

Trends in Speed Dating

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Abstract

The concept of speed dating is topical in the context of increasing demographic diversity and decreasing marriages in the United States. Speed Dating is consistently used by single adults, particularly youth, to find potential matches. Can speed dating lead to successful matchmaking and what are the variables affecting it? Our team conducted data analytics research to explore trends in speed dating using the R Studio application and employed techniques of data visualization by using packages such as shiny, plotly, dygraphs for timeseries and others to showcase our research. There are many other useful methods of data visualization, but the use of these methods truly encapsulates the ease and elegance of ggplot and has the attraction to easily analyse the data. Our findings report that people strongly depend on similarities and commonalities when participating in the speed dates. Further, due to a large number of differences between participants, most did not find success and therefore found the dating to be less effective than other methods. The research can have important implications for match making among youth, and the dwindling marriage market.

Introduction

Often people look to date in hopes of finding their perfect match. Being that we are living in technology-centered days, one of the most common methods of hopefully finding true love or just simply pushing themselves out of their comfort zone and meeting new people is through a method called Speed Dating. Speed dating events are usually hosted in public places like local bars and restaurants where everyone gets a limited amount of time to socialize and get to know the other participants of the event. If there is chemistry, in other words, if the two participants find commonality and bond, it incites interest in future dates together. The “speed” element is that participants are limited to a short amount of time to converse. When the time is completed, they must switch to converse with the next person (Asendorpf et al. 2011).

Speed dating allows people to meet others at a fast rate with a relatively accurate understanding of whether they successfully connected and are interested in further communication or not. Apps like Tinder or Bumble rely on quick judgments solely based on a profile and picture. These things can be filtered to perfection and can hide someone’s identity in hopes of appealing to others and being accepted. Blind dating relies on voice, and although communication is enough to spark interest, it is the social cues and body language that give away if someone is genuinely interested in another or if they are not compatible. Therefore, speed dating continuously provides a sense of clarity for those who participate. There is usually a fee to attend these events, and the events are often planned weeks or months ahead of time, so those who go are often intentional and genuine with their hopeful goal of meeting and connecting with others.

Analyzing speed dating data is important because these analyses can identify the impacts of social cues, initial attraction, and connection through shared interests on the probability of finding a match. Additionally, analysis of speed dating data has been proven as more reliable in comparison to data gathered through other dating tactics (Houser et al. 2008), and allows the separation of effects of general behavior, change in behavior during dating, and combination effects (Asendorf et al. 2011).

As most fads are, speed dating events are temporarily popular some moments and temporarily unpopular other times. Eventbrite (2020) reported that, due to access to Zoom speed dating events, the popularity of speed dating increased by over two thousand percent compared to pre-pandemic speed dating events (Oh et al. 2011, Hughes 2022). The popularity of speed dating from an individualistic standpoint is biased. Many are in favor of meeting people of all backgrounds and personalities in a congested period and enjoy the exposure, while others find it overwhelming or awkward. Speed dating is gaining popularity among the public interested in the dating scene.

The popularity of speed dating also varies by culture. Countries that emphasize the need of being in a relationship or marriage create and participate in speed dating events drastically more than countries that value independence and career or aspirational achievement. Surprisingly, countries with a collectivist mindset often feel the same way about speed dating as those from countries that date primarily as a pastime. Both feel interdependent and have a curiosity about being with and experiencing life with others. (Pepping et al. 2017).

While today we associate speed dating with making a “match,” dating options like speed dating have been practiced for centuries. In the 19th century, some areas of the United States had

a custom called New Year's Calling where they would invite eligible bachelors to meet single women and converse for a brief duration of time (History Nebraska 2022).

Speed dating events provide a huge amount of data on potential dates in a short amount of time, and this data can be used to determine what attributes or attitudes influence an individual's probability of finding a match during speed dating. There have been previous studies that explore the concept of speed dating in the context of gender and common interests. The present study is an exploratory study to understand the role of race, religion, interests, field of study, and dating preferences of individuals to further the understanding about making a successful match.

Literature

Speed dating emerged as a new phenomenon for single people to meet each other in 1998, when Rabbi Yaacov Deyo and his students came up with this idea. It started as a program for singles in the Jew community and soon caught up around the world (BBC 2022).

Previous research has been done on speed dating events, however, the previous literature is constrained by having only a few of the variables contained in our dataset, which limited their ability to analyze combination effects. In addition, some previous analyses have been done on smaller datasets or different populations, which may constrain the generalizability of their results to our population of interest, namely university students in the United States.

Speed dating has been a topic of interest for researchers as it provides an insight into the psychology of young people interested in finding partners. Finkel et. al. (2007) mentioned that speed dating can be 'retrofitted' to understand the changing nature of close relationships. Their

study participants were able to distinguish another person's romantic inclination in a time as short as 4 minutes. Genders react differently to different characteristics in speed dating, for instance men respond more to physical attraction, while women place more weight on intelligence and race (Fisman et al. 2006).

Asendorpf et al. (2011) looked at the effect of partner attributes on whether a pair matched and found that participants tended to match with those that they rated as highly attractive, and while interest similarity did influence match probability, it was not a strong indicator. Additionally, this study found differences based on age, with older women tending to attempt to match with more partners and older men attempting to match with fewer. However, this study did not address the potential effects of race/ethnicity, field of study, or career, all of which we will consider in our analysis. Additionally, Asendorpf et al. (2011) studied people in Germany, so their results may not apply to speed dating in other countries such as the United States.

Pepping et al. (2017), in contrast, examined the effect of race/ethnicity on attractiveness and found that the physical attractiveness of women had a significant effect on men's initial attractiveness towards them, with ancestry having no effect. However, the participants in this study only completed scales for initial attractiveness and attachment anxiety and the study included fewer than one hundred participants, whereas our dataset is larger and contains more variables that may affect attractiveness and race/ethnicity effects (Pepping et al. 2017).

Creating intimacy is a key to the success in speed dating. The process of creating intimacy has been studied through the behavioral aspects of the partners in speed dating particularly the role of communication (Houser et al. 2008), use of impropriety (Korobov and

Laplanche 2013), use of body language (Chang et al. 2021), affective presence (Berrios et al. 2015). Methods like Conversation analysis have been employed to assess the experience of speed dating (Turowetz and Hollander 2012).

Speed dating has also been studied in a variety of contexts like college students, higher education, and elder population (Muurlink and Matas 2011). The role of communication is also important in speed dating as the partners interact for a short span of time (Houser et al. 2008, Croes et al. 2020). Similarly perceived similarity is a predictor of the attraction (Tidwell et al. 2013). Wu et al. (2019) have studied the patterns of Speed Dating among Asian-American youth. However, there is no study that addresses the differences across races and ethnicities.

However, there is a dearth of recent literature on speed dating. It is contextual to study the phenomenon in light of increasing demographic diversity with attention to race and religion. Further, there's a need to understand the variation in speed dating patterns across fields of study, interests, and preferences other than attraction. Our analysis aims to fill the gap in furthering the understanding of speed dating as a phenomenon.

Research Statement

Speed dating is practical and commonly participated in by many people. The main question is, is it effective? Is there a specific look or demographic that benefits from speed dating more than others? Are the chances of being successful completely random? Through our data, we hope to answer these questions with the hope that all have a fair chance of finding romance.

Data and Methods

We explored the Kaggle.com data set titled "Speed Dating Experiment" for our final project. It was compiled by professors Ray Fisman and Sheena Iyengar from the Columbia Business School and was initially used for their paper "Gender Differences in Mate Selection: Evidence From a Speed Dating Experiment." It was produced from a series of experimental speed dating events on Columbia university students and includes information on demographics, whether participants matched, each participant's ratings of their potential matches, and attribute importance at three time points: before, during, the day after, and a few weeks after the speed dating event.

