

# Too Many Jams, Too Many Dates: Tyranny of Choice for Shoppers, Web-daters, and Speed-daters

**Barbara Fasolo**



**Alison Lenton**



In collaboration with Peter Todd

# Outline

- Less is More in Consumer Choice
- Less is More in Animal Mate Choice
- Less is More in Human Mate Choice
  - ✿ WebDating Experiments
  - ✿ Speed-Dating Studies

# Modern consumer choice



Andreas Gursky 99 cent 1999 Cibachrome print, edition of 6 81 1/

~~bike~~  
match

**Number of  
Bikes  
Total 3,263  
In  
Your 3,263  
List**

- Common Berlin Supermarket: 210 kinds of yoghurts, 137 jams, 93 pastas

# In the supermarket...



6  
jams

40%

30%



24  
jams

customers stopped

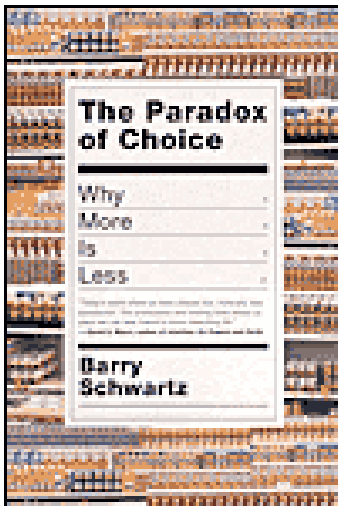
60%

purchased

3%

# The paradox of choice

- Barry Schwartz's (2004) thesis: Modern societies suffer from excessive choice



- ✿ *Too many decisions: Where to live, what to eat, where to go on vacation, which insurance to buy, whom to date, what to wear, what to study, which GP?*
- ✿ *Too many options in each individual decision: too many products in the supermarket, too many dates...*



**But what does consumer choice  
have to do with mate choice?**

# Paradox in animal mate choice

- **Female preference hypothesis:** Females *prefer* male leks to solitary males (Bradbury, 1981); Female visitation rate *increases* with lek size (Höglund et al., 1993)

*BUT...*



- Females are *confused* by too much choice of acoustically advertising frogs, and select *worse* males.



- Quality of choice from 11 black grouse leks varying in size (from 6 to 24 males) tends to *decrease* with lek size *outside of natural range* (above 12, Kokko et al., 1998).



Are we like them?

# Millions of potential mates on the web

match.com<sup>®</sup>

MILLIONS OF POSSIBILITIES



- With simple criteria, still get hundreds of options

I am a  seeking  between  and   
located in (city/zip code)

