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Singles choose efficiency over the bar scene

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THE WORD "PSYCHO" came up. As in, my ex was a lunatic. "Freaky" was mentioned. As in, I hope I don't meet someone freaky.

"Uncomfortable" was directed at me.

As in, "Of all the men streaming through here, you're by far the most uncomfortable looking."

This is what Dianna told me midway through my initiation into modern dating.

Welcome to speed dating.

Dianna, speed date No. 7, rattled off the reasons -- poor eye contact, slouched posture, mumbling, etc.

I should have expected this. I'm reserved by nature, but after 11 years of domesticated life (i.e., marriage), I'm beyond rusty in the dating game.

Speed dating efficiently exposed my shambling ways in their manifold glory. Suave? Uh, no. Rich? Negative. Metrosexual? You've got to be kidding.

Anyway, in my most metro-looking threads, my hair tousled with gel, I nervously strolled into Conor O'Neill's Traditional Irish Pub in Fort Collins Wednesday night. The anticipation mounted when I realized I walked into history.

"We're setting the Guinness book record for the largest simultaneous speed dating event," said Becca Savidge of Cupid.com, organizer of the session. "We're holding it in 91 cities ... we even have one going on in Alaska tonight."

A veritable bevy of speed daters, including 40 of us, in the 30-50 age range, in Fort Fun.

About 2,000 men and women joined in a nationwide dating dance of musical chairs: Take a seat at a table with a complete stranger and discuss hobbies, aspirations and disastrous previous relationships. Do this for 6 minutes, until the ding of the bell. Then switch tables and repeat 11 times over.

If you liked someone, check Cupid.com the next day and see if they chose you. Then you contact each other, presumably, through the e-mails listed on the Web site.

Rosie Pindilli, 37, of Fort Collins experienced the flash, the jolt of magnetism that is the very allure of speed dating, at a session two years ago.

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Darin McGregor / mcmgregor@greeleytrib.com Katie McPike, left, and Mark Manges talk during a speed dating event at Conor O'Neill's Traditional Irish Pub in Fort Collins. About 40 singles came out for Wednesday night's event.



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She scoped a guy out before the clock even started ticking. "It was just kind of an attraction before talking with each other," she said.

They ended up dating six months before breaking things off. Pindilli had no hesitation about giving it another go.

"This is a college town," she said. "For older people, it's really hard to go out and meet somebody."

Louise Giuliano, 45, of Johnstown, another second-timer, agreed. She likes the efficiency of speed dating.

"You get a quick glimpse of someone's personality," she said. "Something that's appealing to you that you want to learn more about. Being older, too, I don't want to fool around with going to bars and playing those games."

The women told me the idea is to not have high expectations. Just look for people you'd enjoy spending time with, they said.

For full disclosure, I told Nos. 1-11, I'm not looking. I'm dating a wonderful, beautiful woman, who was open-minded enough to say, in so many words, "Go ahead -- just don't pocket a bunch of phone numbers."

Upon hearing that, Talia defiantly jotted down a couple of numbers on a napkin and scooted it my way. She was among a trio, Nos. 6-8, who took the speed dating challenge together.

"Safety in numbers," Mary Kay said. "We're all in the same boat, you know, single moms in their early 40s. Where do you meet people in this town?"

The women I talked to were successful and career-oriented, all easy to talk with, all interesting in their own way. Many had been divorced, some never married. A couple referenced Dr. Phil's tips for speed daters. One asked me what makes a good relationship. I said I have no clue, but that without friendship it's got no chance.

"Today would have been my 15th wedding anniversary," Mary Kay said with a wicked laugh. She told me her ex pulled the classic mid-lifer: split at 40, then got remarried a couple of years later.

"Instead of a Porsche, he ended up with four kids and a minivan."

With a satisfied smile, she took a sip of her cocktail.

Chris Casey is a Tribune reporter.

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