To preprocess the data, we first isolated the variables to be used for the specific visualization, then removed any null values and recorded any categorical and binary variables from integers to more meaningful strings. Some visualizations such as Figures 2 required the data to be reformatted to make time its own column variable rather than being stored in multiple separate columns with each column being the value at a different time. This reformatting was done with the reshape2 package or by manually building a new dataframe. Additionally, Figure 2 used the package Hmisc to get the correlation coefficient and p-value.

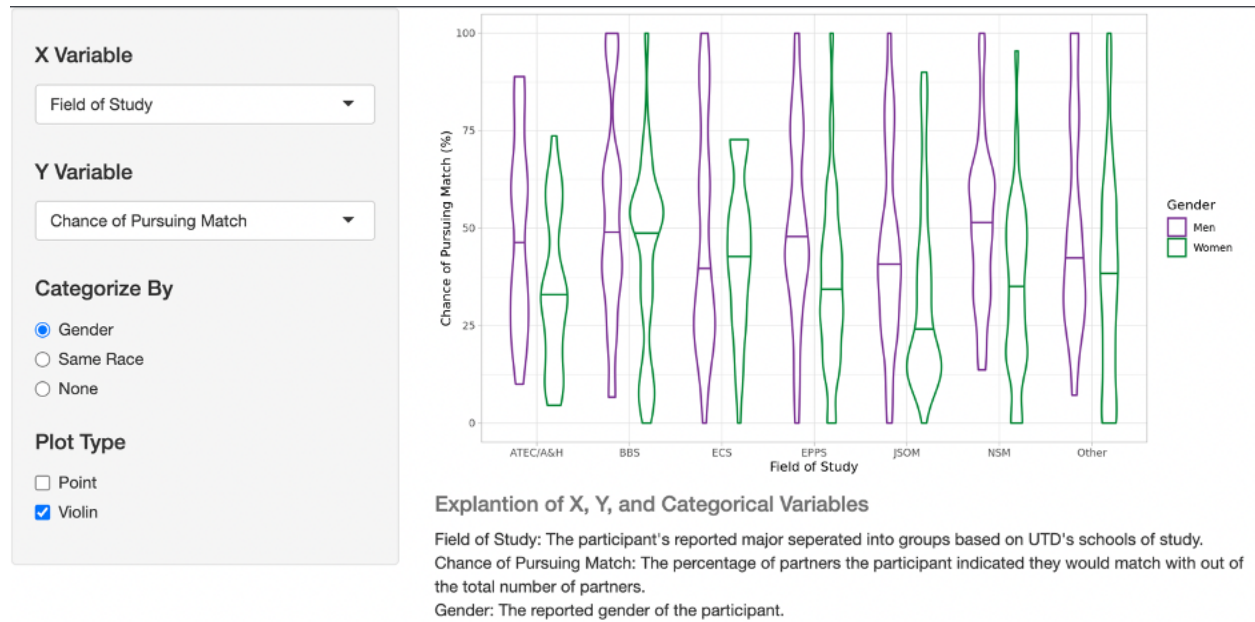
We used ggplot2 to create our plots because it was the most covered package for creating visualizations during the course and is able to output more polished graphs. We used gganimate and ggplotly for making visualizations interactive because of their integration with ggplot2. Shiny was used for Figure 1 rather than Javascript D3 due to its extensive coverage within the course and its ability to allow viewers to explore the data by creating custom graphs.

Visual Analysis

All of the visualizations our team created are in the storyboard on each of our respective websites, please see eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html for the interactive

versions of the figures below. Any interactive visualizations will be presented here as a static with a link to view the interactive version.

Figure 1. Chance of Matching Based On Social Factors



The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 1 at eliannaevans.shinyapps.io/projectPlot1.

Figure 1 is an interactive visualization which allows the viewer to explore how different social variables such as major, goal, sociality, and recent dating experience impact the match likelihood of participants. The chance to match is used instead of the boolean of whether the participants matched because a percent chance to match is more easily interpreted by the viewer than a decimal. In addition, the user can look at the chance of participants pursuing a match and their partners pursuing a match with them, as both must pursue for a match to occur. This breakdown of chance to match can be helpful in situations such as the chance to match based on major. For example, while all majors tend to have between a 15 and 25% chance to match, one

can break down Brain and Behavioral Science (BBS) majors to show that they have the highest likelihood of pursuing a match at just under 50% but one of the lowest likelihoods for their partners pursuing a match at around 35%. Users can also see the effect of gender and whether the participants were of the same race and ethnicity if they choose. This categorization is made by color so the groups are easy to differentiate, colorblind safe color choices were made so all viewers could make interpretations easily, and all groups are plotted on one graph for ease of comparison. Finally, viewers can choose the plot type they find most easily interpretable based on the chosen variables to plot. A scatterplot is always available, for categorical variables a violin plot is additionally available, and for ordinal variables average line and smoothed plots are available. Selected plot types will be layered, allowing the user to show anything from only one plot type to three plot types concurrently.

We chose an interactive rather than static visualization because the large number of high-dimensional categorical variables would have created a confusing static plot, but due to the high relevance of the variables to each other, leaving out a variable would significantly reduce the information gain. The data preprocessing for these plots required y-values such as chance to match to be calculated from the original data to represent the proportion of matches made out of all possible match opportunities.

We believe that this visualization is superior to a similar prior visualization of Table V1 in Fisman et al. (2006), which examines the interaction between whether participants are in the same field of study, their gender, and their decision of whether to pursue a match. The medium of a graph rather than table is superior in this context because with a graph users can see clear correlations and differences between groups rather than being forced to slowly piece together information from text and tables. Our visualization shows the field of study as categorical rather

than a boolean and explores how the field of study affects the chance of matching. Additionally, with our visualization viewers can examine fields of interest and the effects of gender as well as race, neither of which are possible in Fisman et al. (2006).

While extensive results can be found in Figure 1, for sake of space and interest we focus on the major variables here and include further results in the storyboard, found at eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-1-chance-of-matching-based-on-social-factors. Field of study seems to affect the chance of matching; from the 50% percentile line in the violin plot, one can see that while all fields have an under 25% chance of matching, Economic Political and Policy Sciences (EPPS) majors have the highest chance and Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) majors have the lowest chance. Including gender as a factor shows that men majoring in BBS are the most likely to match of any gender-major combination while men majoring in ECS are least likely to match. Including same race as a factor show that ECS, EPPS, JSOM, and other majors are more likely to match with someone of the same race or ethnicity, while ATEC/A&H, BBS, and Natural Science and Mathematics (NSM) majors are more likely to match with someone of a different race or ethnicity. Goal of speed dating also affects the chance of matching: those with the goal of “to say I did it” were most likely to match. Still, none of them matched with 50% or more of their partners, while those with the goal of starting a relationship were the least likely to match but contained the participant who matched with the greatest percentage of their partners. Controlling for gender, men seem more likely to match than women with the goal of “to say I did it.”. Looking at race and ethnicity, participants with the goal of “to say I did it” of the same race as their partner were most likely to match at almost 25%. How often participants go out is positively correlated with chance to match, though the point plot and confidence interval of the smoothed line shows that fewer participants

answered a low number for how often they go out. Controlling for gender, both men and women are generally more likely to match the more often they go out. Whether the participants are the same race does not seem to significantly impact their chance of matching. How often participants go out on dates seems to be more heavily positively correlated with chance to match than how often they go out in general, though effects of gender and race were similar.