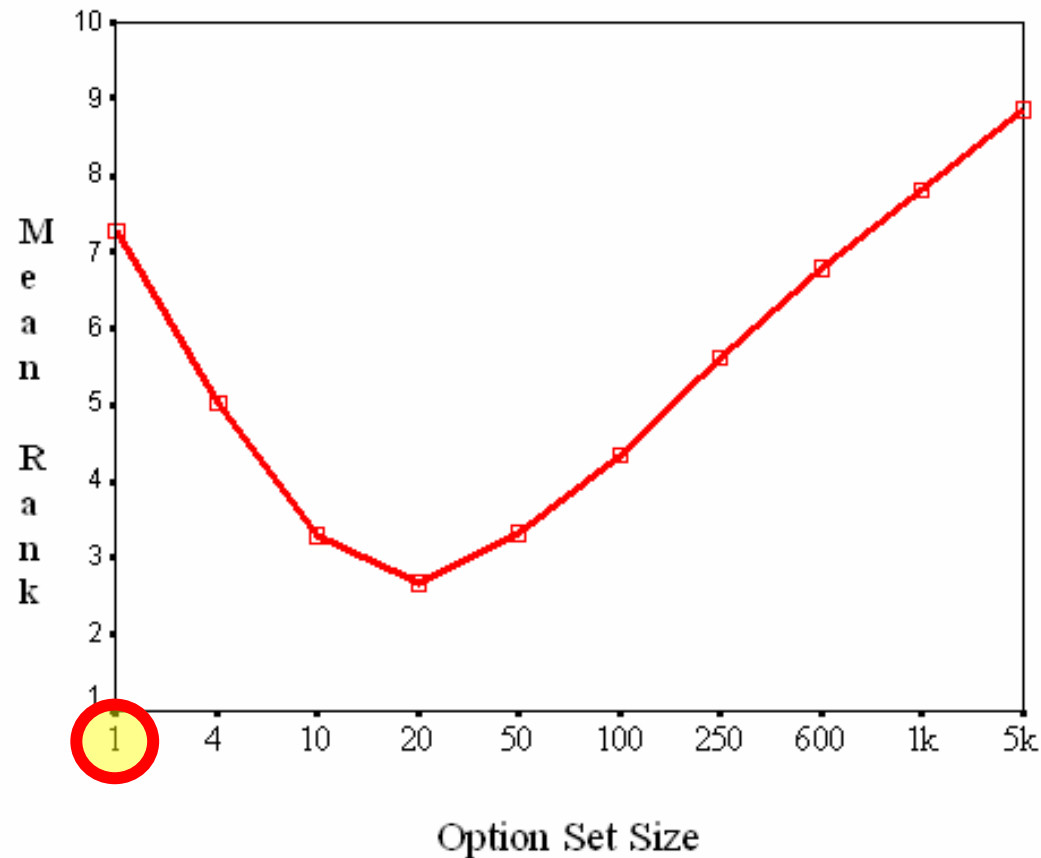
→ 210 profiles with pictures

# Experiment 1

## Expectations: Is more more, or is less more?

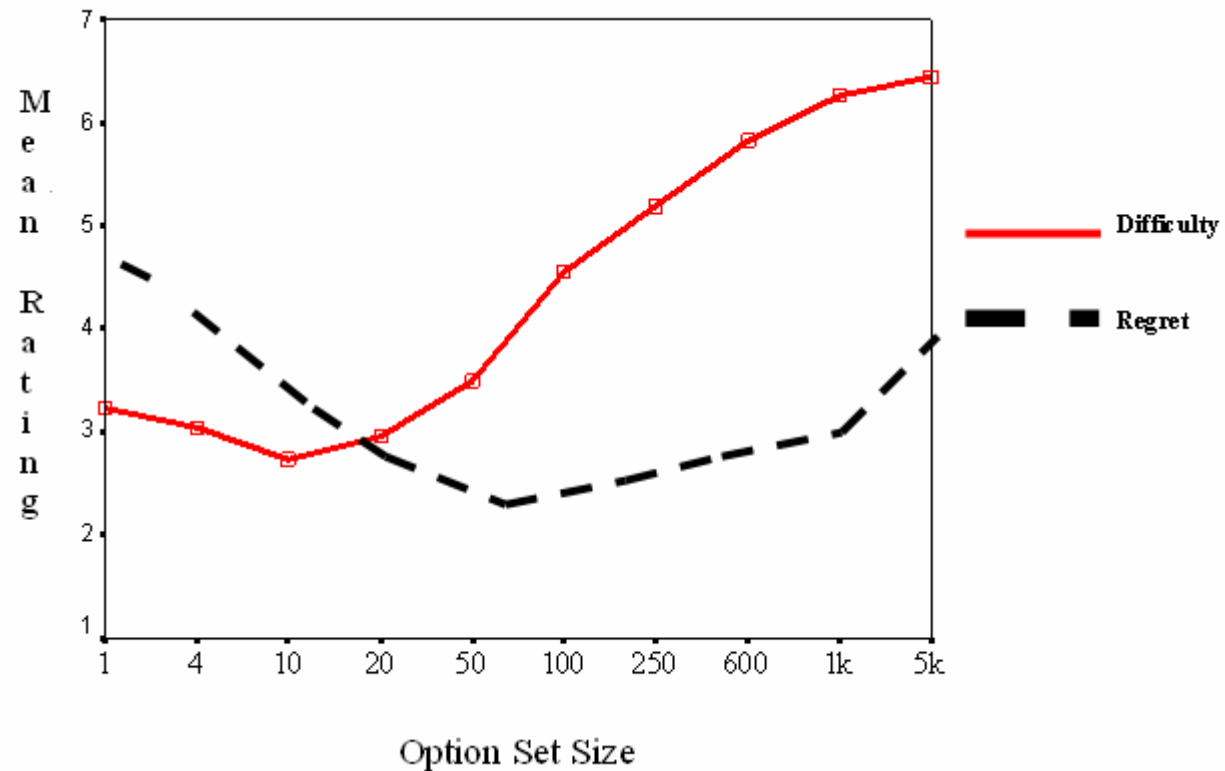
- Goal: Do people expect “Less is More” results in the mating market?
- Details
  - ✿ Paper-n-Pencil Survey
  - ✿ U of Cambridge students
  - ✿ Web-dating scenario
  - ✿ How many people would you like to choose amongst: 1, 4, 10, 20, 50, 100, 250, 600, 1K, 5K (rank from 1 - most preferred to 10 - least preferred)
  - ✿ Expected difficulty, satisfaction, regret with different number of options (1-low to 7-high Likert).

