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Connecting Profile-to-Profile

How People Self-Present and Form Impressions of Others through Online Dating Profiles

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Online dating has profoundly altered the landscape of romantic connections in the twenty-first century. Not only do people turn to the Internet in large numbers to find romantic partners, but they also experience significant success in doing so. One nationally representative survey of U.S. adults shows that 17 percent of the heterosexual couples and 41 percent of the same-sex couples who had met in the previous ten years did so online (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). For heterosexual couples, this made the Internet the second most popular venue for meeting a romantic partner, after meeting through friends. Another study shows that, among Americans who married or began long-term committed relationships between 2005 and 2012, more than one-third had met online (Cacioppo et al. 2013). The same study shows that relationships originating online had a lower rate of divorce and a higher rate of satisfaction than those originating offline, although effect sizes were small (Cacioppo et al. 2013). The biggest predictors of using online dating websites are being single and being an Internet user (Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan 2010), suggesting that online dating has become a mainstream method for attracting romantic partners, rather than a niche filled by a specific group.

Clearly online dating is a transformative technology for romantic relationships. But how does it work? Its very name might be a misnomer, because "dating" oftentimes happens face-to-face or through interpersonal media (phone, text), rather than on online dating websites. These

websites simply facilitate romantic *introductions*. Users are typically asked to construct detailed profiles describing themselves and then are connected with other users in the system either by compatibility algorithms (e.g., eHarmony), by specifying their own search criteria (e.g., Match.com), or a combination of the two (e.g., OKCupid). If users like each other based on their respective profiles, they initiate contact and proceed to the "dating" stage of their relationship through mediated or face-to-face communication. Under these circumstances, we argue that *profile self-presentation*, or constructing a desired version of the self for potential partners to peruse, and *impression formation*, or evaluating potential partners based on their online profiles, are the single most vital elements of online dating.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze these two fundamental aspects of online dating. Since deception is a frequently used self-presentational tactic and one that elicits great concerns in online dating (Cali, Coleman, and Campbell 2013), we pay particular attention to how it infiltrates profile self-presentation. We synthesize the state-of-the-art literature and discuss the main theoretical frameworks that have been proposed to explicate these phenomena, with an eye on how the technological affordances inherent to online dating (e.g., unlimited composition time, editability, audience access) intersect with psychological variables (e.g., users' relationship goals, gender) in the production and evaluation of profiles. We end with proposals for future research.

SELF-PRESENTATION AND DECEPTION IN ONLINE DATING PROFILES

Self-presentation is defined as the process of constructing a version of self in order to convey a desired impression to an audience (Leary and Kowalski 1990). This construction process involves emphasizing certain attributes of self, downplaying others, and strategically utilizing deception in order to either rectify perceived shortcomings or ascribe to oneself credentials not possessed in reality. Decisions about the content of self-presentation, including the use of deception, are made based on self-presentational goals (i.e., what do I want to achieve based on this self-presentational act?), perceptions of the values and preferences of the audience (i.e., what is likely to impress my particular audience?), and the constraints and capabilities of the medium in which the self-presentation takes place (see also Toma and Hancock 2011).

Profile Self-Presentation

The theoretical framework of *selective self-presentation* (Walther 1996; 2007) has been fruitfully used to explicate online dating self-presentation,

precisely because of its emphasis on how media features affect online communicators' ability to convey a desired persona. Online dating profiles, as an interaction venue, are substantially different from face-to-face. At a basic level, claims about the self in an online dating setting take the form of written text (i.e., answers to open-ended questions, such as "about me," and close-ended questions, such as height and weight) and photographs, while face-to-face claims are oral and involve the entire embodied self. At a deeper level, online dating self-presentation is governed by a series of technological affordances that are typically unavailable face-to-face and that are theorized to substantially shape what gets presented online. The strength of the selective self-presentation framework lies in delineating these affordances, specifically:

- *Asynchronicity*, or the absence of real-time interaction, allows online daters unlimited time to think through and compose their self-presentational claims, unlike face-to-face daters, who often have to think on their feet to respond to potential partners' questions.
- *Editability* allows online daters to alter and refine their self-presentational claims until they are satisfied with them. Conversely, face-to-face daters cannot erase gaffes or undesirable statements and thus cannot improve upon their self-presentation once delivered.
- *The reallocation of cognitive resources* enables online communicators to invest the entirety of their attention and thought into the construction of their self-presentation, without interruption or distraction. For instance, online daters can easily retreat to a quiet space (e.g., office, bedroom, library) for a length of time of their choosing to craft their profiles. By contrast, face-to-face daters must field questions and deal with environmental stimuli (e.g., waiters, food, other diners, if at a restaurant) concomitantly with constructing their desired self; this leaves them with fewer mental resources to invest into their self-presentation.