Figure 2. Importance of Physical Attractiveness and Self-Rating of Attractiveness

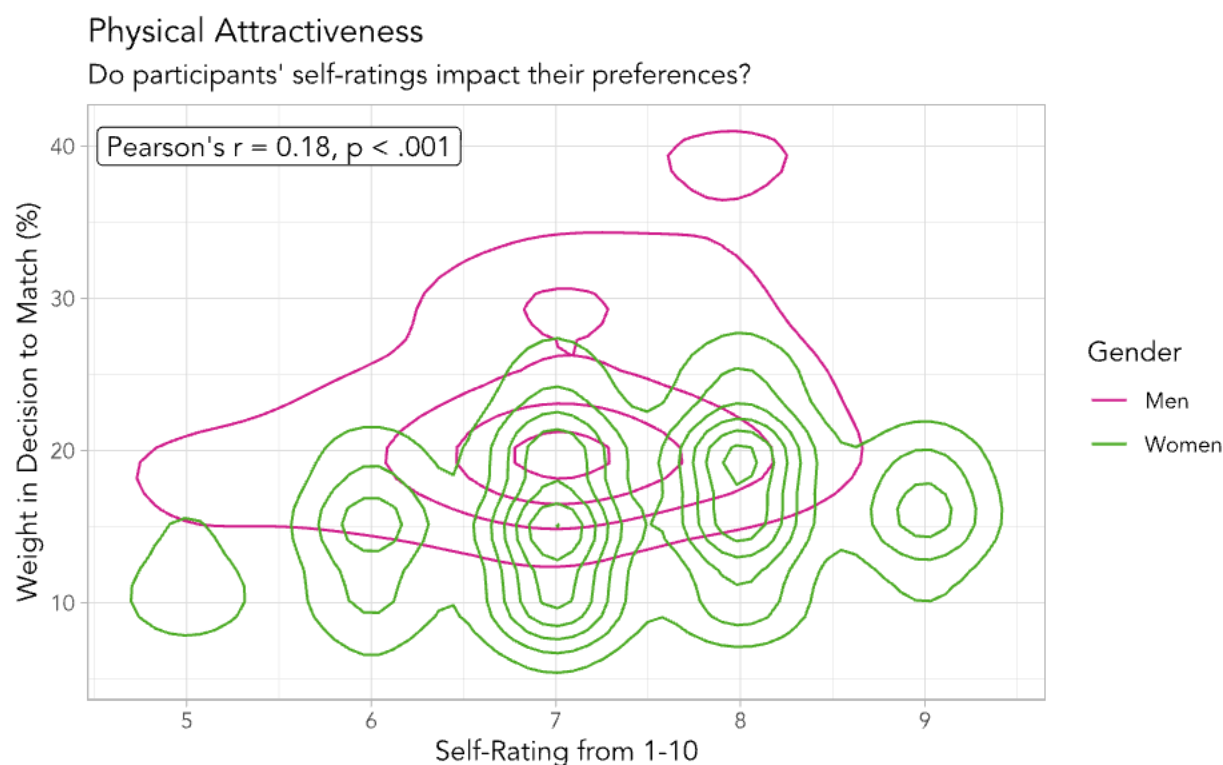


Figure 2 shows viewers the relationship between a participant's self-rating of their own attractiveness and the amount they reported looking for attractiveness in dating partners. The data is grouped by gender, so viewers can see the difference in self-rating, importance, and their relation between men and women. Due to the high number of overlapping points in the data, a contour plot is utilized to show high-density areas in the data which would not be as easily viewable with, say, a jittered point plot. Additionally, Figure 2 shows the correlation coefficient

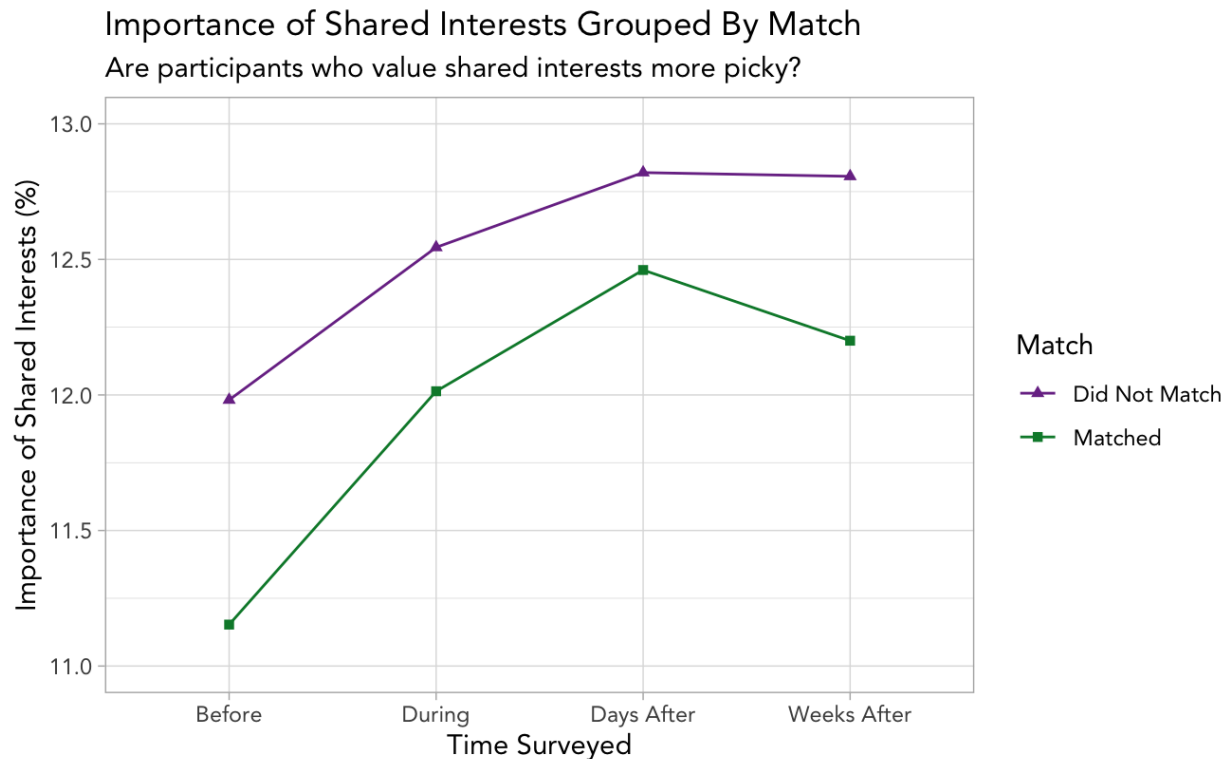
and p-value for self-rating of attractiveness and decision weight of attractiveness, which is helpful for any viewers versed in statistics to determine how related the two variables are and how likely that relation is due to data noise. Colorblind safe color differences are used to denote gender as differences in color makes the two groups quickly and easily differentiable yet comparable as they are plotted on the same space.

We believe this visualization is superior to others representing similar data due to its graphical rather than tabular nature and condensed takeaways. Todd et al. (2007) examine the preferences between men and women for various attributes in relation to their own attributes, and present findings in a tabular format. Table 4 shows correlation coefficients and p-values between women's perceptions of themselves and the average trait values of their chosen partners, including physical attractiveness, and Table 5 shows the same for men. In comparison, Figure 2 presents the correlations for both women and men in one plot, showing both a numerical figure for viewers with a background in statistics and visual contour lines for further analysis and the more casual viewer.

From Figure 2, one can see from the correlation coefficient and p-value that self-rated attractiveness and weight of attractiveness in preference are weakly correlated. However, this correlation is very unlikely to be due to data noise. The contours show that men tend to rate attractiveness as more important to their match decisions to match compared to women, and the highest density of men rated themselves a 7 out of 10 in attractiveness. Women, however, tended to rate themselves as a 7 or 8 in attractiveness, and rated attractiveness as having a 15-20% weight in match decisions. Figure 2 could be interpreted as men valuing attractiveness more in their partners but being slightly less confident in their own appearance compared to women, and

both genders rating attractiveness as slightly more important if they view themselves as attractive.

Figure 3. Importance of Shared Interests Over Time and Match



The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 3 at eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-3-importance-of-shared-interests-over-time-and-match.

