'some r'jus like that (.) n'I ain't saying  
 15 they're bad or [( )  
 16 F: [I-( )I'was gonna say >women say'dey  
 17 don't like it< but they get caught up n'then it's routine  
 18 M: mm::hm:: yup  
 19 F: you know wt'I mean? (.) you pr'bly been w'girls that think  
 20 valuable conversations'bout talkin'bout evry'body elses  
 21 business [ya y'you know?]  
 22 M: [yep I have ]girls who do that (.) who  
 23 always complaining r'moaning r'naggin' or talkin'bout  
 24 others just use all the energy up  
 25 F: exactly (.) it uses up the energy  
 26 M: right I like a woman who focus on themself n'not others  
 27 so it's not all negativeness but it's positiveness  
 28 F: that's what I'm sayin' (.) I like that (.) you  
 29 know (.) you n'me might be onto something heheh  
 30 M: that's righ(ht) (.) might be

F's first two self-selected non-preferable gender-relevant preference categories come in lines 8 ('not into the complaining women?') and 11 ('gossipy n'all that?') as contrasts to the type of personality type M prefers ('genuinely happy' and 'easy to get along with').

That F's receipt is a jocular imagining of a *contrast* rather than a recycling or proffering of M's stated formulation is action-orienting. It treats M's preference as a potentially euphemistic non-statement about disinterest in 'complaining' or 'gossipy' type women. This creates the potential for interactive trouble were M to straightforwardly agree, since agreeing that he is disinterested in 'complaining' and 'gossipy' types may perpetuate stereotypical or sexist views of women, thus damaging the subject-side of M's self-presentation. However, because F's probes are built with a casual turn-initial solicitation ('not into the ...'), and because they are about broad and scripted categories of undesirable features ('complainers', 'gossipy n'all'), they prefer a 'no' answer, with their extremity inoculating against any damage agreement might do. And because these features are extreme, they enable M to affiliate with F's inference while not appearing to be the source of the inference, which he does through repetition ('I don't like that (.) complaining') and escalation ('I def'don't like that'). By line 13, the tables have turned – F displays affiliation with M ('me'neither') towards a stance she originally elicited from M through her own indirect resistance to gender-categorical preference items.

After some coordinated topic expansion about undesirable scripted female features (lines 14–18), F once again (lines 19–21) indirectly resists gender-categorical mate preferences by suggesting that M has probably been with girls that have these undesirable qualities. Like in the first part of this excerpt, M does not orient to this speculation as a criticism or stance disaffiliating provocation, but instead treats it as a preliminary for collusion around a familiarity ('yep I have' [line 22]) and a mutual dissatisfaction for these types of women who 'just use all the energy up' (line 24). M and F are able to affiliate through coordinated resistance; F resists appearing to be the type of female M is disinterested in. F positions M as having the kind of knowledge she has, that is, up-close experiential knowledge about what is unhealthy. Orienting to him this way effectively positions them as co-members of the same gendered mate-preference category. M signals alignment through agreement, topic expansion, and escalation (lines 22–7), after which she is then able to display affiliation ('that's what I'm sayin' and 'you n'me might be onto something') towards M about a stance she originally solicited with her indirect resistance to what are treated as common or normative female qualities. There is an elegant orchestration here with respect to the way their coordinated resistance results in affective stance affiliation.

Consider M's resistance to the normative preference item 'body type' in this next excerpt, and the way it occasions stance affiliation with F.

