

Online dating first empowers, then disappoints

Internet dating, which sparks such a rush of emotions between people even before they have met, often ends in disappointment and failure.

According to a new study, the initial spate of replies a person gets on net dating sites makes them seem very popular.

The kind of attention is a lot more "than if they had walked into a bar", said Matthew Bambling of the Queensland University of Technology, who led the study,

"It gives a feeling of being powerful. The online environment doesn't have the conventions and context of a real life meeting and so online interactions can have a bigger impact on a person," Bambling noted.

He said this lack of inhibition that online interactions allow means some people are carried away by their feelings and "don't use their heads as they would in normal social situations when meeting people".

Bambling said he has seen people in counselling regarding the consequences of making emotional investments in people they had been emailing after meeting them on line.

"They often become quickly emotionally involved and invest in the other person before meeting. After meeting they move too fast because an emotional relationship actually started when they began interacting online before meeting, in which time they build up a fantasy view of the other person," he said.

"When they do meet, often the other person is not always what they had imagined but if they are already emotionally invested they go out anyway. They can end up wasting a lot of time trying to make it work."

Bambling said to avoid pitfalls in online dating people should arrange to meet up after the first few e-mails. This helps to avoid over-investing emotionally or building up a fantasy about the other person.

"The main thing to remember is to make real-life contact as soon as possible if you are interested in someone because it is here that you will know if a relationship is a possibility."

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