Figure 3 shows the change in rated importance of shared interests in potential partners over time grouped by those that matched and those that did not match during the speed dating event. Each point represents the average response of the group of matched or unmatched participants at various points in time, with lines plotted to show continuity between the same group of participants over different time periods. Viewers can interpret both how the importance of shared interests may impact chance to match and how the importance of shared interests

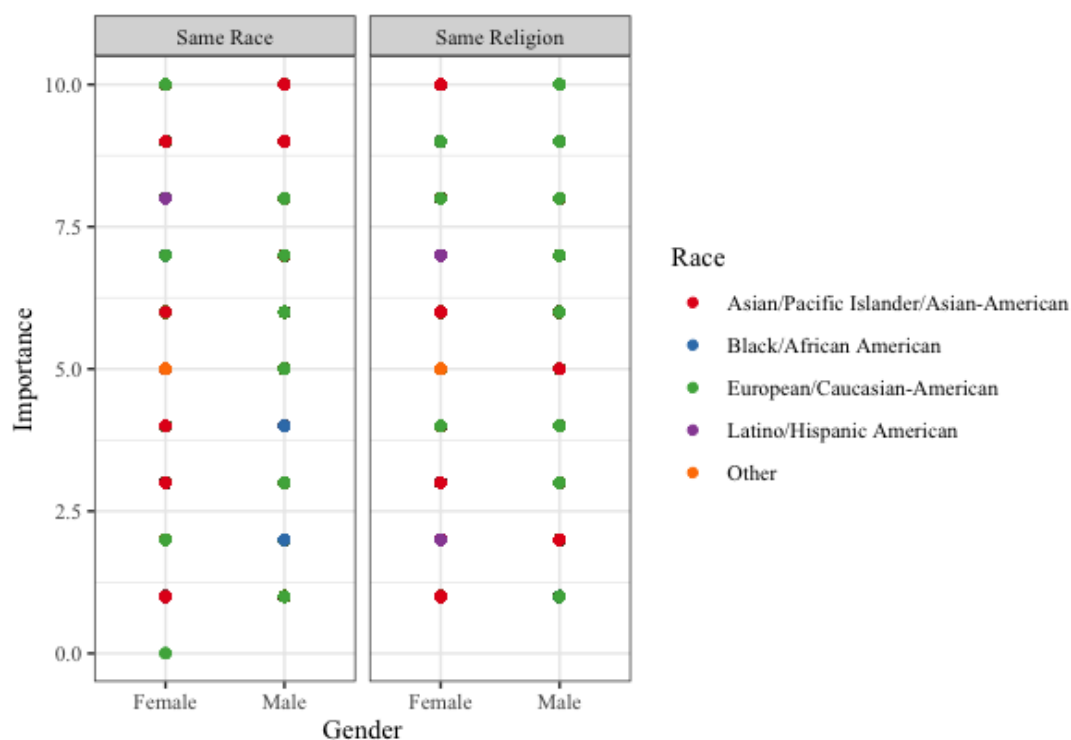
changes from before to weeks after a speed dating event. Color blind safe color differences are used to delineate the groups because color is relatively easy to differentiate and groups can be compared because they are mapped on the same plot. For additional distinctness, point shape also varies between match groups.

We believe Figure 3 is a more effective visualization in comparison to similar visualizations due to its labels, time format, and differentiating factors. Alves (2018) display the variation in the likability of participants based on if they share a more common or rare hobby in three domains of movies, musicians, and hobbies in Figure 2. They utilize a bar chart grouped based on domain and rarity of interest with spatial grouping of bars and color respectively. Where Alves (2018) uses likability on the y-axis and only categorizes shared interests with color based on if they are common or rare, we use color to denote whether participants matched and use the y-axis to present the importance of all shared interests. Additionally, our visualization shows the change in importance of shared interests over time, whereas Alves (2018) does not include time as a variable. Finally, we believe that our labels for Figure 3 are more descriptive as we specify in the graph that importance of shared interests is a percentage and include our legend in the standard righthand position rather than forcing viewers to read the text to understand the variables and placing a small legend at the top of the plot, making it easily missed by viewers as Alves (2018) did in Figure 2.

From Figure 3 viewers can identify that rated importance of shared interests tends to increase over time for both groups and that those who matched tended to rate shared interests as less important than those who did not match. One might infer that perhaps participants who rated shared interest as more important were more “picky” than other participants, making them less likely to match. The increase in rated importance of shared interests in a partner over time after

the speed dating event can be potentially interpreted as a learning curve where participants, after reflecting on their matches, found that shared interests were more important to compatibility than they originally believed.

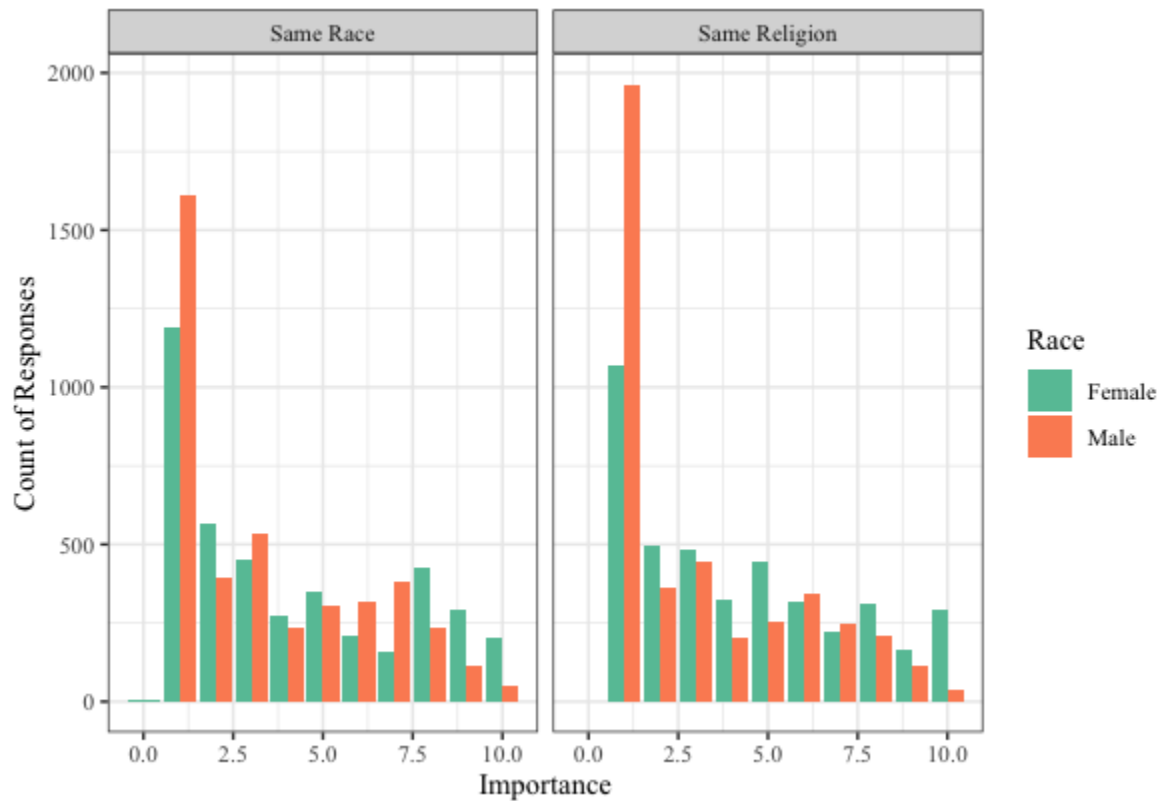
Figure 4.1. Relationship of Importance Same Race, Importance of Same Religion, Gender, and Race



To find out what is important between men and women regarding speed dating, we considered various variables. The lefthand plot is a scatterplot of the importance of the race, gender, and the like. Looking at the figure below, the importance of the same race according to gender and race in speed dating is shown. Specifically, both men and women have a high degree of indicating the importance of the same race in European races. The righthand figure above shows the importance of religion, such as race, gender, and so on. Looking at this, it shows the importance of the same religion according to gender and race in speed dating. Specifically, both

men and women show a characteristic that the degree of importance of the same religion in European races is about 7.5.

