

Playing Hard-to-Get: Comparative Advantage in Dating?

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Abstract. People often want success in everything, including dating. Hence, the strategy for dating was suggested--the method of playing hard-to-get. It spread rapidly with countless tutorials and posts on how to execute the plan. Despite its popularity, this paper examines the strategy's validity through experiments and refers to previous studies in the field. One hundred single heterosexual participants, each date with three opposite-sex confederates, are then asked to record their experience. The three confederates are asked to perform various levels of playing hard-to-get by the duration of the playing hard-to-get tactic during the date with the participant. Therefore, the participant would respond to each level differently, providing the comparison between the levels of playing hard-to-get and their effectiveness. The expected result of the experiment is that the moderate hard-to-get confederate gains an advantage over the other confederates. Therefore, by using tactics of playing hard-to-get moderately, people would obtain a comparative advantage in the dating world.

Keywords: Playing Hard-to-Get; Dating Strategy; Comparative Advantage in Dating; Dating Psychology.

1. Introduction

Playing hard-to-get has been around for a long time and is commonly perceived as a good strategy. The term is defined as: "to pretend that you are less interested in someone than you really are as a way of making them more interested in you, especially at the start of a romantic relationship" [5]. There have been many reports from people who have used the strategy, resulting in the optimal outcome. Others, however, have experienced the opposite with this strategy. In today's society, where everything is moving at a faster pace, it is common to see people dating multiple people at the same time. Moreover, with the help of technology, dating has become much more accessible (Tinder, for example). With such fast pace living style, how does playing hard-to-get gives one comparative advantage in dating and spark the interest of another to go on a formal date afterward?

2. Literature Review

A study done by Dai et al. [2] has explored how the commitment of one another could affect the effect of playing hard-to-get, and that for people who are not committed to playing hard-to-get person, there would be a backfire for the playing hard-to-get person. Therefore, Dai et al. [2] suggested that if person A is already committed to person B (playing hard-to-get), then the strategy will increase the motivation of person A. Additionally, Jonason and Li [3] have defined the action/tactics of playing hard-to-get in their research, with the main tactic of playing hard-to-get being limited availability. Jonason and Li [3], as well as Schnedler and Vanberg [9], claim that demonstrating limited availability sends the signal of scarcity, where the other person will value them higher due to an increase in scarcity. Lynn [4] also stated that scarcity enhances one's desirability. This is likely due to the nature of economics: people desire scarcer products because they believe scarcer goods are better. Hence, scarcer products perform better in both the commodity and dating markets. Jonason and Li [3] continue to discover the motive for people to play hard-to-get, and some of the reasons are increased demand, test commitment, uncertainty, and dating others. Reysen and Katzarska-Miller [7] show that playing moderately hard-to-get should result in the most beneficial outcome.

Despite all the previous findings, it is still unclear how much of an advantage a person will gain from playing hard-to-get in a real-world setting. Meanwhile, the previous studies [3], [7] have mainly focused on letting the participant imagine being in a situation instead of being in the situation.

"Imagination is susceptible to all kinds of external and seemingly irrelevant influences," by allowing the participant to imagine a situation, there was much noise, and decisions could easily be influenced [6]. At the same time, there is a lack of studies on males playing hard-to-get. Therefore, this research will put the previous findings to the test by putting the participants in such a situation. As a result, we will expect to see that moderate hard-to-get should be the most effective and that playing hard-to-get throughout the whole date could backfire.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Participants are 50 male and 50 female university students aged 20-26 years (Bachelor's students, Master's students, and Ph.D. students) from a major university in Toronto who will participate in exchange for extra course credit. All participants are single and heterosexual.

3.2 Procedures and Measures

Participants will read and sign an informed consent and complete a form to collect demographical information. 6 Ph.D. students (three males and three females) will serve as the confederates for the experiment. All six confederates are trained before the experiments.

The participants are asked to participate in a 70-minute dating with three people. Each participant would have the opportunity to talk with all three opposite-sex confederates (each date last 15-minute and 5-minute for form A filling, 10-minute at the end for form B filling), and the order is randomized by computer. The random assignment will allow each participant to be with an opposite-sex confederate in random order, limiting possible favor in order or loss of interest as time progress. The order of participants entering the dating room will also be randomized by computer.

