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## What's the deal with "The Button?"

By Anya Farwell The Daily  
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Illustration by Aaliyah Diaz

Dating used to be all fun and games: until the tables turned, and one person was left holding all the cards. For some, this game started on the playground, when another kid professed their young adolescent love to you by the monkey bars on a regular Wednesday afternoon.

For the rest of the day, fantasies of marriage and plans for future children were projected into your mind. Six-year-old you had their life planned all out, at least until you got dumped for another classmate the following afternoon.

So why does this happen? For many, love is similar to playing poker. You never know who has the winning hand or who's bluffing. And this only seems to get harder as you grow up. Expectations of love are set when you hear stories of high school sweethearts, or how your parents met when they were young. Expectations, for the most part, seemed to be dashed as soon as they opened a dating app, bringing people hurtling down to reality.

With dating apps such as Hinge, Tinder, and Bumble, you would think finding love would be an easy feat. To my surprise, it's not. So why is dating so hard? The CUT, a YouTube channel based in Seattle focused on finding love, explores this phenomenon with their segment "The Button."

The rules of the show are pretty simple. Two participants are seated at a table for ten minutes. At the end of the ten minutes, if there's no immediate spark of connection, each contestant is allowed to hit the button and switch partners. Some people would call this chaotic, and some would call this a contemporary form of "speed dating."

After watching a couple of episodes, entranced by the fast-paced questions and rapid partner turnover, I am still left with one question. Are people using dating platforms for relationships or just for entertainment?

UW professor Nicole McNichols thinks it's a bit of both.

"Data shows that men and women use them differently," McNichols said. "When swiping right or left, women think it through, whereas men just swipe." This behavior gives way to greatly bimodal expectations and frustrations.

When watching "The Button," you feel as if you're watching a game show. With the mixed variety of people, personalities, and questions aimed to unveil the deepest darkest secrets, the show seems to be setting its contestants up to entertain, rather than meet their destined match. And this isn't the only place where the differing views of relationships versus entertainment come into question.

Dating apps such as Tinder have ushered in a new subgenre of relationships, one of them being Hook up culture. Instead of using these apps to find relationships, the majority of people seem to be using them for the sole purpose of finding their next "hook up."

But what are the expectations when it comes to online dating? "Another downside of online dating is there's way less accountability between dates," McNichols said. "Because of the amenity, individuals feel more inclined, and less bad for cutting things off or ghosting someone after a couple of dates."

Freshman, Olivia Peopping would have to agree. "You don't really know what you're looking for because there's so many people," Peopping said. "It's a little bit overstimulating."

More contemporary dating shows such as "Too Hot to Handle," or "The Bachelorette" seem to be an emotional touchstone for many. People would sign up to display their relationship on national television, or on a YouTube show. That begs the question: how bad does real-world dating have to be for people to do these things? The answers might shock you.

With new classifications for relationships on the rise, there seems to be an entirely new manual for dating culture. "I call it blasé culture," McNichols said. "Whoever shows the most emotional clarity and detachment from the relationship is better. Due to this, expressing emotion has become a sign of weakness in fast dating."

With all the mixed signals on online dating shows and platforms, it seems that communications can get lost in translation. Do people really want to be in relationships, or would they rather be part of the "hook up culture" narrative?

"Most people want a long-term relationship, but feel that everyone else wants short-term," McNichols said. This is deemed true.

"It's not really what most people are looking for. They want that 'rom-com' sh--," Peopping said.

Is sitting at a table in front of a camera crew and a large robotic button considered contemporary "rom-com sh--," or is it a step backward in the modern dating scene? Only time will tell.

With the new dating culture and thousands of questions from love-bound individuals, there is one more question I am left with. To press, or not to press? Not all fairy-tale endings can be found with the press of a button.

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