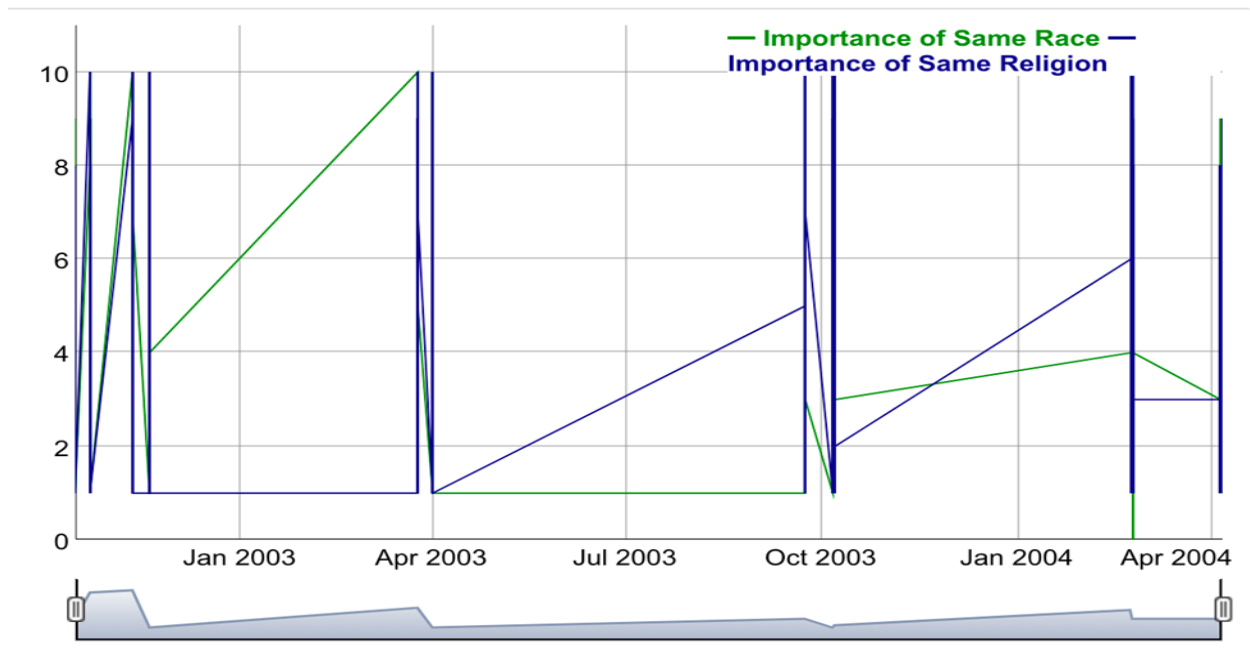
Figure 4.2. Relationship of Importance Same Race, Importance of Same Religion, and Gender



The first plot above is a bar graph showing the importance of race such as gender and race in speed dating. Looking at this, it can be seen that women prefer the importance of the same race to men. The second plot is a bar graph showing the importance of religion, such as gender, in speed dating. Looking at this, it indicates that women have a higher importance of the same religion than men.

characteristics of the graph similar to that of the above figure are shown, we tried to see how the importance of the same race and religion overlaps in the next analysis.

Figure 4.5. Time Series Graph: Importance Same Race and Religion over Time

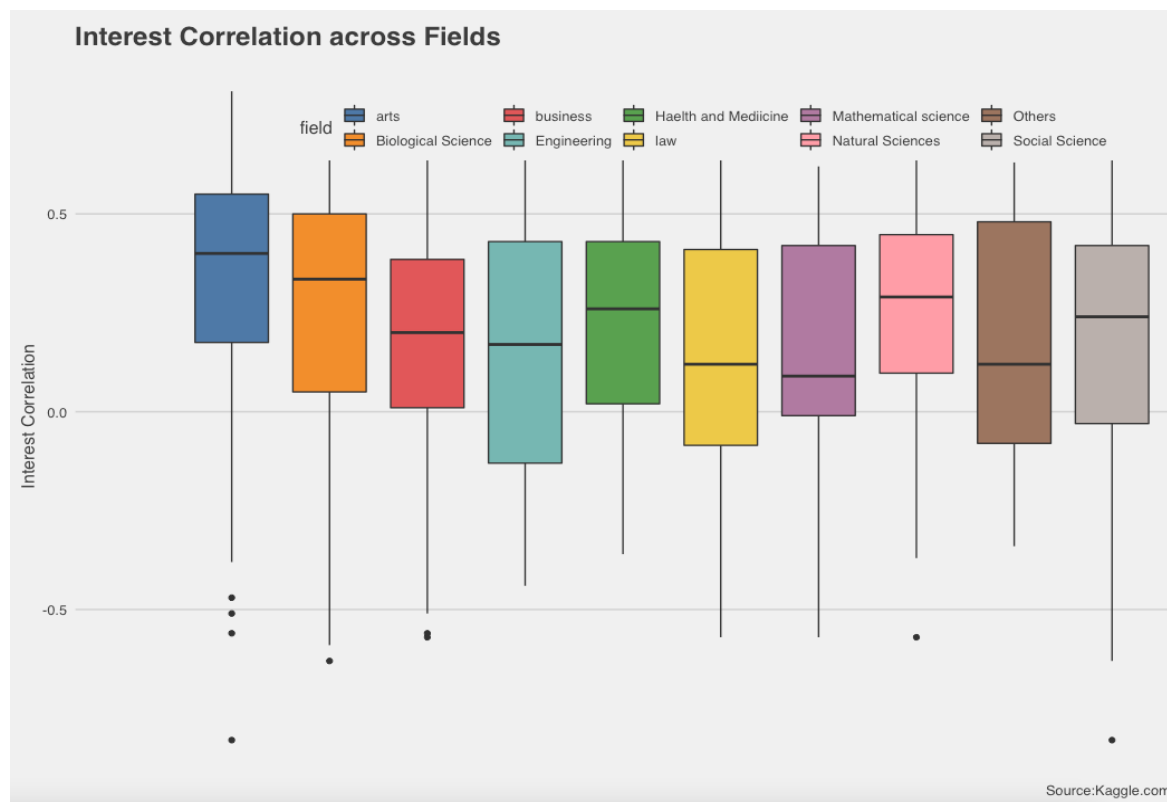


The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 4 at seongdeokoh.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-4-preference-for-race-and-religion-between-gender.

The plot we would like to introduce here briefly is as follows. It is a preference for race and religion between men and women. As is evident in the graph, we wanted to see from past data what the preferences of the same race and religion were with dating between men and women. Green represents the preference for the same race, and purple represents the preference for the same religion. In conclusion, when looking at the past sections, it can find that the preference distinction between race and religion was almost the same because the two colors

overlap through the graph. Therefore, when inferring the present from past data, the preference of the same race and religion is important when dating between men and women.

