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## Ready, set, date

Looking for love?

Steve & Mia test-drive speed dating

Steve is a 50-something married man who's been around the block. Mia is a 20-something single immersed in the Center City dating scene. They may not agree, but they have plenty of answers. If you'd like an answer to your romantic troubles, e-mail them at [S&M@phillynews.com](mailto:S&M@phillynews.com) or write: S&M c/o Daily News, Box 7788, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

EVER SINCE we started this column we've been hearing the same query over and over from readers.

And no, it's not about handcuffs or lubricant.

"Dear Steve and Mia," they write, "Where can I go to meet an attractive, intelligent person to date?"

We've suggested coffee shops and clubs, Internet dating and personals. In honor of Valentine's Day this year, we went into the field to examine another lonely heart option.

Speed dating.

Yes, the parties where you spend five minutes - or eight or 10 - each with a series of strangers, hoping to meet your one true love.

It all began in the late 1990s with a Los Angeles rabbi who wanted to bring Jewish singles together. Now a handful of companies offer quickie date nights in and around Philly, [8minutedating.com](http://8minutedating.com), [hurrydate.com](http://hurrydate.com) and [www.apluspeeddating.com](http://www.apluspeeddating.com); [absolut.com](http://absolut.com); [express.com](http://express.com) among them.

We trekked to an [8minutedating.com](http://8minutedating.com)

event at the Manayunk Diner last week, slapping on Steve and Mia name tags to disguise ourselves as we talked to the participants and observed the scene.

For \$35 you get eight mini-dates lasting eight minutes. Everyone is identified by their first name and a number.

After the evening, you go to the Web site and enter the info of anyone you'd like to see again. If the other person wants to see you too, you get contact information. Theoretically the romance begins.

If you don't get at least one "match," the next event is free.

Was it romantic or uncomfortable? Fun or depressing? Here's what we saw:

Mia: This certainly was the most practical approach to dating I've ever seen. And you talked to a lot more people than you would at a bar, for example. Many of them were pretty good-looking, wouldn't you say?

Steve: If they had this when I was single I know one bar owner who wouldn't have made his mortgage payments.

Mia: One problem: It seems exhausting to have to make the same small talk over and over. By the end of the night I knew Teri was a nurse from New Jersey who loved the Flyers, because I'd heard it 20 times!

Steve: I was with the older speed daters, many newly single. I loved how they talked about it. "I was out for a while, but now I'm back in the game." Or, "I had to take a break, travel a bit. But I decided to come back out." It reminded me of injured athletes returning to the field. Battle of the sexes indeed!

Mia: I noticed most people seemed to be there with friends. Two sisters were even together. I guess people still need some safety net at that kind of thing?

Steve: That makes sense, but what if you both like the same guy!

Mia: Did you see any sparks fly? Most of the people I talked to said there was maybe one person whom they'd go on a date with.

Steve: My favorite conversation went like this:

Gal (who'd previously said financial security was important): "So what do you do?"

Guy: "Well, I'm hoping to get back into my field. I'm a teacher."

Gal: "But what do you do now?"

Guy: "I cut hedges."

It was over right there. If he'd said, "Landscape engineer," he could've stayed in the game.

Mia: That's still better than the woman who said, "I'm an auditor for a bank. It's boring." I mean, don't lie, but don't put yourself down either. Also, Steve, I noticed a bunch who said they came because a friend dragged them. Do you think that meant that they were less committed to meeting somebody?

Steve: Seems silly to pay \$35 when you don't really want to meet someone. Some of them had their own ideas about how this should work. A guy named Mike said, "They should have one-minute dating. You don't need eight minutes. You could go in, see who's attractive, have an appetizer and leave."

I asked, "Mike, don't you want to talk to them?" He said, "Nah, that would ruin it."

Mia: The appetizers looked pretty gross anyway. The one thing I heard from women is that they feel they have a better chance of meeting men who actually want a relationship this way. "I work in a bar, I don't want to go that route," one woman told me.

Steve: That's funny because I met two women who said just the opposite, Karen and Maria. They said they wouldn't do this again. "The men are too needy," Karen told me. She said she'd rather walk up to a cute guy in a bar and introduce herself.

Mia: Yeah, but that cute guy never calls you the next day.

Steve: Maria said, "I like the concept, but when I walked into the room I knew after a couple minutes there was no one here I'd be interested in."

Mia: Aw, that's a little harsh. I thought it was a decent-looking group of people overall. The fear of a room full of dogs kept me away from speed dating, but I'd now tell friends it's worth a shot. I also liked that you don't really have to face rejection in person. If you go to the Web site and say you like a person, it only tells you if they feel the same about you. It's like dating with a net.

Steve: When it was over, Mike said, "There's two women I like, and they're the same two that everyone else will be interested in." An event like this could be a real ego-booster if you get a whole bunch of matches.

Mia: It was an ego boost for me. One of the guys I met said he actually reads our column!

Steve: Yeah, but did anybody hit on you during intermission?

Mia: Maybe a few of them.

Steve: If I did this, I'd act outrageous so everyone would reject me, and I'd get to keep coming back for free. Can you think of a line guaranteed to alienate any woman who met me?

Mia: Sure, "Hi, I'm Steve."

Steve: Cute. Real cute.

Mia: You're just jealous that no one hit on you during the intermission.

Steve: If I were single, I'd do this. It was like a cocktail party and mostly fun. I can think of worse ways to spend \$35. Plus I would comb my hair and tuck in my shirt, unlike one guy I saw.

Mia: I'd advise that all the time, Steve. I'd also tell people to think about questions to ask ahead of time, beyond the "What do you do for fun?"-type queries suggested by the organizers. Especially by the fifth 8-minute date, no one wants to keep answering the same thing.

Steve: I'd ask, "Which is your favorite law of thermodynamics? Mine is the second law."

Mia: It's a good thing you're out of the game, Steve. Happy Valentine's Day, everyone!

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*Hear Steve & Mia at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday morning on Angelo Cataldi's Morning Show on WIP 610-AM.*

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