



MEDIA RELEASE

2 August 2007

In the mood for love? Researchers show how our emotional state affects our evaluations of potential partners.

When evaluating potential romantic partners, men tend to overestimate women's interest in sex and women underestimate men's intentions to commit. But when people are in similar moods, they are better able to judge each other's interest in these aspects of romantic relationships.

Shikkiah de Quadros and Mark Stokes at Deakin University manipulated people's moods with movie clips and assessed perceptions of potential partners' interests in sexual relations and long term-commitment, as well as their actual interest in each other.

They found that people in a similar mood are likely to interpret each other's behaviors more accurately than people in different moods. The researchers also looked at how changing people's moods from negative to positive, and vice versa, affected these evaluations.

"When people started with a positive mood and moved to a negative mood, their ratings did not change. However, when people moved from a negative mood into a positive mood, men made much higher ratings of women's sexual intent and their own commitment intent, and women made much higher estimations of men's commitment and their own sexual intent," Associate Professor Stokes said.

"In other words, when mood was improved, people's ratings of themselves and potential partners became more favourable. So, watching a dramatic movie with a happy ending may increase romantic interest.

"Sex differences in sexual intent and commitment stem from differences in how men and women contribute to potential offspring. Women provide the biological resources investment of pregnancy and breastfeeding, whereas men provide food and protection. Women are typically more cautious about entering into romantic relationships because they face greater costs in childbearing and care. When seeking a long term partner who will help them raise a child, women look for someone who is reliable and a good provider.

"Men may overestimate women's sexual interest because this may have led to more sexual opportunities for them. Women may be skeptical of a man's interest in committing to a long term relationship, to help avoid costly father abandonment. Each sex is likely to try to minimise the type of error that would have the greatest cost."

The mood effects found by the current study may be particularly important because initial contact with potential partners often occurs in mood-rich environments, especially for younger people.

Ends

The study is in the current issue of the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* and is available online at: <http://www.epjournal.net/filestore/ep05453475.pdf>

Associate Professor Mark Stokes is available for interview.

Media contact: Mandi O'Garretty (03) 52272776, 0418 361 890

Issued by:

Mandi O'Garretty, Senior Media Officer
Phone 03 5227 2776 Mobile 0418 361 890