Figure 5. Interest Correlation Across Fields

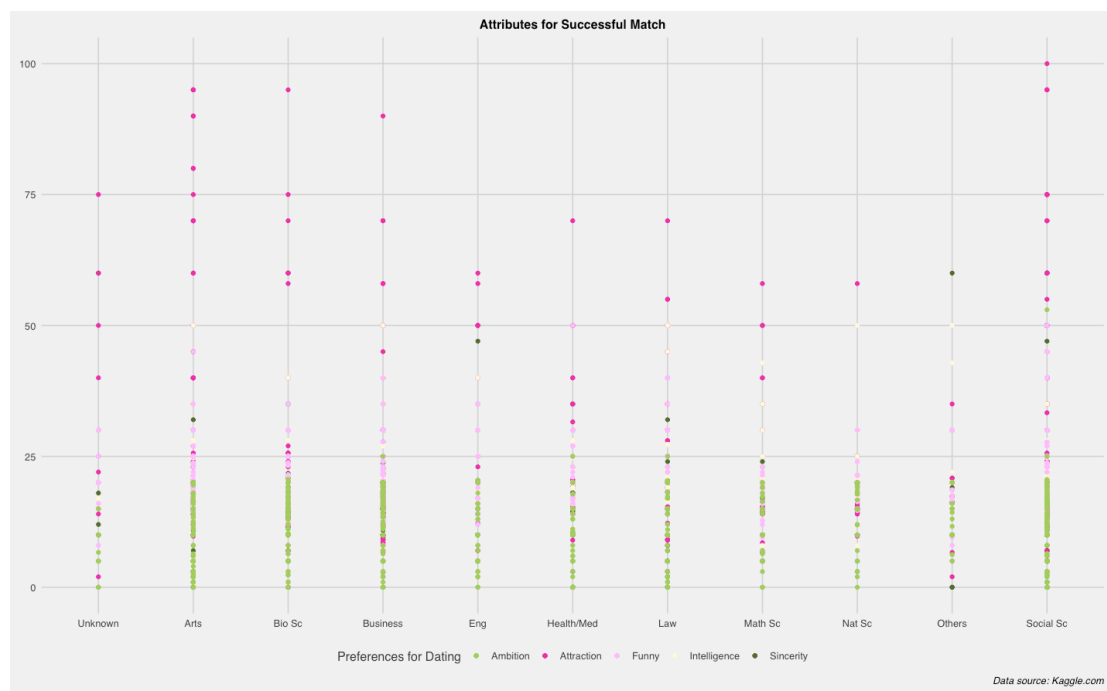


The above figure is a static version, please see the animated version of Figure 5 at eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-5-interest-correlation-across-fields.

Through this plot, we aim to understand the differences in speed dating patterns based on varying academic interests that lead to successful matchmaking. The box plot is an effective means to analyze the differences in the population and hence it has been used to depict the interest correlation difference across different fields of study. The data had more than forty fields of study which were then reclassified into broader fields-Arts, natural sciences, health and

Medicine, Mathematical sciences, Social sciences, law and Business. Figure 5 shows the interest correlation for matches for various fields. As is evident from the plot, the interest correlation of Arts students is the highest, while it is lowest for Mathematical Sciences.. For Social Science also it is slightly lower as compared to other fields. We need to explore further, what is important for students from the fields with low interest correlation. What leads them towards potential match making?

Figure 6. Attributes for a Successful Match



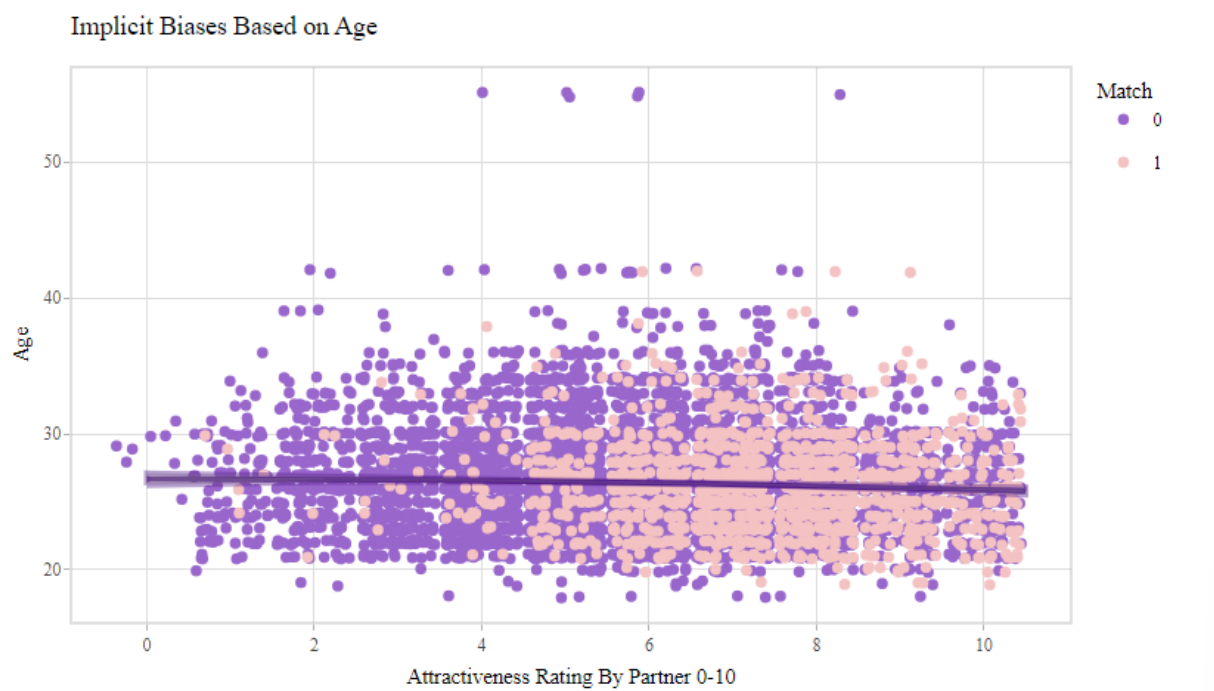
The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 6 at eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-6-attributes-for-successful-match.

It is evident that Social Sciences students show the highest preference for attractiveness, and lower preference for ambition as compared to other fields. At the same time, Business, Health and Medicine and Law students have a greater preference for ambition. Social Sciences

students show a greater preference for Humor and a relatively lower preference for intelligence, while law students show a greater propensity for intelligence.

Figure 7. Implicit Biases Based On Age

Data showcase 7: Implicit Biases Based on Age



The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 7 at elisabethsanders.github.io/Final%20Project%20Storyboard.html#data-showcase-7-implicit-biases-based-on-age.

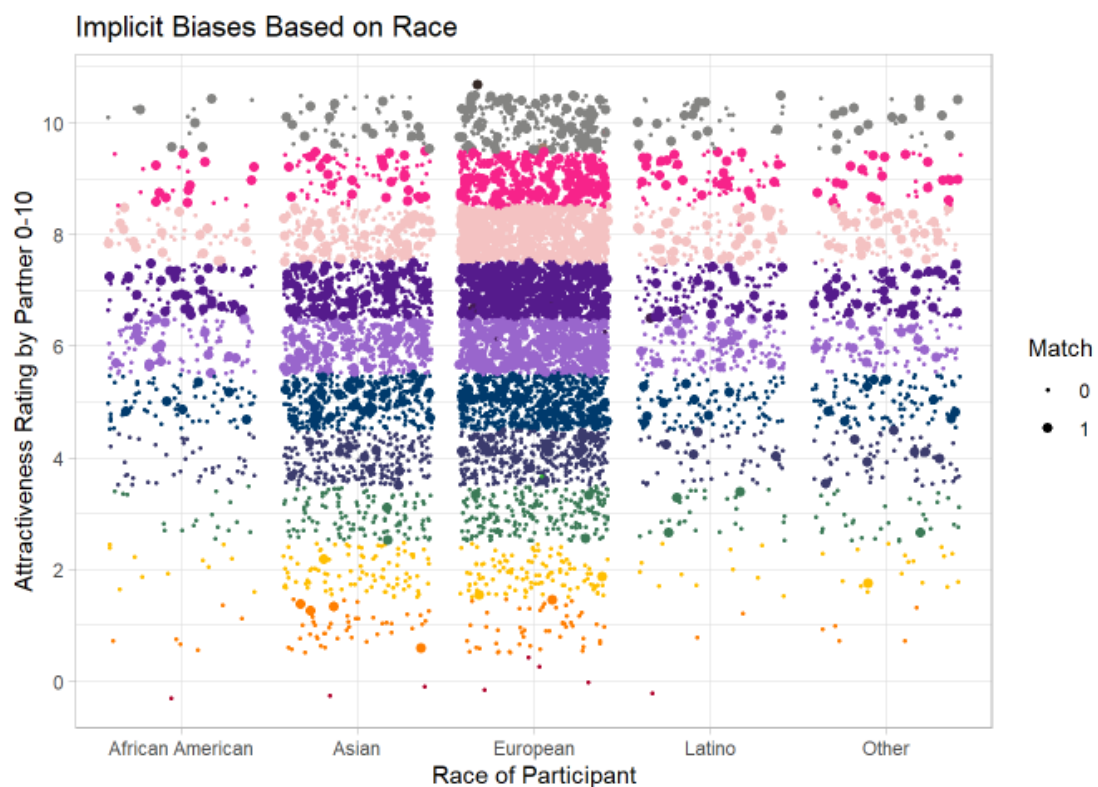
Although speed dating is intended to be an experiment where one can meet others without judgment, does it fully eliminate these implicit biases and assumptions?

