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PROJECT

Mate Markets: How Populations and Behavior Shape Online Dating Experiences

Both academia and popular culture recognize that romantic relationships are pursued within a market. The language laypeople use to talk about mate search - "he's a hot commodity"; "she's out of your league" - implies scarcity, competition, and a hierarchy of desirability. Classic works in economics and mathematics provide models of how mate preferences aggregate into observed matches. But these studies treat relationship markets as abstract, undifferentiated entities. This project uses a rich trove of activity data from multiple online dating sites to understand why dating experiences among men and women vary markedly across cities.

Building on theoretical and empirical work in behavioral ecology, I focus on two distinct classes of behavior: mate choice (i.e., preferences and choosiness) and various forms of competition. My study reveals how dating markets shape men and women's online romantic experiences. They do so both directly, by constraining the type and number of people one is exposed to, and indirectly, through the dynamic interplay between users' behavior and experience. I propose a general framework for understanding how social contexts interact with human behavior.

Recommended Reading

Bruch, Elizabeth and Mark Newman (2018). "Aspirational Pursuit of Mates in Online Dating Markets." *Science Advances*, forthcoming.

Bruch, Elizabeth and Fred Feinberg (2017). "Decision-Making Processes in Social Contexts." *Annual Review of Sociology* 43: 207-227.

Bruch, Elizabeth, Fred Feinberg, and Kee Yeun Lee (2016). "Extracting Multistage Screening Rules from Online Dating Activity Data." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113, 38: 10530-10535.

Singles in Cities: How Places Shape Men and Women's Romantic Experiences

Both academia and popular culture recognize that romantic relationships are pursued within a market. The everyday language people use to talk about mate search - "he's a hot commodity"; "she's out of your league" - implies scarcity, competition, and a hierarchy of desirability. Classic work in economics and mathematics provide formal models of how mate preferences aggregate within marriage or dating markets. Empirical studies in sociology and demography document an association between the ratio of men to women in a city and how cities differ in the fraction of singles who are married, the fraction of children borne to unwed people, and other partnering outcomes. But we know little about whether, how, and why dating and courtship experiences differ across cities.

I use rich activity data from online dating sites to explore how places and human behavior jointly shape men and women's romantic experiences. Building on work in behavioral ecology, I focus on two distinct classes of mate-seeking behavior: choice (i.e., preferences and choosiness) and competition. I find that local markets shape dating experiences both directly, by constraining the type and number of people one is exposed to, and indirectly, through the dynamic interplay between users' behavior and experience. In addition to providing a rich empirical description of mate seeking strategies and how they vary across American cities, I aim to develop a general framework for understanding how social context interacts with individual choices to shape human experience.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Bruch, Elizabeth E. (Washington, DC [u.a.], 2018)

Aspirational pursuit of mates in online dating markets

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1040499090>

Bruch, Elizabeth E. (Chicago, Ill., 2014)

How population structure shapes neighborhood segregation

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1027746071>