# Preferred number of people

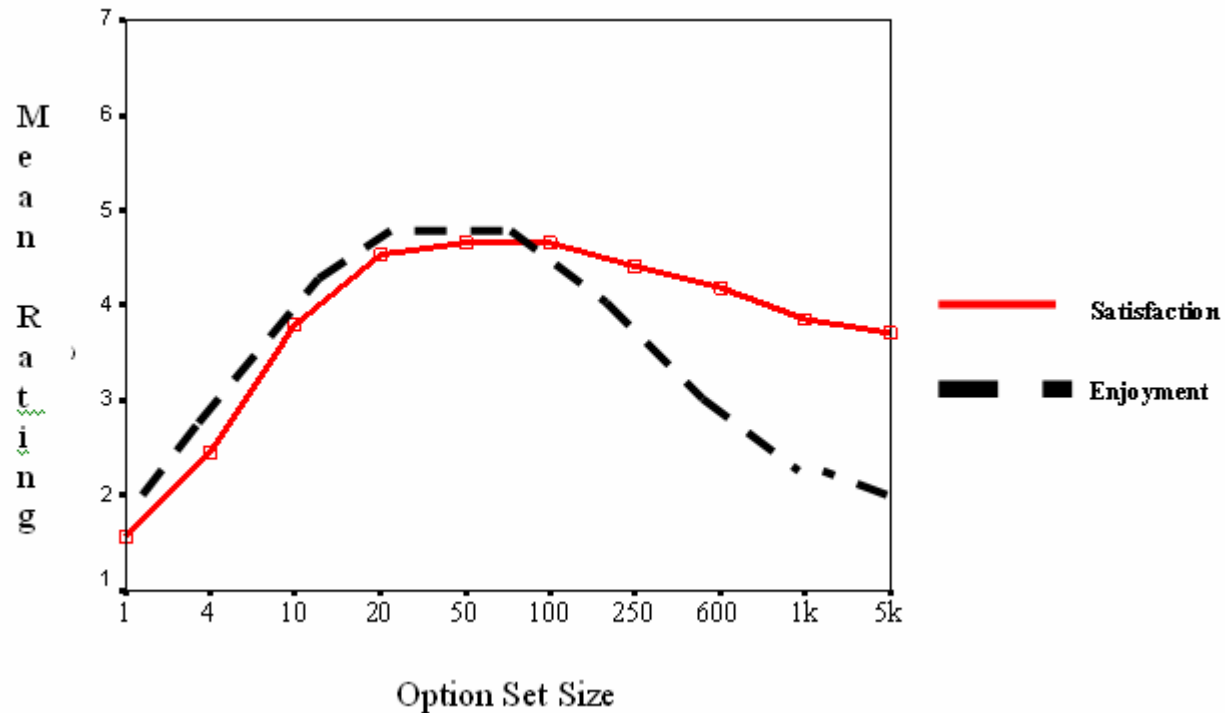


(Note: Lower rank = preferred set size)

# Expected difficulty & regret



# Expected satisfaction and enjoyment



# Experiment 2

## Real Choice:

*At what point does more become less?*

### ■ Details:

- ✿ U of Cambridge undergrads
- ✿ Web-dating site (typically designed similarly to consumer shopping sites)
- ✿ 4 vs 20 profiles of singles, with pictures (equated on attractiveness) & personal details.
- ✿ Participants viewed all profiles, chose one, reported about choice made.

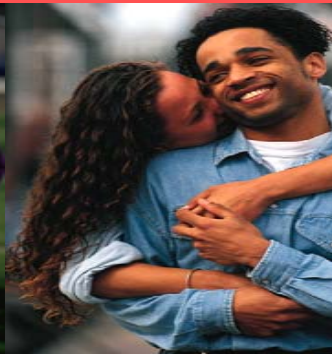
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MAN



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new!