Figure 7, the first chart I made, although simple, explains the correlation between someone's attractiveness regarding their age. Are you deemed as automatically more attractive or more likely to be matched if you are younger? The graph can tell you that regarding the

thousands of people who participated in the study, the average person's age in which they are more likely to be deemed attractive and find a match was in their mid-twenties. This coincides with the study by Herrenbrueck et al. (2018) in the article Smart-dating in speed-dating, where they explain that vertical means of attraction to another, such as how another person may make them look in the eyes of others, can automatically predetermine many people's feelings, especially in age.

Figure 8. Implicit Biases Based On Race

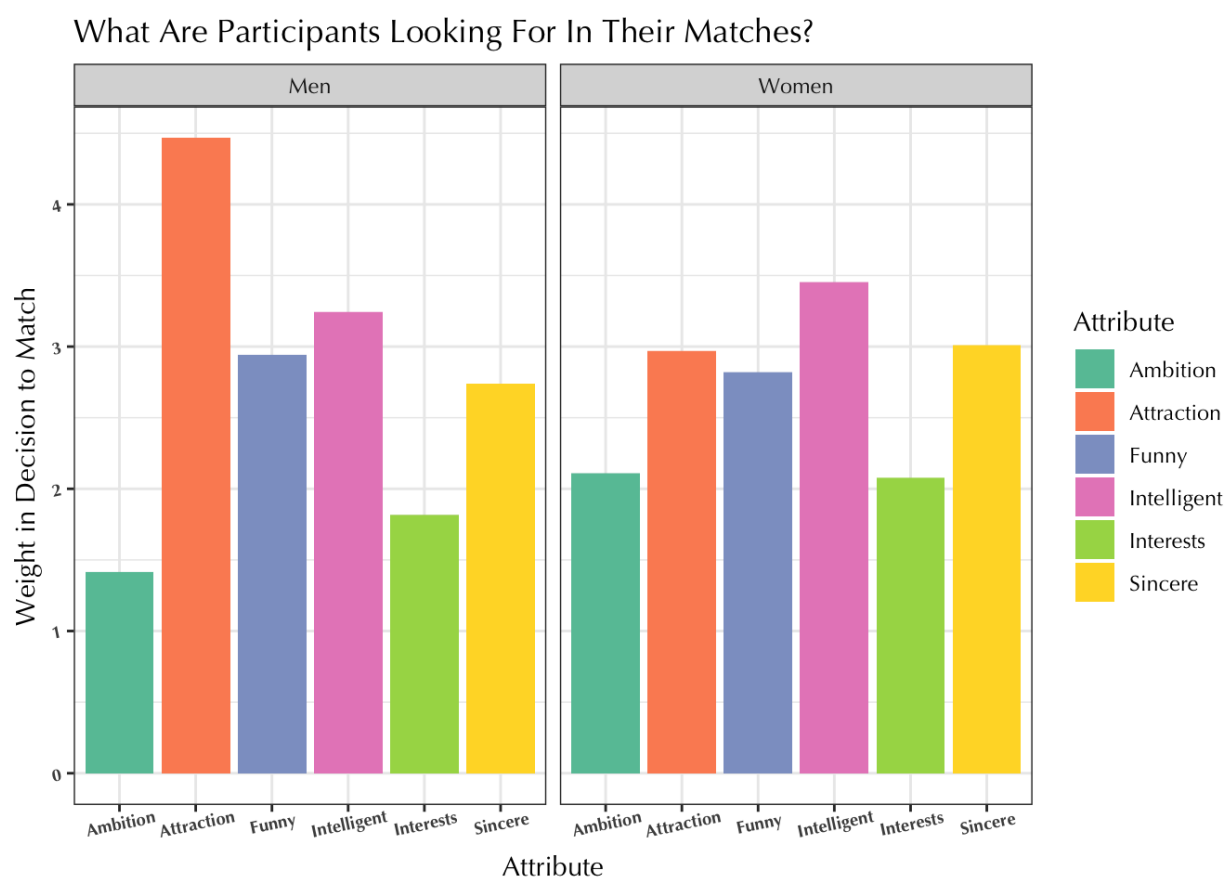
Data showcase 8: Implicit Biases Based on Race



Secondly, in Figure 8 I measured if race depicted more or less of a chance of rating high in the attraction scale and if one race had more of a chance of being matched as others.

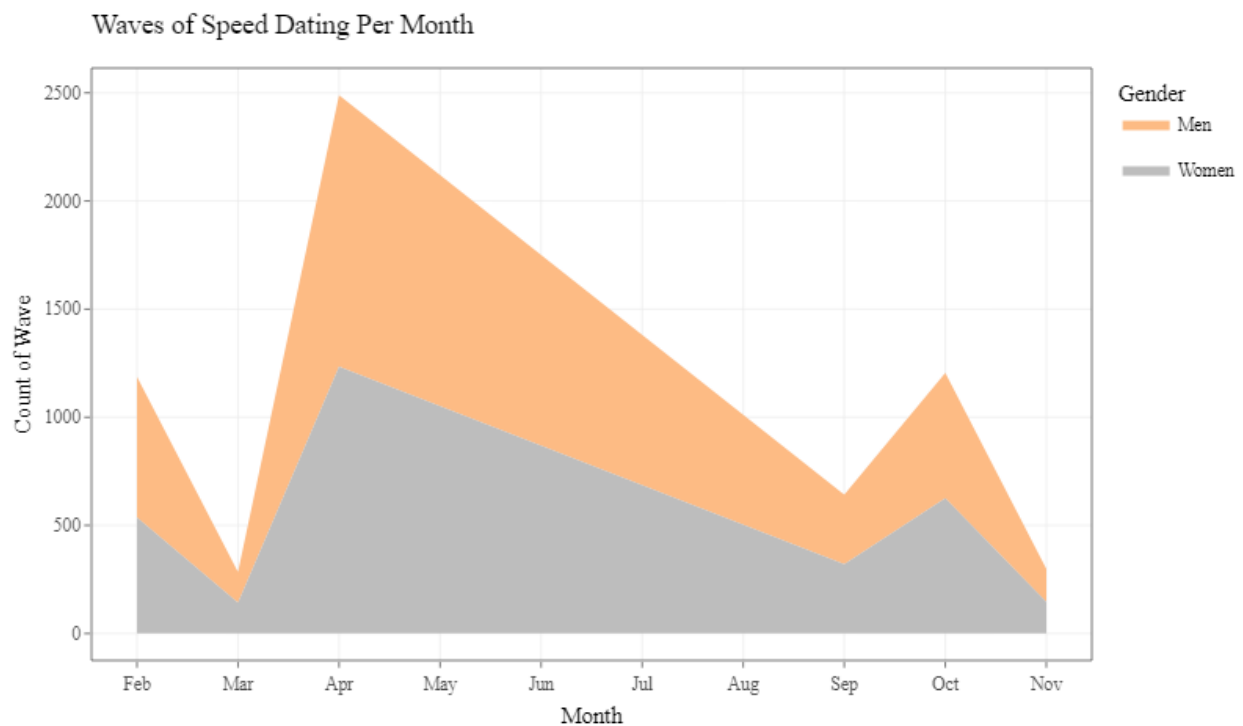
As you can see from the following graph, the assumption turned out to be true, as European or Caucasian-American had a higher percentage of high attraction rankings than any other demographic. This can also be supported by the findings of Herrenbruek as participants of speed dating often try to meet their “perfect” partner, which is more than likely someone who grew up similarly in perspective, someone they are attracted to, but also someone more than likely with the similar ethnicity. As most participants of the speed dating event were Caucasian-American, this rang true as to why the rates of attraction for many Caucasian participants occurred. Additionally, as you are able to see from the graph, those who were white were also more likely to be matched.

