

First impressions: When the mating market resembles a super market

January 29 2016

Two things people always need in life: food and love. According to psychologists, understanding the forces that drive both our hunger and our desire could help us eat healthier and have more satisfying relationships.

First Impressions: Photo, video, or in-person?

Just as supermarkets offer plenty of choices, modern dating, from online sites to speed dating, greatly increases the ability to search for and meet potential mates. Lucy Hunt, Ph.D. candidate from the University of Texas - Austin, wanted to understand if the medium in which someone introduces their self affects another person's perception. She discovered when it comes to first impressions, a picture is not worth a thousand words.

Hunt compared the kinds of first impressions elicited, using the same group of individuals, via: (a) a live, face-to-face encounter with those individuals, (b) a photograph of those individuals, or (c) a video of those individuals attending a brief date. Her study suggests that certain evaluative contexts are more similar (e.g., face-to-face and video) than others (e.g., face-to-face and photo) in the kinds of first impressions they tend to elicit from others.

Although her study focused on undergraduate students, her findings could have implications for anything from job hiring to dating, as

technology has allowed us to encounter novel individuals in more diverse formats. "It is important to recognize the extent to which such different formats elicit fundamentally similar versus dissimilar impressions," according to Hunt.

When mate choice resembles food choice: Long term socioeconomic impacts.

In Rutgers Business School's Dr. Kristina Durante's research on [mate choice](#), she found patterns similar to [food](#) regulation: Encountering a potential romantic partner serendipitously (due to happenstance instead of deliberate [choice](#) characteristic of online dating) enhanced people's perceptions of future love, desire to see the person again, and sustained satisfaction over time. These effects parallel findings for food: encountering a food item in isolation versus amongst a choice set enhanced consumption.

Additionally, Durante's preliminary work indicates that men who experienced a plentiful mating market as a teenager regulated mating behavior; however, men who experienced an impoverished mating market as a teenager pursued a sexual partner comparably whether risk was high or low. These results mirror the food choice results seen in studies examining socioeconomic status and long-term effects on food consumption.

"The rewarding nature of seeking and finding food and companionship share similar pathways in the brain," summarizes Dr. Kristina Durante. "Highlighting the parallels in [choice behavior](#) for each appetitive system, food and love, can lead to novel research that is poised to improve interventions that enhance relationship satisfaction."

More information: The results were presented as part of the Society

for Personality and Social Psychology 17th Annual Convention. The symposium, From the Bedroom to the Kitchen Table: Common Pathways that guide Appetites for Food and Mates occurred Friday January 29th at the San Diego Convention Center.

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Citation: First impressions: When the mating market resembles a super market (2016, January 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-01-resembles-super.html>

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