The key proposition of selective self-presentation is that these affordances allow online communicators more control over their claims than is available to their face-to-face counterparts; as a result, online self-presentations should be highly strategic and in synch with self-presenters' goals. This claim received support on several online platforms: On Facebook, users reported constructing self-presentations that they believed strategically embellished the desirable aspects of their personalities, such as their sense of humor and sociability (Toma and Carlson 2015); on online discussion boards, users engaged in more editing behaviors and took more time to craft their statements when interacting with desirable than less desirable targets, indicating that they did, in fact, exploit technological affordances to make a good impression when motivated to do so (Walther 2007); when creating online avatars, participants presented more desirable images when given a dating than a blogging or gaming

premise, suggesting, again, that they took advantage of technological affordances to create attractive personae (Vasalou and Joinson 2009).

To understand how the notion of selective self-presentation applies to online dating, it is necessary to identify online daters' self-presentational goals, since selective self-presentation simply means that online daters are highly apt to act on their goals. How do online daters wish to come across in their profiles? Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs's (2006) pioneering work on this topic revealed that online daters experience competing desires, or tensions, that they must reconcile when crafting their profiles. On the one hand, they wish to come across as attractive as possible in order to be admired and entice potential mates. This desire for self-enhancement—that is, presenting a better version of self than strictly warranted by reality—is exacerbated by the perceived competitiveness of online dating. With dozens or even hundreds of singles populating the same dating arena, online daters feel compelled to stand out by boosting their attractiveness. On the other hand, online daters experience a need for authenticity, or presenting their veridical selves, because (a) they anticipate face-to-face interaction with potential partners, who might then be able to detect these deceptions and reject them on their account; and (b) they wish to be liked and appreciated for who they truly are, rather than for an unrealistic version of themselves. The online daters interviewed by Ellison et al. (2006) reported reconciling these competing desires by presenting elements of their "ideal selves"—that is, attributes that they wished they embodied and that they *could* conceivably attain in the future. For instance, one dater reported presenting herself as thinner in order to motivate herself to lose weight and therefore truthfully embody the self she claimed online. Resorting to the ideal self allows online daters to enhance their attractiveness while not significantly deviating from reality, or deviating in ways that cannot be justified or amended later. Importantly, such strategic self-presentation was enabled by the affordances of computer-mediated communication outlined earlier, providing support to the framework of selective self-presentation.

A more granular approach to the issue of online daters' self-presentational goals was taken by Toma and Hancock (Toma and Hancock 2010; Hancock and Toma 2009), who considered how online daters' self-presentational goals might be specifically tied to their understanding of what their audience wants. Evolutionary theory (e.g., Barber 1995; Buss and Schmitt 1993; Daly and Wilson 1995; Gangestad and Thornhill 1997; Thornhill and Gangestad 1993) is a useful lens for delineating what heterosexuals value in romantic partners, and therefore provides a framework for understanding online daters' audience-specific self-presentational goals. Evolutionary theory proposes that men and women developed mate preferences that, in the environment in which humans evolved, increased reproductive fitness—that is, their ability to successfully pass on their genes through offspring. Specifically, women devel-

oped a preference for men who could provide and protect, as this was necessary for survival during the difficult pregnancy and child-rearing process, when women themselves were less able to fend for themselves and their babies. Men's ability to provide and protect was denoted by markers of physical strength (e.g., height) and, in the current environment, by social status indicators (e.g., job, income, education). Men developed a preference for youthfulness and physical attractiveness in female partners; the former because women's ability to get pregnant expires at a much earlier age than men's, and the latter because physical attractiveness denotes healthy genes that would increase an offspring's likelihood of survival. As strategic self-presenters, heterosexual online daters should mold their self-presentations to their audiences' preferences, as predicted by evolutionary forces. Research finds support for these claims. Women online daters posted more photographs (an average of about four) than men (an average of about two), especially if they were attractive, as a way to showcase their physical appearance (Toma and Hancock 2010). Women also posted older photographs of themselves (an average of seventeen months old) than men (an average of six months old). These older photographs display a younger version of self, thus presumably appealing to men's preferences for youthfulness (Hancock and Toma 2009). By the same token, men gave themselves more leeway for embellishing their social status indicators (i.e., income, education), by declaring it more acceptable to misrepresent these elements than women (Toma, Hancock, and Ellison 2008). Note that, as before, these strategic self-presentations are enabled by the technological affordances postulated by the selective self-presentation framework.