(10) (F3M1)

- 1 F: so whacha' go for in a girl?  
 2 M: generally personality (.) and ma::ybe body type  
 3 so:metimes (.) but n'I ain't lying (.) personality  
 4 for me is first.  
 5 F: yeah? (.) wow okay [(.) yeah  
 6 M: [no yeah f'real=  
 7 F: =yeah me too (.) I need someone who likes t'laugh (.) I  
 8 love t'laugh (.) I love t'smile n' I need someone who can  
 9 treat me mentally like uh (.) if you can get me laughing

- 10 and hold a good conversation (.) we can make it.  
 11 M: yep (.) true (.) that's it (.) me too  
 12 F: wɪ'very cool (.) alright

M selects two preference items ('personality' and 'body type') and breaks with what might be normatively expected ('n'I ain't lying') by selecting 'personality' as his general preference item. Though he concedes that 'ma::ybe' and 'sometimes' body type is his gender-relevant preference item, 'personality' is 'generally' his 'first' mate-preference criteria. The concession to 'body type' softens the potential that his general preference for personality sounds too good to be true, which is to say, it indirectly foregrounds what might be considered normative (a preference for body types). It thus anticipates and stymies F's potential resistance, which again alerts us to what is normative. Her initial receipt ('yeah?' and 'wow okay') treats M's resistance to conventionality as surprising and thus non-normative, to which M formulates an 'honesty phrase' ('no yeah f'real') (see Edwards and Fasulo, 2006) and claims that his preference is 'real' and not part of some dissimulation. That he assures her additionally points to the lurking possibility that such dissimulation might ordinarily be a part of initial romantic encounters. In lines 7–10, F affiliates with M's gender non-normative preference formulation and offers her own congruent preference for preference items that are personality-relevant, to which M displays alignment and affiliation.

*Type 2: Resistance to being positioned as complicit.* Resistance to gender-normative mate preferences sometimes emerged as a response to *being positioned* as complicit with gender-normative behavior or preferences. In this next excerpt, M positions F as a certain type of female that may prefer a partner who 'spoils' her. F playfully and delicately resists this positioning and, in so doing, creates stance affiliation with M.

(11) (F3M2)

- 1 M: what kind of relationships you into?  
 2 F: I'm open to all sorts of things (.) >like t'be  
 3 treated well< (.) typical things.  
 4 M: you like to be spoiled?  
 5 [hmm?  
 6 F: [hehe me:::?  
 7 M: mm::hm::: hh.  
 8 F: <I lo::ve it>hh (.) but okay (.) for some reason guys  
 9 that I've dated (.) I don't know what happened  
 10 but like ya'll'l put lot of effort (.) like honestly  
 11 trying to make it work (.) but I've learned you can't  
 12 make something work if it ain't gonna work.  
 13 M: umhumm.  
 14 F: I gave up on that.  
 15 M: but'cha still like the spoiling?  
 16 F: w'l ya::h b'li:ke okay for real I do feel things for them,  
 17 M: you put effort in.

- 18 F: oh yah (.) like last guy was never there for me n'I was  
 19 for him (.) like I'm there for the person but he wasn't  
 20 for me (.) never (.) like Valentine's and whatever (.)  
 21 I never got nothing.  
 22 M: that isn't fair (.) that's cold.  
 23 F: yep (.) it was (.) I be the one always giving stuff  
 24 n'I don't care cuz' I'm not the type of the female  
 25 that's like you kno(h)w heheh ya'know,  
 26 M: yeah but ya'gotta ask for a small token'v appreciation  
 27 (.) that'd be easy for him,  
 28 F: yeah (.) well maybe you're letting me know there are  
 29 different kinds of guys out there.  
 30 M: oh yeah.  
 31 (1.0)  
 32 M: [there are ]  
 33 F: [yeah ( )] you're giving me [hope  
 34 M: [me heheh.  
 35 F: okay(ha)oka(h)y heheh that's good to know

M's first gender-relevant positioning of F comes in line 4 as he treats F's 'like t'be treated well' as a euphemism for 'liking to be spoiled', which has gender-relevant negative dispositional implications for F. Yet, instead of orienting to it as a negative dispositional scripting, F laughs and displays a knowing and exaggerated surprise ('me:::??'), thus treating it as a playful provocation. M shapes his reply in kind by recycling F's elongated affect with an exaggerated smile voice agreement of 'mm::hm:::', which F parallels with '<I lo::ve it>hh'. In effect, M's bid to position F within an undesirable category of females occasions a three-part repartee: F appears playfully coy, M appears playfully suspicious, and F appears playfully honest.

