



# THE WASTE REPORT

February 14, 2019

## SWIPE LEFT ON WASTE

### **THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH AND THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION ARE SPENDING UP TO \$1,200,000.00 TO STUDY ONLINE DATING USER HABITS**

The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) “was founded in 1962 to investigate human development throughout the entire life process, with a focus on understanding disabilities and important events that occur during pregnancy,” according to their website, which also states that their “mission is to ensure every person is born healthy and wanted, that women suffer no harmful effects from reproductive processes, and that all children have the chance to achieve their full potential for healthy and productive lives.”<sup>1</sup> The National Science Foundation (NSF) was created “to promote the progress of science; to advance the health, prosperity, and welfare, to secure the national defense...”<sup>2</sup> Apparently NICHD and NSF think a good way to advance these missions is by **studying dating app user habits, funded by cobbling together several grants totaling \$1.2 million.**<sup>3</sup>

Some of the findings have made more headlines than others, though what they all have in common is that they have nothing to do with either the NIH or NSF’s purpose. Most notable was a finding published in *The New York Times* that “sexual desirability peaks at age 50” for men and at age 18 for women.<sup>4</sup> But the *Times* did not highlight the other findings this research unearthed, which included **finding that online dating app users pursue potential mates “who are on average about 25% more desirable than themselves,” as well as finding “that the probability of receiving a response” on an app “markedly” decreases when the pursued is more desirable than the pursuer, and that dating app users exert greater effort to pursue “more desirable” mates than they do to pursue less desirable ones.**<sup>5</sup> Another groundbreaking finding funded by these tax dollars was that the users “enact screeners (‘deal breakers’) that encode acceptability cutoffs,” such as physical distance from the user.<sup>6</sup>

There is no reason research like this should receive federal funding. In truth, the only suitable financiers would be dating app companies themselves. It is silly to pretend this study has anything to do with reproductive and childhood development, “public health,” or “science promotion” more generally.

NIH and NSF grant review panels would do the taxpayers a favor by following a strategy of dating app users: only swipe right on the most attractive proposals.

<sup>1</sup> Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, “About NICHD.” *National Institutes of Health*, 2019. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about>.

<sup>2</sup> National Science Foundation, “At a Glance.” *National Science Foundation*, 2019. <https://www.nsf.gov/about/glance.jsp>.

<sup>3</sup> National Institutes of Health, Grant # K01-HD-079554, <http://grantome.com/grant/NIH/K01-HD079554-01>; National Science Foundation, Award #DMS-1107796 [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1107796](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1107796); National Science Foundation, Award #1407207 [https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1407207](https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1407207).

While the author might have used a portion of the funds for other studies, due to a lack of transparency in spending breakdown, we can ascertain that a majority of the published research was to study dating app user habits, though the exact percentage above a majority is unclear.

<sup>4</sup> Salam, Maya, “For Online Daters, Women Peak at 18 While Men Peak at 50, Study Finds. Oy.” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2018. <https://nyti.ms/2N4E70I>.

<sup>5</sup> Bruch, Elizabeth E. and M.E.J. Newman, “Aspirational Pursuit of Mates in Online Dating Markets.” *Science Advances*, August 8, 2018. <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/advances/4/8/eaap9815.full.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Bruch, Elizabeth E. Fred Feinberg, and Kee Yeun Lee, “Extracting Multistage Screening Rules from Online Dating Activity Data.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, August 30, 2016. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5035909/>.