

Putting the data into dating

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Heart rate, step counts and sleeping patterns may not be the most romantic of topics—but what would happen if you started talking about them on a date?

Researchers at Newcastle University organised Metadating – a speed dating event where participants recorded data about themselves – such as their walking pace and [food intake](#) that week - to create an alternative dating profile.

They were investigating how the information gathered by devices such as smartphones and [fitness trackers](#), come to represent people, and how it could be used in a social way.

Their study has already had a positive outcome with one couple going on to enjoy a long-term relationship.

The research, which is being presented at CHI 2016, in California, USA, next month, asked participants to complete a hand-drawn 'data profile' They were asked to input quantifiable details such as the furthest distance they had ever been from home and how well they had slept.

They were then able to use a range of empty graphs, tables and visualisations to represent any part of their life. Some recorded how many times they had called their mother that week, while others recorded and correlated their vices – like consumption of coffee, alcohol and cake.

They chose how much data to record and how accurate and honest they were. The group of men and women then swapped profiles, as they went on a total of 28 dates, each four minutes long.

Lead author, Chris Elsdon of Newcastle University's Open Lab, said: "As we collect more and more data about ourselves, we were interested in the future social life of data. How people might talk, share, make jokes, brag or even lie about their data? As this really social activity, we thought speed dating was the perfect way to investigate these future interactions.

"The profiles made data a ticket to talk. They helped couples start conversations. Rather than analysing their data, they performed it by talking about it with each other. And despite the fact this was an unusual set-up, the group had no problem finding things to chat about.

"We found that people presented their information in two distinct ways. Some explicitly chose unusual and interesting data to record, while the others felt they should be more honest and accurate in the data they represented. However, for all participants, the hand-drawn profiles offered a new and more expressive way of sharing and talking about their data than existing digital tools.

"Currently, a lot of the information we might track or measure about ourselves is focused only on making us fitter, happier or more productive. But this so called 'Quantified Self' can be really dry and mechanical – and what people can actually do with their data is sometimes quite limited. But what our study showed is that you can be creative with data, you can play around with the way you present it and use it to relate to other [people](#). Just think about all the services that there are to edit, share and curate our photos. I'd like to see something like Instagram for data, where you could be playful and find new ways to design what your [data](#) says about you."

More information: Metadating: Exploring the Romance and Future of Personal Data: [chriselsden.files.wordpress.co ... dating-cam-final.pdf](https://chriselsden.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/dating-cam-final.pdf)

Provided by Newcastle University

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