F's 'but okay' in line 8 both acknowledges the play frame and breaks with it. She shifts towards a focus on 'guys' who try too hard when the relationship is not working, to which M responds by recycling the gender-relevant negative dispositional tease 'but'cha still like the spoiling'. His recycling avoids F's shift of focus onto 'guys' and thus holds her accountable to the possibility that she knowingly takes advantage of her partner's generosity. The opening part of F's response in line 16 ('w'l ya::h') is a *sine dicendo* rhetorical response that treats his question as having an obvious answer, and proceeds to select that obvious answer. By positioning it as obvious, she inoculates it from its ability to make her preference seem aberrant. Its obviousness thus does subject-side work (Edwards, 2005, 2007), but also does interactive work; it positions the two of them as sharing obvious knowledge. Like her turn in line 8, it is after a jocular rejoinder that she turns to the second part of her turn to deflect possible negative inferences. Following this, M's next contribution in line 17 ('you put effort in') does *not* project negative gender dispositional inferences, but instead states the implication of her prior statement that she feels things for her partners, which negates his claim in line 15 that suggested she might be manipulative. By line 17, the two appear in sync, despite the riskiness of M's gender-relevant negative dispositional positioning of F.

Lines 18–25 are topic expansive, with F providing a relational history account where her generosity and support were freely given but unreciprocated by her last male partner. Although M aligns with her stance in line 22, which promotes topic expansion, he proposes closure to her relational history account by again positioning her as potentially complicit with gender-conventionality with ‘but ya’ gotta ask for a small token’v appreciation’. He adds that such appreciation would be ‘easy’ for her partner to show. The potentially negative dispositional inference here is that F may fit the category of being overly ‘docile’ or ‘passive’ because she cannot or will not ask for what she wants, when what she wants is an ‘easy’ thing for her partner to give. Like with M’s previous formulations, F does not treat this as a criticism, but rather treats it as a presentation of alternative possibilities – that is, as a way that M is letting her know that there are different kinds of guys available. Given the speed-dating context, F’s response positions M as perhaps having a stake or interest (Edwards and Potter, 1992) in making such an observation. In short, F’s response treats M’s negative gender categorical scripting of F not as a criticism, but as a method by which M is signaling that he may be one such alternative possibility (a possibility ratified by M in line 34). F orients to M’s provocations as flirtatious bids, which are made plain across the final turns of the excerpt.

This next excerpt begins at a point where M and F have returned, after a digression and delay, to F’s preference for ‘balance’.

(12) (F3M6)

- 1 M: like how you said balanced (.) y’know (.) balanced.  
 2 F: right (.) it’s jus’like I like em’ t’have a world  
 3 view (.) b’educated a lil’bit in everything (.)  
 4 be eclectic (.) cause I like a lil’bit ev’rything.  
 5 M: ut’o::h(hh) sh’wants everything?  
 6 F: oh ye(h)s ye::s hehe.  
 7 M: yah nah I feel ya (.) you want somebody that  
 8 enjoys aw’kinds uv’sstuff >n’brings< their own new  
 9 stuff (.) like a’mutual kinda=  
 10 F: =exa::ctly.  
 11 M: same here (.) in my last relationship I had’ta  
 12 take all the initiative.  
 13 F: oh I like takin’ initiative.  
 14 ((bell sounds signaling time is up))  
 15 F: [ogh we was just getting somewhere  
 16 M: [ah is that it already ( )

