

Is Two-Man an Evolved Form of Dating?

A feature article talking on the links between social media, COVID-19, and human cooperation in dating.



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I had a big cheetah phase during my childhood. Late nights at home, where my dad and I would watch a trio of cheetahs desperately *chase a gazelle for their meal*. Normally, I'd hate it when it's on *Nat Geo Wild*, knowing it is the late-night option for interesting entertainment before going to bed, but not this time. I loved cheetahs, their elongated legs flying across the screen in slow motion, their slender, lean bodies galloping as they chased the poor prey. It was a blockbuster end to my day. Afterwards, I'd usually go down a rabbit hole on them, seeing fun facts that I already know, like their inability to roar like other big cats or cheetah bachelors sticking together to boost prey and mating chances.

However, humans are, quite frankly, the champions of cooperation to achieve a single goal. As my roommate passionately explained the evolution of *shared intentionality* to me, a psychological concept that is "the capacity to solve problems cooperatively with shared goals and intentions". As he explained, my mind raced, and it led me to one conclusion: Two-man is an evolved solution to dating.

ISO-ISO!

My experience with two-man is a horror story that doesn't compare to Stephen King's scariest stories. However, looking back, it seems I forgot the main idea: cooperation with your pair, not just two guys and girls talking. Which ties back into *shared intentionality*, the need to "pool

individual strengths...in collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions." As expected, this requires an almost "instinctive connection" within a two-man duo, as an interviewee said, adding on that "they need to be on the same page for things to go down."

"Pairings matter a lot," a common consensus that was stated by the interviewees, as "if they can't read the room, they'll fuck it up." It's almost a sports mentality, one that favors chemistry over individual brilliance, where "everyone has to play their role" to succeed. It is fair to assume that a lively atmosphere is the most essential factor for a two-man to excel, where physical contact would be needed, an exact contradiction of the COVID-19-era norm. But of course, at some point, the goal will always be a one-on-one conversation and a date with your pairing, which necessitates *ISO*.

ISO, isolation for short, is essentially a tactic that signals the separation of the pairings, leaving them alone with their desired partner. If the earlier two-man partnership was effective, this transition would naturally be easy, leading to a good one-on-one conversation. It's a strategy that is highly valued and ultimately sought after by the interviewees, essentially signaling the success of the two-man. From then on, they could ask for their number, Instagram, or maybe change the setting. It's a strategy that can see both men, or potentially one, lose out, as this is a part where individual brilliance does matter.

This could bring the need for *defence*, a strategy to sabotage your duo's communication for the sake of your own benefit. An instance of this could be creating an absurd lie that would immediately disgust their desired partner, like "Did you get your STI checked?", a lie two interviewees used as an example. One interviewee says he uses this on a slow night when there aren't many "prospects," purely to mess with his duo for "shits and giggles."

However, the consensus is that this isn't used seriously, but it does highlight the potential drawbacks of the two-man approach. One of the

two men may not be interested in the desired pairings chosen to “chat” too, as one noted, “If my friend goes to talk, I’ll entertain the other, but if she’s really ugly, I wouldn’t approach.” This contradicts the goal of cooperation, essentially leaving his friend in a one-versus-two situation without his pairing. He later noted that “perception matters in determining his image at the function,” noting that “he cannot be seen talking to an ugly girl or a fridge.” It shows the need for a shared mental space between the duo, where a personal type or preference may come into conflict within the duo. It comes as no surprise that this isn’t a preferred dating technique for any of the interviewees, all preferring the simplicity of dating through social media and dating apps.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a peak in dating app usage, with dating apps serving as the primary form of connection for couples. However, in a larger dating pool, a dating app that widens exposure to people outside social circles can make the dating scene more competitive. Which brings the need for a two-man, a relatively new form of dating in which a pair of guys couple up with another pair of girls, hoping to quickly foster a lively, playful connection. Hearing this, it’s expected to think that I’m talking about double dating or wingman, but two-man is a borderline tactical evolution of the former, well-suited for contemporary times, marked by a need for connection. To best answer the question of whether it’s truly an evolved form of dating, I gathered five interviewees, all experienced in the two-man field, to hear about their experiences and their dating history before COVID-19. However, I must disclaim that this article is not a representative of the wider population; rather, it is an investigation of their answers in relation to the research.