Down to earth...

*About Him**Sex:* Male*Age:* 22*Location:* England, UK*Hair:* Dark Blonde*Eyes:* Green*Height:* 5'10"*Body Type:* Medium*Language:* English*Occupation:* Student*Favourite Food:* Italian*Drinker:* Occasionally*Status:* Single*Have Children:* No*Goal:* Romance/ Relationship*Star Sign:* Aries**How He Describes Himself:**

Personally, I'm fairly laid back and easygoing, though I've been known to cut loose on more than one occasion. I have a wide variety of interests, including travelling and keeping fit. I can hold a conversation on varied subjects, with most anyone.

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## OWM-74

Last Seen Within 24 Hours



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**new!**

### Why not?...

*About Her*

**Sex:** Female

**Age:** 23

**Location:** England, UK

**Hair:** Dark Blonde

**Eyes:** Blue

**Height:** 5'4"

**Body Type:** Medium

**Language:** English

**Occupation:** Student

**Favourite Food:** Italian

**Drinker:** Occasionally

**Status:** Single

**Have Children:** No

**Goal:** Romance/ Relationship

**Star Sign:** Aries

### How She Describes Herself:

I am down-to-earth, caring, honest, and friendly. I enjoy impulsive weekends away, the cinema, meals out or low-key evenings in with a good DVD. I can be quiet at first, but I warm up quickly. Keeping in shape is important to me.



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PHONE.

FAT  
WALLET.

WIRELESS  
Technology



Multi-sport in  
Nova Scotia

Cycling and Kayaking  
in Canada

Adventures

# Results - Webdating

- With more choice (20 profiles) participants:
  - ✿ reported having more variety (e.g. being better able to find a person they liked) but were no more satisfied with their choice than those with 4 profiles.
  - ✿ tended to enjoy the choice process less
  - ✿ wanted fewer profiles and information per profile than those with 4 profiles
  - ✿ were more likely to show memory confabulations (i.e., they mixed up the traits of the person they selected with the other options!)
  
- Replication of *less is more* with *human* mate choice.



# Wrap up

## ■ Webdating

- ✿ People report they want more choice, but when they are in the choice situation they discover that less choice would be more appealing.

## ■ Would less is more occur in Speed-Dating too?

# What is Speed-Dating???

(video)



# fastdating<sup>®</sup> sessions

- 117 FD sessions in 2003/04: 47 Munich, 20 Berlin, 14 Stuttgart, 13 Frankfurt, 12 Cologne, 10 Hamburg, 1 Duesseldorf
- More than 4000 people
- Lots of choice
  - ✿ Females: from 7 to **36** per session
  - ✿ Males: from 8 to **34** per session
- More than one choice is possible
  - ✿ '**offers**' - Proportion offers made out of total number of people seen
  - ✿ '**matches**' - Proportion matches out of total number of people seen

# offers made & number of people seen

- Across 117 sessions
- Offers made related to:
  - ✿ Gender: men make more offers (M: 1 out of 3, F: 1 out of 5)
- Less is more?
  - ✿ Less is more for men: the more women, the fewer offers made ( $r = -0.38$ )
  - ✿ More is not more for women ( $r = 0.06$ )

# Matches & number of people seen

■ Is a 'match' important? [video](#)

