

# Flak from Sen. Flake: Making Sense of One Politician's Attack on Social Science



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# A (very) brief timeline of events



**WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW?**

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

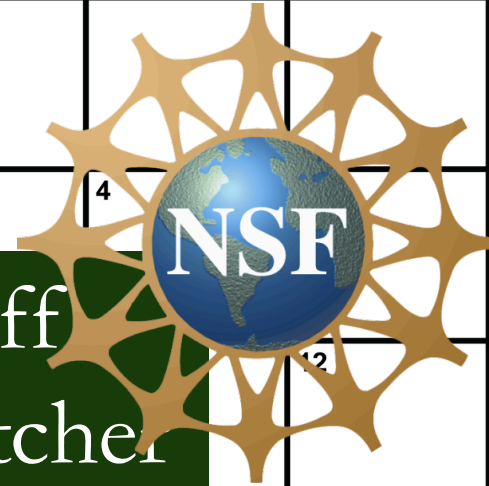
Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

# September 2015



Stephanie Tong, Jeff Hancock, & Rich Slatcher receive a \$851,462 grant from the Interdisciplinary Behavioral Social Sciences division of NSF

|    |  |   |   |   |   |    |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|----|
|    |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |    |
| 6  |  |   |   |   |   | 12 |
| 13 |  |   |   |   |   | 19 |
| 20 |  |   |   |   |   | 26 |
| 27 |  |   |   |   |   |    |

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

# December 2015

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Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ)  
 releases his version of  
*The Wastebook: The Farce Awakens*  
 in an online publication

**WASTEBOOK**  
 THE FARCE AWAKENS

**23** **LOVE AT FIRST SWIPE**  
 Michigan  
 National Science Foundation  
 \$851,500



Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

# February 2016

1

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COSSA alerts all 3 PIs to the attack on their own research

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Notes:



CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

# The Impact of Online Technologies on Interpersonal Communication & Perceptions



**STEPHANIE TOM TONG, JEFFREY T. HANCOCK,  
RICHARD B. SLATCHER**

**IBSS, NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION**

# Driving Questions



- How does the *source multiplicity* of online dating technology affect the *attributions* that we make?
  - Source Multiplicity = Humans + Machines
- Do people *recognize* technology's influence on relational decision-making?
- How does online dating *transform* the individual dater's self-concept?
  - Localization of feedback from multiple sources

SENATOR JEFF FLAKE PRESENTS

# WASTEBOOK

## THE FARCE AWAKENS



A REPORT ON WASTEFUL FEDERAL SPENDING STARRING MONKEYS ON TREADMILLS, PARTIES FOR HIPSTERS AND SHEEP IN MICROGRAVITY FEATURING PARTY BUSES, WINEMAKING FOR MINORS, THE SCIENCE OF BEER KOOZIES, ZOMBIES IN THE WHITE HOUSE, LIFE-SIZE PAC MAN, DATING SECRETS FOR THE UNATTRACTIVE AND DOZENS MORE

DECEMBER 2015

# 23 LOVE AT FIRST SWIPE

Michigan  
National Science Foundation  
**\$851,500**

Do you believe in love at first swipe?

In today's terminology, "swipe right" means you are interested in pursuing a relationship based upon seeing a few pics and brief self-description. This phrase comes from the action taken on the popular dating app, Tinder, which allows users to peruse other singles in their area. When Tinder users view profiles, which contain photos, a brief bio, and shared interests on social media, they can either "swipe right" to indicate interest, or "swipe left" to move onto the next profile. When two users swipe right on each other, an official match is made, and communication can begin.

Wayne State University researchers are seeking to better understand how the rise of technology has affected dating by observing those looking for love online and how they decide to pursue a romantic connection.<sup>353</sup> The study is being funded over the next three-and-a-half years with a \$851,462 grant from the National Science Foundation.<sup>354</sup>

"Online dating is one of the most popular ways for single Americans to meet a romantic partner," points out Stephanie Tong, Ph.D., who is leading the study.<sup>355</sup> One-in-five adults between the ages of 25 to 34 have tried online dating.<sup>356</sup>

# Moving Forward



**OUR RESPONSE & GENERAL ADVICE**

# Focus on Productivity



- Research activities
  - 1 pilot study; 2 in development
  - 5 conference papers/workshops; 1 publication
- Public engagement
  - 3 invited sessions at various outlets in MI and CA; several radio interviews across the USA (NPR) and Canada (CBC)
- Teaching
  - Research teams with over a dozen students at various levels (undergraduate, MA, PhD), across various disciplines (comm, psych, information)
  - 1 undergraduate senior seminar with in-depth focus on online romantic relationship formation







# Response & Reflections



- Understanding our attackers: What is the nature of these attacks? What do they consist of?
- Advocacy: Raising awareness in our home disciplines and across the social sciences
- Teaching & Advising: Introducing our students to this issue and what it may mean for their future
- Public: Empirically testing the effects of satire, irony, and humor on public opinion of government-funded research

# A Greater/Renewed Effort



- 1 Contextualize & translate findings for the public and pursue outlets to communicate with those outside of the academy
- 2 Raise awareness among fellow intellectuals
- 3 Continue to train, educate, and advise the next generation of social scientists

# Not An Entire Waste...



- Moment of self-reflection on my own research and teaching
- Reminded of the value of rigorous social science that makes strong theoretical contributions
- An opportunity to connect with other smart social scientists and students across the country
- New research agenda!



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# Questions?



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