Awakening?

It’s common knowledge to say that COVID-19 caused damage to human connections, as it’s fair to assume that months spent in a small enclosed home will have some effect on the community. Which is essentially the impact of *norm-psychology*. Psychologists refer to it as the learned

behavioural standards shared and enforced by communities, creating dos and don'ts, along with benefits and discipline attached.

Relating it to COVID, lockdowns brought heavy restrictions on movement, resulting in very little movement or contact between citizens. In turn, norms emerged to address the interdependent challenge posed by the global pandemic. Such as the expectation that one would abide by restrictions, stay indoors, and wear a mask. These norms, as with others, were solidified with the moral justification that they might benefit collective cooperation and survival. These expectations were a collective effort to combat a highly infectious illness, so I was confident that months of lockdown would dent my interviewees' ability to talk to women, underscoring the need for a two-man . This is considering the lockdown brought the increased likelihood of loneliness, anxiety, and possibly depression, a common consensus among psychologists. However, I was mistaken, as a majority of my interviewees stated that their dating lives improved post-COVID, with one going further to say that the loosening of restrictions "unleashed a beast," where he was ready to finally talk to women in person.

It initially confused me to hear several interviewees describe COVID as something positive—for example, as a chance to "get back into running" or as a relief from the social pressure of talking to women in a small academic environment where gossip was a concern. However, their reflections on personal growth after COVID helped me realize what I had overlooked: the concurrent rise of social media and dating apps.

Now hear me out...

While COVID did bring the higher prevalence of loneliness, it also ironically brought a sense of community, albeit an online community, from social media. Researchers, such as Yachao Li, discussed its rise: it was downloaded 315 million times globally at the start of 2020 and saw huge popularity during COVID, with 27% of its users aged 13-17, which is the age range the interviewees and I were in during the pandemic.

Known for its short-form content and endless entertainment value, like *Vine*, TikTok was a remedy for coping with the pandemic, with dance videos often the most-shared content on the app, and it also brought the rise of TikTok influencers, a new group of celebrities who gained fame on the app, mostly through dance videos. Examples such as Charli D'Amelio, Addison Rae, and Bella Poarch have amassed 300 million+ followers on TikTok as of 2026.

My point is, COVID-era social media sparked the rise of a global community like never before, bringing people closer together as they watched the same dance videos or comedy skits. I'd argue it marked the rise of the age of imitation, with users doing the same dance moves Charli D'Amelio did, like the "renegade" dance, or simply imitating each other's looks. I remember the huge craze for Nike Dunks, which were almost impossible to get unless you were willing to pay an absurd reselling price on StockX. It was a time of imitation that would later evolve into the spread of "looksmxing" an online movement centred on optimizing physical appearance to increase one's perceived "sexual market value." While this represents a more radical extension of imitation, it reflects the same underlying pressure to be attractive, fit, fashionable, financially successful, and without visible shortcomings, what one interviewee described as the expectation to "be good looking, be in decent shape, have good fashion, get your money up, and have no lacking qualities."

This may seem like a well-duh moment, but in a time of tight restrictions on interaction and forced closures of common spaces, those qualities do bring a sense of edge in algorithmic and digital spaces like social media and dating apps, where physical features are more paramount over character. However, six years later, it seems that the edge is only a minimum now, "where girls have raised their standards," an interviewee noted.

So what?

So is two-man an evolved form of dating? I believe so, as it encompasses the very nature of our world right now: one filled with in-person isolation but a rich collective online, where physical attributes, including accolades and material ownership, are more important than character. The majority of the interviewees acknowledge the need to boost their “stats” to compete in the dating world, where there seems to be a higher need for physical attractiveness and “older men wanting to have fun with younger girls,” one interviewee noted. Two-man may not be the preferred dating technique, but it offers an edge that social media doesn’t: connection at its most human level, though one filled with strategies and desired pairings. Connection that depends on the men: whether they have preferences, are just willing to play support, or tend to play *defence* within the group. All connections that hope to achieve the goal that the cheetah trio wishes to achieve too.

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