Profile Deception

Let us now turn our attention to deception as a specific self-presentational tactic utilized by online daters. As mentioned before, people are generally wary of online deception, and perceive it to be a particularly salient problem in online dating. In a recent survey, about half of online daters reported serious concerns about the extent of prevarication in online dating profiles (Smith and Duggan 2013). These fears are likely to stem from the disembodied nature of online self-presentation, whereby online daters get to make self-presentational claims in the absence of the corporeal self (see also Toma, Jiang, and Hancock 2016), and from the impossibility of capturing a dynamic, constantly evolving self, into a static, two-dimensional (i.e., using text and photographs) profile. Indeed, an interview study reveals that online daters don't expect their own and others' profiles to be an exact replica of the offline self, but merely a good enough approximation, precisely because of the medium's limitations (Ellison, Hancock, and Toma 2012).

A large project examining the prevalence of deception in a sample of profiles from online daters in the New York City area found that 80 percent of daters had lied about either their height, weight, or age. However, deviations from the truth were small and gender-driven. Men increased their height by about half an inch, on average, whereas women were relatively honest about their height; women subtracted about eight pounds from their weight, significantly more than men, who only subtracted about two pounds, on average; and age was relatively honestly presented, with only a few outliers deviating from the truth. Notably, these deviations were measured objectively, in order to avoid the problem of having to rely on liars to be honest about their deceptions when probed by researchers. Participants were asked to step on a scale in order to obtain weight measurements, to stand against a measuring tape for height assessments, and to produce identification for verifying their date of birth (Toma, Hancock, and Ellison 2008). In a follow-up study of photographic deception, researchers found that the daters themselves rated their photographs as quite accurate, but judges who evaluated daters' photographs against an everyday photograph, taken by the researchers, had a different view. Judges rated women's photographs as significantly less accurate than men's, due to the presence of inaccuracies related to physical characteristics such as age, hairstyle, and skin (Hancock and Toma 2009). Overall, this pattern of deceptive self-presentation provides support for the selective self-presentation theoretical framework once again. Online daters did not lie indiscriminately, embellishing themselves simply because it is easy to do so online. Rather, they took advantage of technological affordances to produce deceptions that were frequent (in order to give themselves an advantage in the dating arena), but small (in order not to alienate potential mates upon subsequent face-to-face meetings), and strategically placed, appealing to the known preferences of the opposite gender. Men lied about their height, because women prefer taller men, and women lied about their weight and photographs presumably in order to enhance their physical attractiveness, which men favor in romantic partners. This pattern is consistent with the claims of evolutionary theory. The fact that photographs were the least accurate element of the profile—according to judges, but not to the daters themselves—reflects perhaps the extent of embellishment that is possible to use face-to-face before going on a date. Surely most daters did not plan to show up on a date looking like they did when they came to the lab to have their photograph taken for a research study. Thus, photographic deception may not be as problematic as the judges' ratings indicate, but may instead be small and strategic, consistent with the selective self-presentation framework.

IMPRESSION FORMATION IN ONLINE DATING PROFILES

Once online dating self-presentations are constructed, they are subject to scrutiny and evaluation by potential mates. How do online daters form impressions of others solely based on profiles? Much of the research to date has been concerned with the impact of *profile cues*, or bits of information contained in the profile, such as photographs, textual self-descriptions, or system-generated cues (e.g., time stamps about a users' last login) on impression formation in online environments. Two main theoretical frameworks have been advanced on this topic: social information processing theory (SIPT, Walther 1992) and choice architecture (Thaler and Sustein 2009), which we discuss below.

Social Information Processing Theory

While this theory was originally developed to explain how individuals develop impressions through text-only interactions, it has been subsequently expanded to include the evaluation of multimodal (i.e., text and photographs) online profiles. On the topic of forming impressions about online strangers, SIPT makes one straightforward prediction: In interaction contexts characterized by high levels of uncertainty (such as evaluating online strangers), every bit of information takes on much more meaning than it would otherwise. In order to reduce uncertainty, observers actively utilize each cue to extract judgments about their target, and ascribe them substantial diagnostic value. For instance, grammatical ability, the setting of photographs, or sequencing of hobbies become interpreted as highly telling of an unknown target's personality, although such information may be insignificant when evaluating a close friend's personality. Simply put, small online cues carry big meaning in terms of impression formation. An extension of this notion proposes that some online cues matter more than others. These cues have been labeled "sticky cues" (D'Angelo et al. 2015; Van Der Heide and Schumaker 2013), because they grab perceivers' attention and influence impression formation more than other cues. Following the dictates of SIPT, the majority of research on online dating impression formation has been concerned with identifying sticky cues and unpacking their meaning. Two such cues have received empirical attention: photographs and warranting cues. We describe them below.