■ More is not more

✿  $r = -0.07$  for men

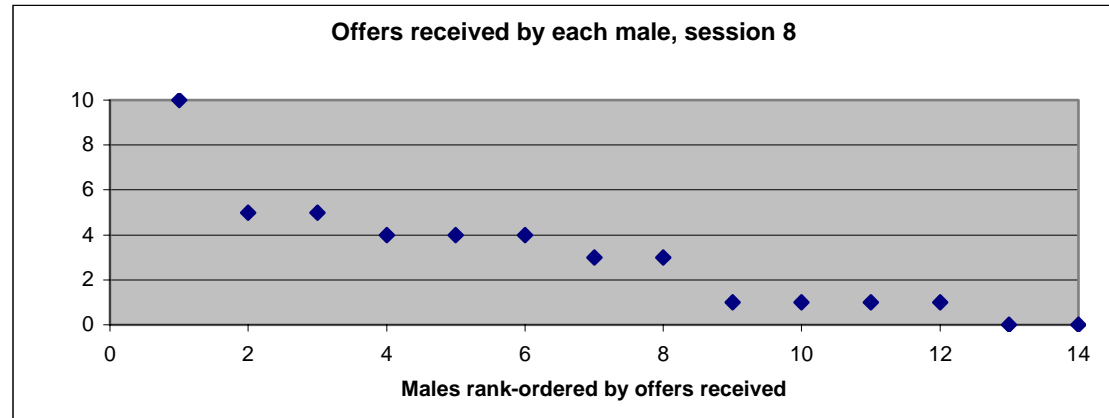
✿  $r = -0.02$  for women

# Black Grouse vs Fastdaters



Kokko et al.: 'choice quality' decreased with size,  
quality = agreement on one best

Small session  
(14 males):  
Agreement on  
top male, clear  
winner



Large session  
(34 males): no  
clear winner,  
less agreement



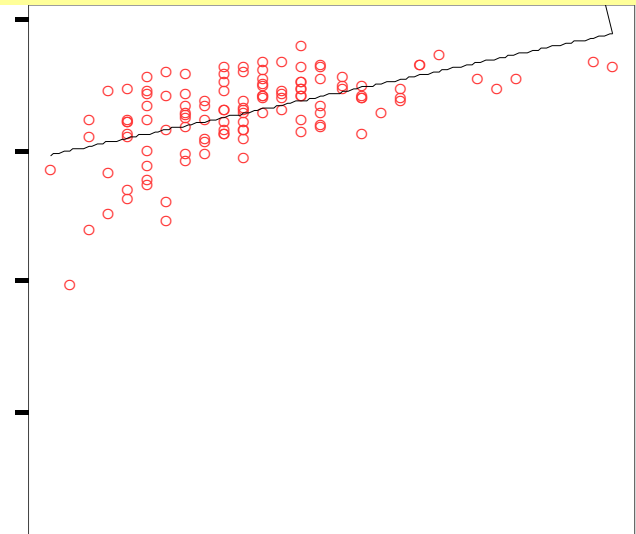
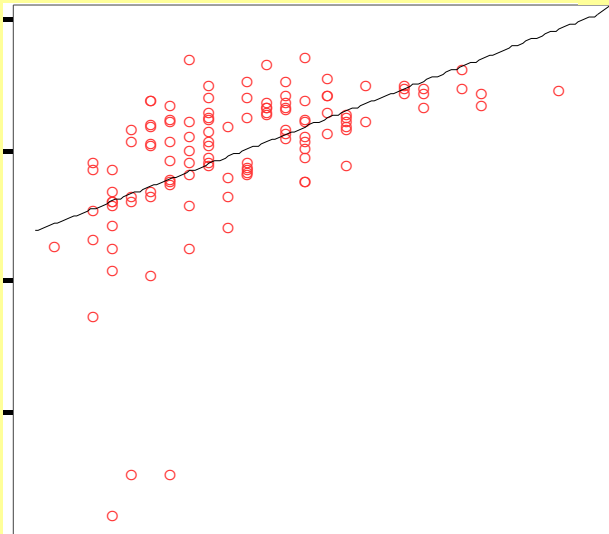
Fasolo Lenton & Todd, in progress

# The larger the session, the more disagreement

*Female Choosers*

*Male Choosers*

↑  
*Disagreement*



*Option Set Size* →

*Option Set Size* →

# Conclusions

- with ***fewer*** options we find:
  - ✿ Greater enjoyment, despite expectations to the contrary
  - ✿ Less confusion
  - ✿ Men make more offers
  - ✿ No fewer matches
  - ✿ More agreement (quality?)
  - ✿ Less is more

## 5,000 turn up at 'meet and mate' mega event

By Pan Haixia (China Daily)  
Updated: 2005-10-24 05:13

SHANGHAI: Some were shy, others bold. Some played the waiting game, others sent their mothers to stand in and scout around.

The curtain came up on the eagerly-awaited largest matchmaking party in China on Saturday evening and the turnout did not disappoint.

# 5000 Speed-Daters in Shanghai...

*"As the old saying goes, too many directions take you nowhere," said Rex Pu, a local man in his 30s.*



Pairs of single men and women talk in Shanghai's Zhongshan Park on October 22, 2005. [newsphoto]