There will be six individual rooms, referred to as the dating rooms, that are not connected, decorated with cozy warm lighting and couches, and accompanied with beverages and snacks to minimize the feeling of uncomfortable and nervousness. In the room, there would be an opaque white sheet in the middle of the room separating the confederate and the participant. The sheet between the two will allow sound to pass through but will not allow the participant and the confederate to see each other. In addition, voice-changing devices will be placed on the confederate side and used during the dating by the confederates. The sheet and the voice changer eliminate the factors of preference of the participants for appearance and voice.

The six confederates are trained to such: Confederate Male A and Confederate Female A will be playing the character of "hard-to-get"; Confederate Male B and Confederate Female B will be playing the character of "easy-to-get"; Confederate Male C and Confederate Female C will be playing the character of "moderate-to-get." The "hard-to-get" character would be using tactics of hard-to-get throughout the whole duration of the conversation. The "easy-to-get" character would avoid the use of hard-to-get tactics throughout the whole duration of the conversation. Finally, the "moderate-to-get" would use tactics of hard-to-get for approximately 40%-50% of the conversation. The tactics of hard-to-get are sarcastic but friendly, superficial conversation, unpredictable, non-committal, uninterested, teasing, limited self-disclosure, and others [3].

Each participant is given four forms, three of which are identical (Form A). Form A asks the participant the following:

- 1) How would you rate your overall experience with your date (1 = very poorly, 7 = fantastic)?
- 2a) Would you like to have another date (yes or no) [2]? If yes, continue to 2b; If no, skip to 3.
- 2b) To what extent you would like to have another date (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so) [1]?
- 3) How much time and effort are you willing to spend to know the person more (1 = not much, 7 = very much so)?

The participant will fill out Form A every time she/he finished a 15-minute dating with one of the confederates. They will then fill out Form B after finishing all three sessions. Form B states and asks the following:

1) Rank the three dates you had based on the desire to go on another date with the person (from most desirable to least desirable).

2) Would you like to modify any ratings you have filled on the previous forms (Form A)? If so, how would you like to modify it?

3) Who has made you the most curious to get to know them better (rank from most curious to least curious)?

4) Who would you like to leave your contact information with?

The participants are separated into two gender groups (50 males and 50 females), then directed and assigned to their first, second, and third rooms by the experimenter. The order of participants entering and the order of their dates are randomized. After their entrance, the participant and the confederate will briefly introduce themselves and start their conversation. Confederates will be responding to the conversation in their trained character manner. Each date will last for 20 minutes, and after the date, the participant will be given two minutes to complete Form A. Then the experimenter will guide the participant to their next designated room until they finish all three dates. Four minutes after the three dates are then given to the participant to complete Form B. After completing the dates and the forms, participants are thanked and debriefed.

4. Expected Results

Based on the previous studies, Form A's result shall be the following: For both male confederate A and female confederate A would receive the lowest score in 1) and 3). Male and female confederates B and C would score higher in 1) and 3). Male and female confederate C would have a higher possibility of getting a "Yes" in 2a) and score a high score in 2b). Form B's result would be the following: Male confederate B would receive the highest ranking for 1); Female confederate C would receive the highest ranking for 1). Male confederate C would receive the highest ranking for 3); Female confederate A would receive the highest ranking for 3). Both male and female confederate C would receive the highest number of left contacts.

5. Discussion

There have been plenty of studies on playing hard-to-get strategy, where different conclusions are drawn. However, they have provided the fundamental of this strategy and some factors that affect the effect of hard-to-play (i.e., commitment). Through the proposed experiment, it has testified and examined past studies in the present research, implying them to the real world of dating. The experiment illustrates that playing moderate hard-to-play does increase its advantage over the other dates. Meanwhile, the study showed how much of an advantage someone would get by using this mating strategy moderately, as well as what advantages (more interest demonstrated, leaving contact information, wanting to go on a date, and more) they gain. Although this research provides new insights, its implication is limited to people aged 20-26 in a university setting. At the same time, it is affected by volunteer bias. Therefore, future studies should focus on the application of the strategy in broader demographics and the impact of this strategy based on the duration.

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