M’s first gender-relevant positioning of F as potentially complicit with gender conventional preferences comes in line 5 with his playful suggestion that she may want ‘everything’, that is, she may want to be provided for or taken care of extensively. Note that although he is speaking to her directly, where using the ‘you’ voice (in ‘you want everything?’) would be the grammatical type conforming rejoinder to her I-voice

construction in lines 2–4, he instead says ‘sh’wants everything’. The shift to ‘she’ is a categorical positioning that does interactive work. It positions her not as an individual, but as a potential member of a gender category of ‘she’s’ that possess a dispositional desire for ‘everything’. Yet, his preface ‘ut’o::h(hh)’ is a self-conscious and exaggerated potential marker of trouble, which undermines the force of the gender-negative dispositional scripting. Typically, the preferred response to a negative projected dispositional inference would be disagreement. But F agrees, and does so in an exaggerated way with laughter (line 6). His ‘yah nah’ in line 7 is a two-part stance affiliating preface. In the first part, the ‘yah’ latches to her prior turn and signals alignment with the action of playful collusion; second, as a preface to ‘I feel ya’, the ‘nah’ softens the force of his prior negative gender dispositional scripting in line 5. The ‘yah nah I feel ya’ thus affiliates both with the action of F’s turn and with her interpretation of M’s social action.

M continues his turn in lines 7–10 by formulating what is arguably a charitable inference that tilts her ‘wanting everything’ to mean wanting a guy with wide ranging interests who can also contribute to the relationship mutually. She latches with expressive agreement (‘=exa::ctly’), thus aligning with M. However, M’s rejoinder ‘same here’ treats her ‘exa::ctly’ not as an agreement token per se, but as a preliminary for his own agreement and affiliation with a preference he elicited from her. M can therefore display agreement and thus stance affiliation. It is in the latter half of M’s turn in lines 11–12, where he comments on his prior relationship, that we see how he uses his reformulation of F’s gender modus operandi in lines 7–9 as a segue to the disclosure of his own preference for a partner who takes initiative, to which F signals that she is that sort of person (line 13). Like in excerpt 11, being positioned as potentially complicit with conventional gender dispositional preferences is resisted and used as a preliminary for cooperative and playful affiliation.

*Type 3: Being positioned as resistant.* Speakers occasionally positioned the other as resistant to gender appropriate mate-preferential behavior. Like in the examples above, this positioning did not result in interactive trouble, but rather was taken up in ways that promoted affiliation. In the following example, F positions M’s self-confessed pickiness about women as a breach in what would normatively be expected from guys.

(13) (F5M4)

- 1 F: well not here in school but=
- 2 M: =>yah’yah< I understand.
- 3 F: so ya’looking for a girlfriend here?
- 4 M: I’m just (.) so picky (.) n’I don’t know why
- 5 (.) I’m the worst one to be picky.
- 6 F: I’ve never heard a guy t’be picky though (.) that’s
- 7 so craz(h)y.
- 8 M: [yeah
- 9 F: [yeah that’s a girl thing.

- 10 M: like my roommates in college used to pick on me  
 11 so much (.) b'like how'd ya'get get a good looking girl  
 12 t'go out with you (.) n'then I'd dump em'in three months  
 13 (.) but (.) I mean I ain't wasting my time.  
 14 F: right (.) we're too old to waste our time now.  
 15 M: yeah if it ain't what I'm looking[for  
 16 F: [right right  
 17 M: I'm not gonna lead a [girl on  
 18 F: [yeah yeah  
 19 M: if I know it ain't gonna work.  
 20 F: so with you there.

M's initial receipt of F's gendered topic proffer is position himself as 'picky', and to then problematize that formulation with a display of uncertainty ('I don't know why') and self-deprecation ('I'm the worst one to be picky'). The display of uncertainty and self-deprecation is recipient oriented – it attends to, and perhaps mitigates, the potential interactional trouble of coming off as 'picky' to a potential romantic partner. In other words, his admission anticipates negative uptake. Although in many instances self-deprecation prefers disagreement (see Pomerantz, 1978), in this particular exchange F's initial receipt is not disagreement. What she attends to is not his evaluation of his pickiness, but rather is the fact of his pickiness as a member of the gendered category 'guy'. F's evaluation is not about his individual pickiness, but is a scripted evaluation that the pickiness of any 'guy' is out of the realm of normalcy ('I've never heard') and is generally and psychologically aberrant ('that's so crazy'). Not only is it non-normative for 'guys', but it is 'a girl thing'. F therefore positions M as resistant to the normative action orientation of members of the category 'guy', where 'guy', in this particular exchange, means 'not picky'.

