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Finding love has no expiration date



BOWLING GREEN, O.—People may think that online dating is only for the young, but individuals over the age of 60 are the fastest growing demographic in online dating. However, they may be looking for different qualities in their relationships than their younger counterparts.

Two Bowling Green State University professors of gerontology have started research about online dating in later life. A shortage of data about older adults and the online dating world spurred Dr. Wendy K. Watson and Dr. Charlie Stelle to look into the phenomenon.

They both are interested in older-life issues – her focus is mostly on females and his is mostly on males. They have combined their efforts to increase the quantity and improve the quality of information available about dating in later life, in this case, online dating.

While in the very early research stages, they are finding that older adults appear to market themselves differently on online dating sites than younger adults. Gone is the focus on appearance and status. They believe the senior population appears to be more interested in honest self-representation and being compatible rather than discussing areas such as sexual prowess and nightlife.

They found traditional online coding terms used to describe younger generations seem to “miss some key elements relevant for ads placed by older adults,” according to their initial findings presented recently during the Gerontological Society of America’s international conference.

Watson and Stelle suggest online sites geared at those over 60 might want to consider adding personal characteristics such as affection, intelligence, independence, purpose and goals, religion and spirituality, political beliefs, health and status. Also missing on the young adult online sites were lifestyle categories such as compatibility and companionship, which are important to daters 60+.

The researchers also found the language of seniors’ online ads was different when describing themselves and what they were looking for in a relationship, Watson explained. Terms such as “young at heart” and “active” were used to show physical fitness and good health.

In previous research on dating in later life, Watson and Stelle found that older women had specific expectations regarding dating. Watson says women don’t have a need that has to be filled. “Instead their philosophy is: ‘Please don’t waste my time,’” he said. “They are less likely to play games,” Stelle said. “They want to make a decision quickly and cut their losses, because they have learned life is too short for dating games.”

Watson and Stelle will continue this research and expand the analysis within the match.com and ourtime.com dating sites. Interviews of dating couples to understand the dynamics of dating in your 60’s and beyond are also being planned. This research goes to show that the desire to find love and a companion to share life with has no expiration date.

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