Simply reviewing online dating websites reveals that most of them depend on photographs as the main way to showcase and differentiate among daters, at least initially. When online daters are connected with their matches, they are presented with thumbnails of these matches' photographs, on which they must click if they wish to obtain more information about that person. The profile photograph is literally the gateway to a potential partner's profile. Unsurprisingly, most online daters indi-

cate that they carefully attend to this photograph and make decisions about whom to pursue based on it (Couch and Pranee 2008). In fact, many refuse to even engage with profiles lacking photographs (Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs 2010). The photograph is ascribed such diagnostic value that it is often used as a benchmark against which the reliability of other profile information is gauged. Best and Delmege (2012), and Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai (2010), found that online daters utilize photographs as checks for textual self-disclosure, rating profiles as credible if the text was congruent with the photographs and the reverse if they were incongruent. For example, an incongruent online dating profile might provide textual self-disclosures of outdoor adventure, but photographs of bottle service at a club.

This is consistent with previous impression formation research on Facebook, which suggests that photographs carry greater impression formation weight than textual self-disclosures (D'Angelo et al. 2014; Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, and Schumaker 2012).

While online daters actively attend to photographs and seek out profiles with photographs, laboratory research suggests that the presence of photographs might not have the straightforwardly positive effect that daters believe it to have. In one study, profiles in which the photograph was removed by the experimenters were rated as more trustworthy than those that displayed a photograph, presumably because purely textual online information encourages observers to idealize the self-presenters—that is, to mentally fill in the blanks for unavailable information with positive information (Toma 2010). This could facilitate relationship development, provided, of course, that the trust is well-placed. Moreover, research finds that an especially attractive photograph can be problematic for women daters' perceived trustworthiness: Men perceived more attractive women online daters as less trustworthy, although women did not display the same bias for attractive men's photographs (McGloin and Denes 2016).

Warranting cues are defined to be pieces of information that are perceived to be as resistant to manipulation by the self-presenter, and are therefore deemed more credible (Walther and Parks, 2002). In the case of online dating, this includes system-generated cues (e.g., time of last login) or links to websites hosted by external organizations (e.g., companies where daters are employed). Wotipka and High (2016) showed that when online daters are sensitive to such cues, they do, in fact, ascribe higher credibility to profiles containing warranting cues. This is consistent with prior research on social networking sites showing that warranting cues are important determinants of online impression formation (DeAndrea et al. 2015; Hall, Pennington, and Lueders 2014; Fox, Warber, and Makstaller 2013; Utz 2010; Walther et al. 2009).

Choice Architecture

The second theoretical framework to inform research on impression formation in online dating is choice architecture (Thaler and Sustein 2009). Choice architecture refers to the manner in which choices are presented and arranged, either in physical spaces (e.g., grocery stores) or online spaces. Since online dating by definition operates by giving users choices between potential matches, so much so that many online daters view using these websites as akin to shopping (Heino et al. 2010), and since designers of these websites have substantial control over how these choices are presented to users (e.g., how many choices are given, when these choices are given, etc.), this framework seems to be especially relevant to online dating. Unbeknownst to online daters, the mere availability of choices may affect their impressions of potential matches.