M is left to attend to two discursive tasks. First, he must realign himself with some activity which inscribes him back into the category 'guy'. And second, since 'pickiness' is a 'girl thing', he must account for this gender normative transgression. To re-align himself with the category 'guy', M first expands his regular action pattern to involve not simply being routinely picky, but also to being someone who routinely 'gets a good looking girl' and then 'dumps them', where getting attractive females and disposing of them are arguably dispositional action patterns that index what might be stereotypically expected from 'guys'. To account for his pickiness, M claims that it results from a superordinate dispositional commitment to not 'wasting time', or 'not leading a girl on'. His pickiness thus comes off as a mark of relational integrity, not girliness, to which F expresses affective alignment and affiliation (lines 16, 18, 20). Note the elegant orchestration here: M's initial receipt (lines 4–5) of F's topic proffer has the effect of eliciting from F a positioning of M as a guy who is resistant to gender conventionality. Although risky, F's receipt opens a space for M to offer an expanded gender-relevant account of himself that simultaneously reclaims membership into category 'guy' gender conventionality (it is thus face-saving) while nevertheless providing something novel and idiosyncratic, which is an account for his resistance that functions as a preliminary for interpersonal alignment and affiliation.

## Discussion

The current study focused on how potential romantic partners used gender in first encounters to both proffer and formulate mate preferences. The analyses were motivated by the experimental social psychological speed-dating research finding that there was a difference between speed-daters' pre-interaction expression of gender-stereotypical mate-preferences and their post-interaction, non-gender stereotypical, choices about actual persons. In working from a discursive-conversation analytic perspective, the current study conceptualized the attenuation of gender stereotypical positions in actual interactions (as compared with pre-interaction lab measures) as an action-oriented response to the social business of local speed-dating interactions. It was suggested that resistance to gender-norms may allow speed-daters to construct their identities in ways that appear fitted, idiosyncratic, or finely-tuned to their specific interlocutor – all interactive features which may work as preliminaries for affective affiliation. To examine these possibilities, a sequential discursive approach was used to analyze how gendered mate-preferences were initially elicited and formulated, as well as the interactional effects of mate-preferences that were designed to appear complicit versus resistant to gender conventionality.

Three conspicuous design features characterized speaker's initial elicitations of mate-preferences. First, initial queries were built as *categorical* gender formulations in at least two ways. Recipients were 1) often positioned as a certain categorical type of person with either a generalized action pattern or a heterosexual preferential disposition who 2) might generally prefer a categorical class of gendered objects (i.e. 'men', 'guys', 'girls'). The generality of these categorical gender queries functioned interactively to mitigate the questioner's stake in the response, and by projecting an array of candidate responses, also attended to the subject-side of the recipient's response. Initial prompts were also built with turn-initial or tag features which allowed them to appear as incipient or pending actions waiting to happen, suggesting that gendering mate-preferences is a normative or expected action in first encounters by potential romantic partners. Prompts were also generally built as topic proffers that were designed to promote topic expansion. Initial responses to these prompts, however, tended to also be categorically gendered, which worked interactively to delay the provision of an account of *personal* preference. Because of the subject-side risks of expansive disclosure, managing the press of the proffer became a preliminary for negotiating affiliation.