Figure 9. What Are Participants Looking For In Their Matches?



The above plot shows what people are looking for in their matches. Men are looking for attractive women and on the other hand women are more interested in smart men. The other trend that can be seen is that females are looking for a sincere man and male give more preference to females being funny. It can be seen that the shared interests factor is of least interest among both the participant groups.

Figure 10. Waves of Speed Dating Per Month

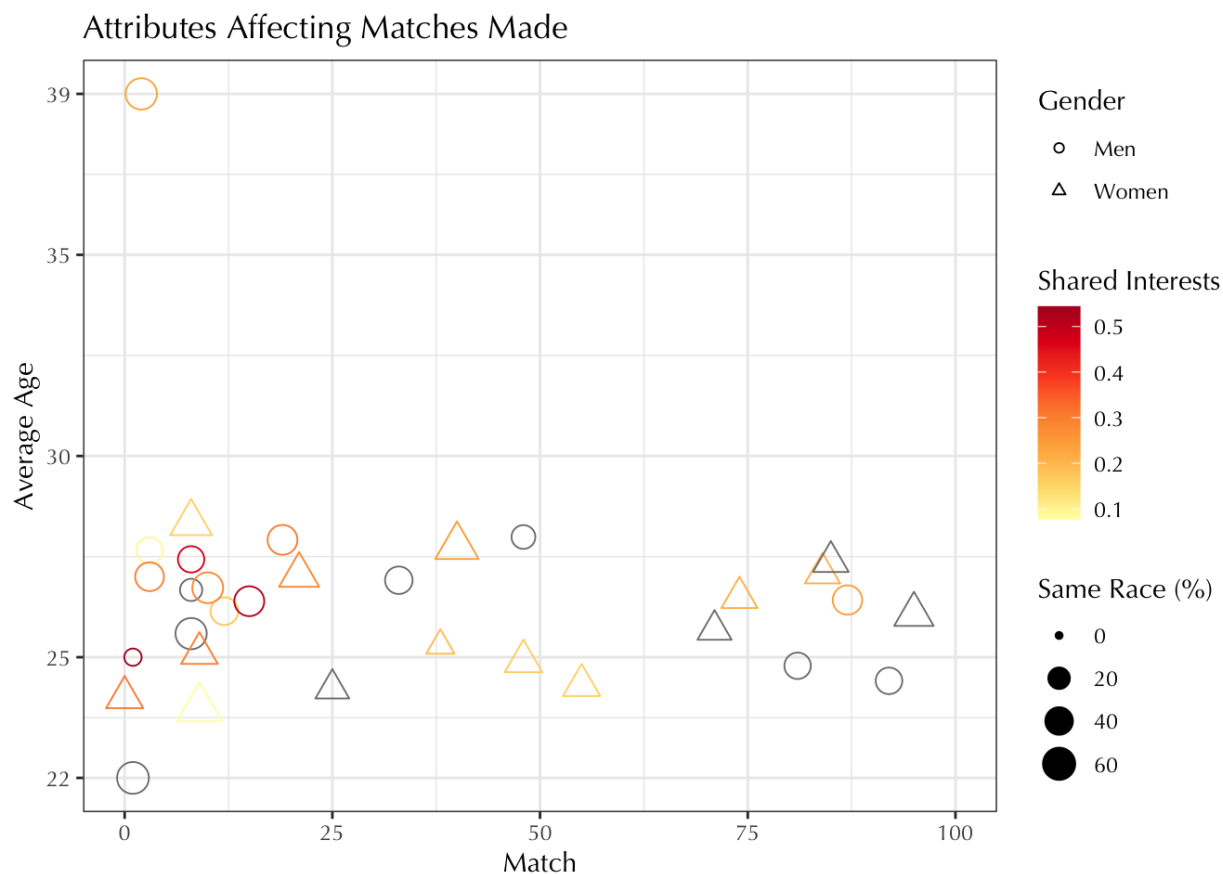


The above figure is a static version, please see the interactive version of Figure 10 at eliannaevans.github.io/finalProjectStoryboard.html#data-showcase-10-waves-of-speed-dating-per-month.

The plot shows the count of dates in a certain wave considered for all the months in a year. It can be seen that Feb being the lovers month had a high start which decreased and then further increased and reached maximum in the month of April. Then a sudden hike can be seen

in the month of October after which there was again a decline in the number of dates. Both the genders follow the same trendline as the date happens when both say “YES”.

Figure 11. Attributes Affecting Matches Made



The scatter plot shows the sum of matches vs average of age. Color shows the sum of shared interests. Size shows the sum of the same race. Shape shows details about the gender. Details are shown for the field. It can be seen that shared interests are not of concern. People have preference for the same race. With each differing field the choice of partners might affect.

Conclusion and Implications

Concerning speed dating, our team tried to analyze what factors impact whether a participant matches according to their demographics, match ratings, and preferences using

ggplot2, Shiny, gganimate, and ggplotly. Through our extensive research analysis, we would like to discuss the following conclusions and implications.

Firstly, whether a participant finds a match or not is impacted by many factors such as majors, goals for speed dating, how often they go out on dates, gender, race, attractiveness, and how much value they place on shared interests. The “successful participant” who would get the most matches would be a highly attractive feminine JSOM major who has gone out on many dates previously, does not value shared interests, and has the goal “to say I did it.”

Second, when we looked at the past history of time related speed dating, we found that the preference distinction between race and religion was almost the same because the importance of race and religion overlap in many parts of the previous graph. Therefore, when we infer the present from past data, the preference of the same race and religion is important when dating between men and women.

Third, speed dating showcases the relevance of social stratification, with the majority of participants preferring to match with those who obtain the same or close to the same classes and point-of-view as their own. Additionally, those who did date someone who was different from them leaned more towards the choice which is appealing to the view of others, the majority of which were white men. This study showcases how reputation and ego play a huge role in the participants' ultimate decision to pursue connections post their first interaction.

Fourth, the field of study affects matchmaking in speed dating as interest correlation and individual preferences complement each other.

Lastly, it can be observed that attractiveness, intelligence, and humor are the three main attributes that the people are looking for in their matches. For youth, shared interests play an important role as most of their bonding starts on the common grounds of interest. It can also be seen that mostly people of age 20-30 are most active in speed dating.

Our analysis shows that while speed dating is supposed to be a quick way to find a match without sacrificing auditory and visual cues, the system contains bias. In future studies, we would recommend that researchers look at the long-term success of matches made during speed dating, which would allow for greater analysis on what makes an good long-term partner as well as a match.

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