

Modern love—The internet has transformed the search for love and partnership (3)

Notes & Cues:

Article:

The fact that online daters have so much more choice can break down barriers: evidence suggests that the internet is boosting interracial marriages by bypassing homogenous social groups. But daters are also more able to choose partners like themselves. Assortative mating already shoulders some of the blame for income inequality. Online dating may make the effect more pronounced: education levels are displayed prominently on dating profiles in a way they would never be offline.

The domination of online dating by a handful of firms and their algorithms is another source of worry. The entry into the market of Facebook, armed with data from its 2.2bn users, will provide clues as to whether online dating will inexorably consolidate into fewer, larger platforms.

But even if the market does not become ever more concentrated, the process of coupling (or not) has unquestionably become more centralised. Romance used to be a distributed activity which took place in a profusion of bars, clubs, churches and offices; now enormous numbers of people rely on a few companies to meet their mate. That hands a small number of coders tremendous power to engineer mating outcomes. Competition offers some protection against such a possibility; so too might greater transparency over the principles used by dating apps to match people up.

Yet such concerns should not obscure the good that comes from the modern way of romance. The right partners can elevate and nourish each other. The wrong ones can ruin both their lives. Digital dating offers millions of people a more efficient way to find a good mate. That is something to love.

Summary: