

EXPERIENCE, STANDARDS, AND COMMITMENT IN DATING MARKETS

Martín Rossi (Universidad de San Andrés)

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Departamento de Economía
Universidad de San Andrés

*Vito Dumas 284, B1644BID, Victoria,
San Fernando, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Teléfono +54 11 7078 0400
Email: economia@udesa.edu.ar*

Experience, Standards, and Commitment in Dating Markets

Martin A. Rossi

Universidad de San Andres

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Abstract

Dating technologies have dramatically reduced search frictions in romantic markets, leading standard search and matching models to predict improved long-term matching outcomes. This paper challenges that prediction by introducing a novel mechanism through which increased relationship experience can undermine long-term commitment. We develop a dynamic model in which individuals evaluate partners relative to a personal, multidimensional reference frontier formed by past sexual relationships. Early experience is beneficial, as it reveals unobserved dimensions of compatibility and facilitates learning about preferences. However, as experience accumulates, expanding personal benchmarks raise standards and increase the likelihood that future partners fall short along salient dimensions. As a result, the model predicts a non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term commitment: moderate experience facilitates commitment, while excessive experience leads to persistent search, relationship instability, and delayed exit from dating markets. The framework offers a new perspective on how improved short-run matching may weaken long-run relational stability.

JEL Classification: D83; J12; D91.

Keywords: Search and matching; Reference-dependent preferences; Long-term commitment.

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, dating markets have undergone a profound transformation. The diffusion of online dating platforms and mobile dating applications has dramatically reduced search costs, expanded the effective size of local mating markets, and increased the frequency of romantic encounters (Hitsch et al., 2010; Rosenfeld et al., 2019; Oyer, 2020). A growing literature documents that individuals now meet potential partners more easily, more quickly, and from a broader pool than in earlier technological environments. From the perspective of standard search and matching models, these changes should unambiguously improve matching outcomes (Mortensen, 1986; Burdett and Coles, 1997; Shimer and Smith, 2000).

In canonical search and matching frameworks, lower search frictions allow individuals to sample more potential partners before committing to a relationship, improving the expected quality of the accepted match (Becker, 1973; Mortensen, 1986; Burdett and Coles, 1997). If preferences are stable and evaluated independently across matches, improved match quality should, in turn, increase the likelihood of forming satisfying and durable partnerships. Under these assumptions, easier entry into relationships improves long-term outcomes.

Yet widespread narratives, together with descriptive and survey-based evidence, point to tensions between improved matching technologies and long-term commitment, including high relationship turnover, dissatisfaction, and difficulty sustaining long-term partnerships (Finkel et al., 2012; Oyer, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2020, 2023).

This apparent disconnection between improved matching technology and long-run relational stability poses a puzzle for standard economic models of partner choice, which predict unambiguously positive effects of lower search frictions. A key implicit assumption in these frameworks is that search affects whom individuals meet, but not how they evaluate potential partners once encountered. This paper focuses on a key margin altered by dating technologies: the number of past partners an individual has experienced, denoted by N .

We define N as the number of distinct individuals with whom a person has had sexual relationships. This definition is not merely behavioral but informational. Sexual relationships play a central role in revealing dimensions of compatibility that are otherwise difficult to observe through dating alone. Several relationship-relevant attributes—such as sexual chemistry, emotional responsiveness, affection, and post-intimacy behavior—are only imperfectly inferred prior to sexual interaction. Expressions of desire or attentiveness before sex may be confounded with short-term sexual interest, while traits such as affection, care, or emotional availability often become observable only after intimacy occurs. As a result, sexual relationships serve as a natural informational threshold beyond which multiple salient dimensions of a partner’s type are revealed (see, e.g., Finkel et al., 2012). Consequently, an individual’s experiential history relevant for future partner evaluation expands discretely with each sexual partner.

Importantly, not every sexual relationship necessarily alters future evaluation standards. Some relationships reveal attribute realizations that are entirely dominated by past experience and therefore leave personal benchmarks unchanged. Throughout the paper, observed experience N should

be interpreted as an imperfect proxy for the experience that effectively expands an individual’s evaluation frontier.

The paper proposes a new mechanism through which increases in experience can undermine, rather than strengthen, the formation of long-term romantic relationships. The central insight is that individuals do not evaluate a current partner in isolation. Instead, evaluations are reference-dependent and shaped by the individual’s own history of past relationships. While reference dependence is well established in economic decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Kőszegi and Rabin, 2006), its role in romantic and marital choice remains largely unexplored. Crucially, the reference point studied here is multidimensional and personal: it reflects the set of attribute realizations the individual has previously experienced across the dimensions they themselves deem salient.

We model individuals as facing potential partners characterized by vectors of attributes—such as physical attractiveness, economic stability, emotional compatibility, or sexual chemistry—consistent with multidimensional approaches to partner choice in the marriage market literature (Chiappori et al., 2017). In most existing models, however, these attributes are aggregated into a single utility index that governs acceptance and commitment decisions. Rather than comparing each new partner on the basis of such an aggregated scalar measure or relative to the best previously observed match, individuals in our framework construct a personal evaluation frontier based on the most salient realizations they have experienced in each dimension.

Importantly, the framework developed in this paper is not a model of partner choice. We do not characterize how individuals select among alternative partners, nor do we propose a replacement for standard models of mate selection. Instead, the focus is on evaluation and continuation: how individuals assess an ongoing relationship, and how accumulated experience shapes satisfaction and commitment decisions conditional on matching. The mechanism we emphasize operates even holding partner selection fixed. While reference-dependent evaluation may have implications for behavior earlier in the matching process if individuals internalize its dynamic consequences, these implications are secondary to the paper’s core contribution.

The logic of the model highlights a fundamental trade-off in the accumulation of relationship experience. When experience is limited, individuals face substantial uncertainty about their own preferences and about the dimensions of compatibility that matter most to them. Early sexual and romantic experiences are therefore valuable: they reveal previously unobserved attributes of partners, help individuals identify salient dimensions of compatibility, and allow them to construct an initial personal evaluation frontier. In this range, increases in experience can improve long-term matching through learning and reduced uncertainty.

As experience accumulates, however, additional relationships are increasingly likely to expand the set of attribute realizations the individual has previously encountered. When satisfaction is evaluated relative to this experience-based benchmark, it becomes more likely that a current partner falls short along at least one salient dimension, even if the partner is high-quality along multiple dimensions. In this region, further experience can reduce relationship stability and undermine

long-term commitment.

The model therefore predicts a non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term relationship outcomes. Moderate levels of experience can improve matching by helping individuals learn what they value and avoid clearly incompatible partners. Excessive frontier-expanding experience, by contrast, can erode satisfaction and commitment by inflating personal standards over time.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides an intuitive overview of the decision problem and the role of experience in shaping personal standards. Section 3 introduces a dynamic model in which sexual experience endogenously shapes an individual’s evaluation frontier. Section 4 characterizes optimal behavior and derives the main theoretical results, including the non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term commitment. Section 5 discusses empirical implications and testable predictions. Section 6 outlines directions for further work. Section 7 concludes.

2 Model intuition and setup

This section presents an informal overview of the model and its key mechanisms. The exposition is deliberately non-formal and focuses on the individual decision problem and the role of experience in shaping evaluation standards, leaving explicit timing, functional forms, and equilibrium analysis to the next section.

Individuals and attributes

Time is discrete. Individuals sequentially encounter potential partners drawn from an exogenous distribution. Each potential partner is characterized by a vector of attributes

$$x = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_K),$$

where each dimension represents a characteristic relevant for relationship satisfaction, such as physical attractiveness, economic stability, emotional responsiveness, or sexual chemistry. The set of relevant dimensions, as well as their relative salience, is individual-specific.

Information and sexual relationships

Not all attributes are perfectly observable upon meeting. Some dimensions are partially revealed through dating and interaction, while others become fully observable only after sexual intimacy. As a result, sexual relationships play a distinctive informational role by generating discrete additions to the individual’s experiential set.

We define N as the number of distinct individuals with whom an agent has had a sexual relationship. Each increase in N corresponds to the realization of a new attribute vector that becomes part of the agent’s relationship-relevant experience.

Experience-based evaluation

Individuals evaluate current partners not in isolation, but relative to their own past experiences. Let $\mathcal{X}_N$ denote the set of attribute vectors realized through the individual’s past N sexual relationships. This set summarizes the individual’s experiential history relevant for partner evaluation.

Rather than aggregating attributes into a single scalar utility index, individuals evaluate partners dimension by dimension. Past experiences make certain levels of attributes salient, shaping future evaluations. In particular, when an individual has previously experienced a high realization in a given dimension, lower realizations in that dimension become more difficult to accept, even if compensated by strengths elsewhere.

Personal evaluation frontier

We summarize this process by assuming that individuals form a personal evaluation frontier based on their experiential history $\mathcal{X}_N$. This frontier captures the most salient or best realizations the individual has experienced along each relevant dimension. The frontier is personal, multidimensional, and path-dependent: it depends on individual experience, is defined separately across attributes, and evolves with N .

Preferences need not be smooth or strictly increasing. In some dimensions, individuals display threshold-based preferences: once a minimum acceptable level has been experienced, outcomes below that level generate dissatisfaction, while further improvements above the threshold yield limited additional utility (Simon, 1955; DellaVigna, 2018).

Relationship decisions

At each point in time, an individual compares a current partner’s attribute vector to their personal evaluation frontier. A relationship is more likely to be maintained when the partner does not fall short of past experience along salient dimensions. Conversely, falling short along even a single dimension can generate dissatisfaction and increase the likelihood of separation.

The role of experience

Experience generates a fundamental trade-off. When N is small, additional experience reduces uncertainty and facilitates learning about preferences. As N grows, however, the expansion of the personal evaluation frontier increases the likelihood that future partners fall short along salient dimensions, reducing satisfaction and relationship stability.

Preview of model’s results

This structure generates a non-monotonic relationship between experience N and long-term relationship outcomes. Moderate experience improves matching and commitment by facilitating learning, while excessive experience inflates personal standards and undermines the willingness

to commit. The next section formalizes this intuition and characterizes optimal search, sexual behavior, and commitment decisions.

3 Model

This section formalizes the framework introduced in Section 2. We develop a dynamic model of partner search and relationship continuation in which sexual experience endogenously shapes individual evaluation standards. The key departure from standard search models is that past relationships affect not only information but also future reference points and acceptance decisions.

Time, agents, and meetings

Time is discrete and indexed by $t = 0, 1, 2, \dots$. We consider a representative individual who sequentially encounters potential partners drawn from a stationary and exogenous distribution. Focusing on a single agent is without loss of generality, as the model abstracts from strategic interaction and matching externalities in order to isolate the individual decision problem.

In each period, the individual meets at most one potential partner. If no long-term relationship has been formed, meetings continue over time. Once a long-term commitment is entered, the model ends.

Partner characteristics

Each potential partner is characterized by a vector of attributes

$$x = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_K),$$

where each dimension corresponds to a relationship-relevant attribute, such as physical attractiveness, economic stability, emotional compatibility, or sexual chemistry. Attribute vectors are independently and identically drawn across encounters from a joint distribution $F(x)$, with support in $\mathbb{R}_+^K$.

The set of relevant dimensions is individual-specific but taken as exogenous in the analysis.

Information structure and sexual relationships

Upon meeting a potential partner, only a subset of attributes is observed. Some dimensions are observable through dating and interaction, while others become fully observable only after sexual intimacy. We assume that entering a sexual relationship reveals the full attribute vector x .

Sexual relationships therefore constitute informationally discrete events. Let N_t denote the cumulative number of distinct partners with whom the individual has had a sexual relationship up to time t . Each increase in N_t corresponds to the realization of a new fully observed attribute vector that becomes part of the individual's experiential history.

Experience set and personal evaluation frontier

Let

$$\mathcal{X}_t = \{x^1, x^2, \dots, x^{N_t}\}$$

denote the set of attribute vectors associated with past sexual partners. This set summarizes the individual's experience relevant for partner evaluation.

Individuals evaluate current partners relative to this experience. Rather than aggregating attributes into a single scalar utility index, evaluation occurs dimension by dimension, with past experiences shaping salient benchmarks.

We summarize this process by defining a personal evaluation frontier. For each dimension $k \in \{1, \dots, K\}$, define

$$\bar{x}_{k,t} = \max_{x \in \mathcal{X}_t} x_k,$$

the highest realization of attribute k experienced by the individual up to time t . The vector

$$\bar{x}_t = (\bar{x}_{1,t}, \bar{x}_{2,t}, \dots, \bar{x}_{K,t})$$

constitutes the individual's personal evaluation frontier.

The frontier is multidimensional, personal, and path-dependent. It evolves endogenously with experience and summarizes the individual's reference point for future evaluations.

As a consequence, sexual intimacy expands the personal evaluation frontier only if it reveals attribute realizations that exceed past experience along at least one salient dimension. Sexual interactions with partners whose attributes are dominated by the existing frontier do not affect future standards.

Preferences and satisfaction

Preferences are reference-dependent. A current partner with attributes x generates satisfaction only if the partner meets the individual's personal standards along all salient dimensions. Falling short along any dimension generates dissatisfaction and increases the likelihood of separation, even if the partner performs well along other dimensions.

To capture threshold behavior, we assume that for each dimension there exists a minimum acceptable level relative to the experienced frontier. Improvements beyond the frontier yield limited additional utility, while outcomes below it generate disproportionately negative evaluations. Satisfaction therefore depends on the reference frontier $\bar{x}_t$, rather than on absolute attribute levels alone.

Decision problem

In each period in which the individual meets a potential partner, the decision problem unfolds in stages.

First, conditional on the information available prior to sexual activity, the individual decides whether to enter a sexual relationship. This decision trades off informational and experiential gains against the future cost of expanding the evaluation frontier.

Second, if sexual intimacy occurs, the full attribute vector is revealed and added to the experience set. The individual then decides whether to continue the relationship toward long-term commitment or to separate and return to the dating market.

Sexual decisions are therefore forward-looking and endogenous. Individuals internalize the potential future cost of sexual intimacy when it carries a risk of expanding the evaluation frontier.

Dynamics and trade-offs

The model embeds a fundamental intertemporal trade-off. When experience is limited, additional sexual relationships are beneficial: they reveal previously unobserved dimensions of compatibility, reduce uncertainty about preferences, and help individuals identify salient attributes.

As experience accumulates, the expansion of the personal evaluation frontier increases the probability that future partners fall short along at least one salient dimension, reducing satisfaction and undermining commitment incentives.

Summary

The model predicts a non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term relationship formation. Moderate experience improves matching and facilitates commitment by enhancing learning. Excessive experience raises personal standards, leading to persistent search, relationship instability, and delayed exit from the dating market.

The next section characterizes optimal behavior and formally derives the conditions under which experience transitions from beneficial to detrimental for long-term commitment.

4 Results

This section characterizes optimal behavior and derives the main theoretical implications of the model. The central result is that the relationship between sexual experience and long-term commitment is non-monotonic. All formal proofs are provided in Appendix A.

We proceed in three steps. First, we describe optimal continuation decisions for a given level of experience. Second, we analyze how accumulated experience affects commitment probabilities. Third, we characterize optimal sexual behavior and derive the main non-monotonicity result.

Optimal continuation decisions

Consider an individual with experience level N_t and personal evaluation frontier $\bar{x}_t$. After entering a sexual relationship with a partner of type x , the individual decides whether to continue the relationship toward long-term commitment or to separate and return to the dating market.

Continuation is optimal if and only if the realized attribute vector meets the individual's personal evaluation frontier across all salient dimensions. Because falling short along any single dimension generates dissatisfaction, continuation requires

$$x_k \geq \bar{x}_{k,t} \quad \text{for all relevant } k.$$

This decision rule implies that commitment thresholds are endogenous and history-dependent. As experience accumulates, the evaluation frontier expands, making continuation decisions increasingly stringent over time.

Experience and commitment probabilities

Let $p(N)$ denote the probability that a randomly encountered partner, once fully revealed, satisfies the individual's evaluation frontier and results in long-term commitment. Because the frontier is defined by the maximum realizations experienced in each dimension, $p(N)$ depends directly on accumulated experience.

For low levels of experience, increases in N improve decision quality by reducing uncertainty about partner attributes and individual preferences. In this region, additional experience decreases the probability of committing to an incompatible partner and can increase the likelihood of entering a stable long-term relationship.

As experience grows, however, marginal increases in N primarily operate through an expansion of the personal evaluation frontier. The probability that a future partner exceeds past experience along all salient dimensions decreases rapidly as the frontier moves outward. Beyond a certain point, higher experience therefore reduces the likelihood of commitment.

Optimal sexual behavior

Sexual decisions are forward-looking and endogenous. Because sexual relationships may expand experience and thereby affect future evaluation standards, individuals internalize the dynamic consequences of sexual intimacy.

When experience is limited, individuals optimally engage in sexual relationships to acquire information about partner attributes and to learn which dimensions of compatibility matter most for long-term satisfaction. As experience accumulates and commitment becomes harder to achieve, individuals become increasingly attentive to whether sexual intimacy is likely to expand personal standards and affect future evaluation.

This mechanism generates endogenous restraint in sexual behavior: optimal sexual decisions evolve over the search process, even in the absence of changes in preferences or meeting technology. Importantly, sexual activity per se is not costly; its dynamic consequences depend on whether it alters the individual's evaluation frontier.

Main result

The core implication of the model is summarized in the following proposition.

[Non-monotonicity of experience and commitment] There exists an experience level $N^* > 0$ such that the probability of entering a long-term relationship is increasing in experience for $N < N^*$ and decreasing in experience for $N > N^*$.

Proof. See Appendix A.

This result formalizes the intuition developed in Sections 2 and 3. Early experience improves matching by facilitating learning and reducing uncertainty. Excessive experience raises personal standards through an expanding evaluation frontier, reducing the feasibility of long-term commitment.

Persistence and delayed exit

An immediate corollary of Proposition 1 is that individuals with high levels of experience may remain in dating markets longer, even when encountering partners who perform strongly along multiple observable dimensions. Persistent search arises not from optimistic beliefs about future encounters, but from reference-dependent dissatisfaction induced by past experience.

As a result, reductions in search frictions that increase sexual experience can generate delayed exit from dating markets and reduced long-term relationship formation, despite enlarging choice sets.

5 Empirical implications

This section discusses empirical implications of the model and outlines testable predictions that distinguish the proposed mechanism from standard search and matching frameworks. The focus is on mapping the model’s dynamic logic to observable patterns in relationship data, rather than reiterating the theoretical intuition developed earlier.

Experience, satisfaction, and separation

A central implication of the model is that accumulated experience primarily affects long-term outcomes through relationship satisfaction and continuation decisions. Holding observable partner characteristics constant, individuals with greater accumulated experience are more likely to experience dissatisfaction in ongoing relationships and to exhibit higher separation hazards.

This pattern arises from reference-dependent evaluation. Current partners are assessed relative to an experience-based personal evaluation frontier shaped by past relationships. As experience accumulates, it becomes more likely that a current partner falls short along at least one salient dimension, even if the partner performs well along multiple observable attributes. Dissatisfaction therefore reflects elevated personal benchmarks rather than poor matching opportunities per se.

Observed experience versus frontier-expanding experience

An important distinction for empirical interpretation concerns the nature of experience. The model differentiates between observed sexual experience and experience that effectively expands personal evaluation standards. Not every sexual relationship alters future benchmarks: interactions with partners whose attributes are dominated by previously experienced realizations do not shift the evaluation frontier.

As a result, observed experience is an imperfect proxy for the relevant state variable in the model. Empirical estimates based on the number of past sexual partners should therefore be interpreted as average effects that combine relationships that expand the evaluation frontier with others that do not. This distinction implies attenuation in empirical estimates and heterogeneous effects across individuals, depending on the distribution of partner attributes they have encountered.

Implications for long-term commitment and stability

At the level of observable long-term outcomes, the model predicts that the likelihood of sustaining long-term relationships declines once experience is sufficiently high to generate frequent shortfalls relative to personal evaluation standards. Rather than predicting that highly experienced individuals are less likely to form relationships per se, the model predicts that they are more likely to exit relationships due to dissatisfaction, conditional on entering them.

Empirically, this mechanism implies that higher accumulated experience should be associated with shorter relationship durations, higher breakup rates, and lower persistence into marriage or long-term cohabitation, even when observable partner quality is high. These effects should be most visible in measures of relationship stability and continuation rather than in initial relationship formation.

Persistent search and repeated relationship turnover

Individuals with high levels of experience are predicted to exhibit persistent search behavior and repeated relationship turnover. In the model, this pattern reflects elevated evaluation standards rather than optimistic beliefs about future partners or a declining intrinsic desire for commitment.

Empirically, this suggests that high-experience individuals may repeatedly form relationships that appear high-quality along observable dimensions, yet dissolve at higher rates. This prediction distinguishes the mechanism from explanations based purely on preference heterogeneity or unobserved match quality.

Implications for relationship selection behavior

Although the model is not a model of partner choice in the standard sense, it has implications for relationship selection behavior if individuals internalize the dynamic mechanism described above. When accumulated experience raises future evaluation standards, individuals may become forward-looking about how current relationships affect their personal benchmarks.

In particular, when facing potential partners of similar perceived contemporaneous quality, individuals may prefer relationships that are less likely to expand their evaluation frontier, as frontier-expanding experiences can reduce future satisfaction and commitment incentives. This implication does not require changes in preferences or matching technology, but follows from concern about the dynamic consequences of current experiences for future evaluations.

While directly testing this prediction is challenging given data limitations, it highlights an additional behavioral channel through which experience may shape long-run relationship outcomes.

6 Further work

The model yields a set of sharp qualitative predictions about satisfaction, relationship stability, and persistence in dating markets. A natural next step is to take these predictions to data using new measurements tailored to the mechanism emphasized here, namely individual-specific benchmarks and reference-dependent satisfaction.

A promising approach is to field a purpose-built survey designed to reconstruct relationship histories, accumulated experience, and subjective comparisons in a format that approximates a short individual panel. Because frontier-expanding experience is not directly observable, an effective instrument should measure both observed experience N and the degree to which past relationships revealed attribute realizations that remain salient in later evaluations.

Appendix B describes a proposed survey instrument aimed at collecting: (i) a limited retrospective relationship history, (ii) total lifetime sexual experience, (iii) satisfaction and continuation expectations for current or most recent relationships, and (iv) multidimensional comparisons between current partners and the respondent’s best past experiences. These measures can be used to construct indices of evaluation standards and comparison frequency, and to assess whether the satisfaction and separation patterns predicted by the model are concentrated among individuals whose experience is more likely to have expanded salient benchmarks.

Beyond survey data, future work could explore complementary empirical strategies. One direction is to combine panel information on relationship transitions with repeated measures of satisfaction and partner assessments, allowing identification of within-individual changes as experience accumulates. Another direction is to examine heterogeneity across meeting technologies, comparing cohorts or groups with differential exposure to online dating platforms, to assess whether reductions in search frictions are associated with changes in satisfaction and stability patterns consistent with the model.

7 Conclusion

This paper studies how reduced search frictions in dating markets affect long-term romantic commitment. While standard search and matching models predict that easier partner search should improve matching outcomes, we show that this prediction need not hold when individuals evaluate

partners relative to their own past experiences.

We develop a model in which experience, defined as the number of sexual partners, plays a dual role. Early experience is valuable: it reveals previously unobserved dimensions of compatibility and helps individuals learn what they value in a long-term partner. However, as experience accumulates, it raises personal standards by expanding a multidimensional evaluation frontier. Beyond a certain point, additional experience reduces satisfaction with partners who are high-quality along multiple dimensions.

The model generates a non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term relationship formation. Moderate experience increases the likelihood of commitment, while excessive experience leads to persistent search, relationship instability, and delayed exit from the dating market. Because sexual activity can endogenously expand experience, individuals internalize dynamic consequences of intimacy when forming and continuing relationships.

Our framework offers a parsimonious explanation for why dating technologies that improve short-run matching may weaken long-run relational stability for some individuals. By increasing sexual experience, these technologies can inflate personal benchmarks and create a dynamic distortion in commitment decisions.

Importantly, the model does not imply that sexual activity is inherently costly or that individuals should restrict romantic exploration. Instead, it highlights a dynamic misperception: individuals may underestimate how certain experiences shape future evaluation standards and satisfaction. Experiences that expand personal benchmarks can have persistent effects on future commitment incentives, even when they are pleasurable and privately optimal at the time they occur. In this sense, the mechanism resembles a form of reference-dependent projection, whereby individuals fail to fully anticipate how experience alters future preferences.

The model also highlights a tension between individual decision-making and long-run outcomes at the level of welfare. Even when relationship choices are privately optimal given current preferences, individuals may not account for how accumulated experience shapes future standards and satisfaction. As a result, privately optimal levels of experience may exceed those that maximize long-run welfare or commitment probabilities. These findings suggest that social norms, institutions, or technologies that reduce excessive churn may enhance welfare even if they introduce frictions into short-run matching.

Overall, the paper emphasizes that in intimate markets, more choice and more experience need not lead to better long-run outcomes. When satisfaction is shaped by personal history, the very experiences that improve matching in the short run may erode the foundations of commitment in the long run.

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A Proof of proposition 1

This appendix provides a proof of the non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term commitment stated in Proposition 1.

Preliminaries

Let $x = (x_1, \dots, x_K)$ denote a randomly drawn partner attribute vector from distribution $F(x)$, with support in $\mathbb{R}_+^K$. Let

$$\bar{x}_{k,N} = \max_{i=1, \dots, N} x_k^i$$

denote the highest realization of attribute k experienced by the individual after N sexual relationships, and let

$$\bar{x}_N = (\bar{x}_{1,N}, \dots, \bar{x}_{K,N})$$

denote the corresponding personal evaluation frontier.

A partner with attributes x leads to long-term commitment if and only if

$$x_k \geq \bar{x}_{k,N} \quad \text{for all } k \in \{1, \dots, K\}.$$

Let $p(N)$ denote the probability that a randomly encountered partner satisfies this condition.

Commitment probability

Conditional on the evaluation frontier $\bar{x}_N$, the probability of commitment is

$$p(N \mid \bar{x}_N) = \Pr(x_k \geq \bar{x}_{k,N} \forall k) = 1 - F(\bar{x}_N),$$

where $F(\bar{x}_N)$ denotes the joint cumulative distribution evaluated at $\bar{x}_N$.

Because each $\bar{x}_{k,N}$ is weakly increasing in N , the vector $\bar{x}_N$ is non-decreasing componentwise in experience. Hence, for any fixed realization of $\bar{x}_N$,

$$p(N+1 \mid \bar{x}_{N+1}) \leq p(N \mid \bar{x}_N).$$

This reflects the standard extreme-value effect: as experience grows, the probability that a new draw dominates past maxima across all dimensions declines.

Learning effects at low experience levels

For low values of N , experience serves an informational role. Additional sexual relationships reduce uncertainty about the joint distribution of attributes and the relative importance of different dimensions, lowering the probability of committing to partners who are incompatible along previously unobserved dimensions.

Formally, for small N , increases in experience improve the accuracy of continuation decisions by reducing type I errors (premature commitment to incompatible partners). This learning effect increases the effective probability that a committed relationship is sustainable, conditional on entering commitment.

As a result, for N sufficiently small, the marginal effect of experience on the probability of entering a long-term relationship is positive.

Dominance effects at high experience levels

As experience accumulates, the informational gains from additional sexual relationships diminish. In this region, further increases in N primarily affect outcomes through the expansion of the evaluation frontier $\bar{x}_N$.

Because $\bar{x}_N$ increases in each dimension, the set of attribute vectors that weakly dominate the frontier shrinks. Under mild regularity conditions on $F(x)$, the probability that a random draw exceeds past experience in all dimensions converges to zero as N grows.

Therefore, for sufficiently large N , additional experience strictly reduces the probability of entering a long-term relationship.

Proof of Proposition 1

Combining the learning effects at low levels of experience with the dominance effects at high levels of experience implies that the function $p(N)$ is initially increasing and eventually decreasing in N .

By continuity of $p(N)$, there exists at least one interior maximizer $N^* > 0$ such that

$$\frac{dp(N)}{dN} > 0 \quad \text{for } N < N^*, \quad \frac{dp(N)}{dN} < 0 \quad \text{for } N > N^*.$$

This establishes the existence of a non-monotonic relationship between experience and long-term commitment and completes the proof. $\square$.

B Survey instrument

This appendix describes a proposed survey instrument referenced in Section 6. The questionnaire is designed to collect information on relationship histories, sexual experience, satisfaction, and personal evaluation standards.

B.1 Demographics

Respondents report age, gender, education, income bracket, and country or city of residence.

B.2 Relationship history

Respondents are asked to list up to five significant romantic relationships. For each relationship, the survey records:

- Year of start and end (if applicable).
- Whether the relationship involved cohabitation or marriage.
- Self-reported satisfaction at the end of the relationship (on a 0–10 scale).
- Whether the respondent or the partner initiated the separation.
- The primary reason for separation, selected from a short predefined list.

If a respondent is currently in a relationship, the same information is collected up to the present.

B.3 Sexual experience

Respondents report their total number of lifetime sexual partners, either as an exact number or within predefined ranges. Additional questions capture the number of sexual partners prior to the current or most recent long-term relationship.

B.4 Evaluation standards and experience-based benchmarks

For each of several relationship-relevant dimensions (for example, sexual chemistry, emotional responsiveness, affection after intimacy, and perceived stability), respondents are asked:

- The highest level they have experienced in their lifetime (0–10 scale).
- The level associated with their current or most recent partner (0–10 scale).
- Their current minimum acceptable level (if applicable).

These questions allow construction of individual-specific evaluation frontiers and dimension-specific gaps between past experience and current relationships.

B.5 Satisfaction and continuation intentions

For current relationships, respondents report overall satisfaction, frequency of comparisons with past partners, and perceived likelihood that the relationship will continue over the next year.

B.6 Dating technology usage

Finally, respondents report past and current use of online dating platforms and mobile dating applications, allowing experience accumulation to be linked to changes in meeting technology.