Further, speakers routinely marked their gendered mate-preferences as either normative (complicit) or non-normative (resistant) to traditional gender norms. When speakers positioned their mate-preferences as complicit or aligned with conventional or normative standards, speakers were often quick to mitigate or soften them (see excerpt 6), as if they signaled interactional trouble; in terms of their receipt, listeners would often challenge conventional mate-preferences (see excerpt 7), often resulting in interactional trouble and a relative lack of affective affiliation in the environment of expansion. This finding was initially surprising, especially given research that suggests that in new or ambiguous situations, where ingratiation and appearing likable is an interactive goal, speakers are apt to err on the side of caution in terms of their self-presentations, which would predict safer and more *conventional* formulations of desire or preference (Kahneman et al., 1991; Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988). Displays of gender-conventional mate-preferences rarely promoted an environment of ingratiation or affiliation.

In contrast, gendered mate-preferences that were designed to appear resistant to gender-conventionality did tend to function as a preliminary for affective affiliation. As detailed in the analyses, resistance could be straightforwardly formulated by the speaker him/herself, resistance could emerge as a reaction to being positioned by the other as complicit with conventional gender norms, or one could be positioned as resistant by the other. Positions of resistance to non-preferable gendered dispositions seemed designed to elicit mutual rejection from the other; this way, speakers could coordinate and affiliate around what they could agree was non-preferable. When positioned as complicit, a speaker could playfully concede to being aligned with the gender traditional preference in general, as anybody might, but could go on to indirectly resist it by describing the actual particulars of their life in a way that revealed exceptions and thus resistance. Resistance at the level of particularity seemed to promote affective affiliation. Gender-categorical resistance allowed speakers to show how they shared knowledge around aspects of gender-conventional preferences or behaviors that could arguably be taken to be unhealthy or undesirable. In so doing, speed-daters could appear to be alternative possibilities to one another – that is, as *unique* potential partners. This gave the interaction an idiosyncratic feel and set the couple apart.

In traditional social psychological speed-dating research, gender has largely been conceptualized in terms of sex-differences, with a particular interest in showing how a priori sex-role stereotypical mate-preferences disappear after interactions with real people in live speed-dates. Although it is the actual interactions that catalyze this breakdown, the interactions are typically left unexamined. Instead, and in consonance with a social cognition perspective, researchers typically assume that the mechanism lies within – that is, that men and women lack introspective awareness about what influences their mate-preferences. The point of this study was to draw attention towards an analysis of the actual speed-dating interaction, to see the interaction itself as a social practice and to analyze it as the proper object of inquiry. A sequential-discursive perspective focuses on the ways social practices, like speed-dating interactions, are oriented to action and how those actions are co-constructed within unfolding sequential interaction. When approached this way, the gendering of mate-preferences is not taken to be a manifestation of either an inner psychological disposition to act or to see the world in a gendered way, but is an emergent and responsive social practice to the business of speed-dating. Gender is an interactional tool with an interactional design that, in this study, has relational consequences for the ways potential romantic partners create connection and affiliation. In short, the ways potential romantic partners gender their desires or preferences are consequential for the development of a close relationship.

The upshot of this sort of discursive psychological analysis is that it reveals that although attraction-preferences may be gendered, they are not pre-figured gendered dispositions that simply get played out in actual situations; rather, gender is used selectively in the company of mate-preference disclosures for broader interactional goals. Speed-daters do not simply haul their pre-existing gendered mate-preferences to the discursive scene and use them to direct decision-making. Rather, categorical gender formulations may be serviceable tools in the business of managing disclosures about attraction preferences so as to promote the potential for affiliation. Gender is thus a fluid, partial, emergent, and revisable social practice for managing and coordinating stance (Edwards and

Potter, 1992). There may be a gulf between the way gender is treated in experimental speed-dating research and the way gender is put to use by participants in actual interactions. When squared with the findings of the present study, we discover that the establishment of connection or compatibility during initial romantic encounters may not involve participants successfully coordinating their a priori gendered mate-preferences. Rather, an analysis of the social practice of gendering mate-preferences during an initial encounter with a potential partner reveals that affiliation and compatibility may reflect the extent to which participants are able to create a unique and idiosyncratic connection through coordinated resistance to gender conventionality.

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