Choice architecture can be conceptualized across several dimensions. The first is the sheer *amount of choice* available, an issue addressed by the choice overload theoretical framework (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). While people typically desire a greater amount of choice (see Patall, Cooper, and Robinson 2008 for review), research has shown that more options are not always better, as they paradoxically decrease satisfaction with the selected item (e.g., Arunachalam et al. 2009; Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Schwartz 2004). The second dimension is the *quality of choices*. Research suggests that having more attractive options also decreases satisfaction with the selected item (Scheibehenne, Rainer, and Todd 2009). The relationship between attractive options and choice satisfaction is so strong that a more attractive small set reduces satisfaction more than a less attractive large set (Scheibehenne, Rainer, and Todd 2009). The third dimension is the *complexity of choices*, conceptualized as the number of attributes each choice contains, and operationalized as the number of choices in a set multiplied by the number of attributes of each choice (Greifeneder, Scheibehenne, and Kleber, 2010). More complex choices reduce satisfaction with one's selection more than less complex choices (Mogilner, Rudnick, and Iyengar 2008). For instance, if individuals can place their choices into categories, they experience greater satisfaction with their choice, because this exercise simplifies the choice (Mogilner, Rudnick, and Iyengar 2008). The fourth dimension is the *reversibility of choices*, with the reversibility effect arguing that, when people can change their minds about a choice, they experience less satisfaction with that choice than when they are locked into it (e.g., Gilbert and Ebert 2002; Frey 1981; Frey et al. 1984). The final dimension is the *loss of options*. Research has begun to explore what happens when people are faced with a pool of choices that is likely to diminish over time through the disappearance of some of the choices. Findings indicate that in such a context, individuals who tend to explore more and exhaust all options before making a decision (i.e., maximizers), search less because they are concerned with losing

the options that they have (Patalano et al. 2015). In sum, the dimensions of choice architecture enumerated earlier (amount, quality, complexity, reversibility, and loss of choices) have been shown to affect people's perceptions of their choices in predictable ways: Choices that are more numerous, higher in quality, more complex, reversible, and less likely to disappear tend to decrease people's satisfaction with the selected item. Importantly, all these dimensions are highly salient to online dating.

Research to date has focused on the effects of the amount of choice available to online daters. A series of initial studies applying choice overload theory have found conflicting evidence. When single women were asked to select a hypothetical match out of four, twenty-four, or sixty-four online dating profiles, there was no impact of choice set size on satisfaction with the selection (Lenton and Stewart, 2008). However, Wu and Chiou (2009) and Yang and Chiou (2010) found that online daters who were presented with more matches (30 versus 60 versus 90, and 40 versus 80, respectively) engaged in more searching behaviors (i.e., examined more profiles) and selected partners who deviated more from their pre-specified ideal list of qualities, suggesting that choice overload did, in fact, have a psychological effect on online daters.

Attempting find some remedy to these inconsistent findings, we (D'Angelo and Toma 2016) conducted the most extensive study to date on the effect of choice overload on online daters' satisfaction with selected partners. Using an experimental design, we combined a number of key elements previously missing in the application of choice overload theory in online dating. First, unlike Lenton and Stewart (2008), we used a real online dating website, rather than a hypothetical one. Second, we hypothesized that online dating is a context where time matters in the sense that decrements in satisfaction should only be observed over time, and not immediately after a choice of a potential partner is made. Unlike choices of consumer goods, choices of romantic partners are complex and may require deeper thinking that unfolds over time. Thus, we asked participants to rate their satisfaction after an initial selection and again one week later. Finally, we considered the role of choice reversibility in satisfaction with a potential romantic partner, because reversibility is the basic premise of most dating websites (i.e., people can and frequently do change their minds about whom to date).

Results show that choice overload effects do emerge in online dating, but only after the passage of time. Consistent with Lenton and Stwart (2008), we found that, immediately after making their selection, online daters matched with six versus twenty-four potential partners did not differ in their levels of satisfaction with their choice. However, after one week had elapsed, those daters who chose from the larger pool were less satisfied with their choice, and more likely to want to change it, than daters choosing from the smaller pool, consistent with the choice overload theory. Reversibility did not have an effect on choice satisfaction,

with daters who were told they could change their minds about their selection registering the same levels of satisfaction as those who were told they couldn't change their minds, both initially and a week later. However, online daters paired with a larger pool of choices *and* given the ability to reverse their selection were the only ones to experience a drop in satisfaction with their choice over the course of the week, and they ended up being the least satisfied of all participants in the study at the end of the week (D'Angelo and Toma 2016). This nascent body of evidence therefore suggests that the choice architecture that most closely resembles that of popular dating sites (i.e., many choices and the ability to change one's mind) may, in fact, be detrimental to online daters' satisfaction with potential partners.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Online dating self-presentation and impression formation are two facets of the same coin, yet they have received different levels of academic attention and present distinct opportunities for future research. Let us consider first online dating self-presentation. As this review shows, there is a well-developed and theoretically grounded literature on (1) the psychological goals that animate online daters, and how these goals are sometimes in conflict with one another; (2) the construction behaviors that online daters engage in, such as the posting of photographs and text; and (3) the use of deception as a self-presentational strategy. We argue that each of these branches of the literature can be deepened by future research. On the issue of psychological goals, research can take a more granular look at the different types of relationships pursued by online daters (e.g., casual versus serious; monogamous versus non-monogamous) as these are likely to affect self-presentational decisions (see also Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino 2006). For instance, online daters looking for casual liaisons can be expected to invest less effort into their profiles and emphasize their physical appearance more than daters looking for serious relationships. On the issue of construction behaviors, future research should focus on the *content* of self-presentations by performing content analyses of both textual and photographic claims. This approach has not been undertaken yet, with extant research focusing on quantitative indicators such as the number of photographs posted (Toma and Hancock 2010) or the length of the profile (Toma and Hancock 2012). What do online daters say about themselves? How do they use humor? What aspects of themselves do they forefront and which do they obstruct? What kinds of photographs do they post (e.g., solo versus group, head shots versus full-body shots, with or without pets). Big data analyses and natural language processing can be leveraged to address these questions, given recent developments on these techniques (see Shah, Cappella, and

Neuman 2015). On the issue of deception, we recommend that future research replicate existing findings, given the constantly shifting nature of online daters' demographics and relational goals. Larger samples should also be used, although this is likely to be difficult if researchers choose to verify online daters' claims, a procedure that requires online daters to be interviewed in person. The detectability of online dating deception in face-to-face meetings with future partners should also be examined, as it is likely to shape the path of relationship development. Relatedly, we also recommend that future research pursue questions regarding the *outcome* of using various self-presentation and deception tactics in online dating profiles: Which of these tactics is successful in securing attention on the site, and in fulfilling online daters' relationship goals? To the best of our knowledge, there is no research on this topic, despite its practical and theoretical importance.

On the theoretical front, the framework of selective self-presentation has demonstrated much utility in explaining online self-presentation patterns, and we expect it to maintain its validity moving forward. Evolutionary theory has also received strong support, although this theory is unsuited for explaining same-sex dating. We recommend that future research utilize a gender socialization approach to explaining gender-based mate preferences and how these preferences shape self-presentational choices.

A slightly different picture emerges for the literature on online dating impression formation. Here, we find the literature to be underdeveloped theoretically, with much opportunity to grow. The SIPT framework provides a general overview of the importance of small cues online, yet it does not make specific predictions about how individual cues operate in the impression formation process. It is encouraging that research has begun to apply warranting theory to make more granular propositions about the judgments elicited by specific types of cues—in this case, those that are more or less amenable to manipulation by the self-presenter. We recommend that future research more comprehensively apply warranting theory to online dating. Other theories are also suitable. For example, research in impression formation has established a non-normativity effect (Carr and Walther 2014; D'Angelo and Van Der Heide 2016), whereby cues that are unexpected and violate conventional self-presentational practices carry more weight in the impression formation process than normative cues, because they draw more attention. We believe the non-normativity effect can be fruitfully extended to online dating. Finally, it bears noting that impression formation is a holistic process, and considering the impact of profile cues in isolation does not illuminate the full picture of how online daters evaluate potential partners. To have a full understanding of what cues are more "sticky," it is important for online dating impression formation research to continue to test different types of cues against each other. While there exists a rich line of research purs-

ing this path of impression formation research via social networking profiles (D'Angelo and Van Der Heide 2016; Carr and Walther, 2014; Van Der Heide et al. 2012; Walther et al. 2009), an important extension exists in the application of this material to online dating.

Our own choice architecture framework needs to be expanded in substantial ways. First, there is no clear indication of what actually *causes a drop* in satisfaction with choice overload. Do individuals simply feel regret for options discarded (Iyengar and Lepper 2000) or is there a more complex process of expectation disconfirmation (Diehl and Poynor, 2010) in action? Beyond mechanisms, the concepts of quality of options and choice set complexity have not yet been applied to online dating despite their promise. For instance, do individuals like Tinder dates better because the platform presents simpler sets?

A final, yet important, area for ripe for exploration in online dating is the notion of loss of options. While consumer goods are likely to be perpetually available, online daters are not: Options can disappear quickly as people partner up and drop out of the site. Thus, it would be beneficial both for online dating impression formation research and for choice architecture research in general to explore the implications of loss of options in online dating.

CONCLUSION

Online dating challenges millions of users to construct versions of themselves and to carefully attend to others' in the hopes of forging romantic connections. Personal profiles on these sites have become veritable gateways to romance. Understanding the complex psychological and communicative dynamics that shape these profiles is a task of utmost theoretical and practical importance. This chapter highlights the important strides academic research has made towards this goal and outlines exciting avenues for future research.

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