

The Formation of Stereotypes on Female Online Dating Profiles

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to uncover how both online daters and dating sites are responsible for shaping the manner in which individuals present themselves online to potential suitors. More specifically, the proposed study examines online dating practices by investigating the process for developing an online dating profile on two different dating sites; Match.com, a paid dating site and Plenty of Fish (POF), a free dating site. A paid and unpaid site has been chosen in order to determine whether a fee has an influence on the ability to present in an original way.

In the current study, the researcher found that most female daters develop profiles that reinforce a stereotypical image regardless of opportunities (i.e. open-text boxes) to provide an original self-presentation. However, four females manage to develop original profiles, by uniquely displaying information and developing original self-descriptions relative to all profiles in the study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

The online dating arena presents a novel opportunity to examine the shifting cultural norms of computer-mediated relationship development and to observe important aspects of online behaviour such as self-presentation strategies and impression formation. Dating sites vary between paid and unpaid systems; most of them operate on a hybrid system where individuals can post profiles for free but fees must be paid by those wishing to contact other daters (Hardey, 2002, p. 572). This research will be limited to an examination and analysis of the registration process and the profile content of female daters on Match.com, a paid dating site and Plenty of Fish (POF), a free dating site. Throughout the remainder of the paper, I will be using the acronym POF when referring to the Plenty of Fish website.

According to Baker (2002), online dating was once considered a service for those who were socially inept and desperate for a date. However, Gibbs, Ellison and Heino (2006, p.153) reveal in their study that “online dating is rapidly becoming mainstream because of higher levels of Internet penetration and changing demographic trends”. Match.com, for example, reports being responsible for arranging hundreds of thousands of relationships for its members: “each year approximately 200,000 members tell us they found the person they were seeking on the site” (Sprecher, 2009, p.765). Individuals may search out other online daters and market themselves as potential candidates for relationships through: generating a self-presentational profile, searching for and assessing others’ profiles, and initiating online interaction using various online tools.

In Internet dating, the common ability to construct shared meanings, experiences and sentimental bonds is put to work to produce content that can be commercialized successfully (Arvidsson, 2006, p.672). Through the development of personal narratives

(i.e., textual content expressing a preference for various lifestyles, personality and physical traits) in open-text spaces on dating sites, individuals present or market themselves as potential partners for some form of relationship. Following the creation of a dating profile, individuals can begin to search for people with whom they wish to interact. Subsequent online interaction provides daters with a unique opportunity to explore the various aspects of the self.

In fact, computer-mediated communication (CMC) permits individuals to have more control over their presented identities and develop new stronger relationships that may not be possible with face-to-face interaction (Walther et al., 2001, p.110).

Controllable aspects of CMC (i.e. controllable verbal and linguistic cues and more time to generate well-crafted messages) permit individuals to present themselves online in a strategic way and build stronger relationships than in face-to-face circumstances.

However, some research suggests that social media are being shaped by a commercial agenda that advantage images of an online girl “who is highly sexualized and commoditized” (Shade, 2007, p. 72). Even though this research paper does not focus on these two aspects of the female image, it does acknowledge that women continue to reproduce the very stereotypical self-presentations that men desire. These personal characteristics that encompass a stereotypical female are described in the results and discussion section.

Written text and images on dating profiles are developed by online daters to support an ongoing imagination of the profiled other (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 679). Profiles on Match.com and POF display information on height, body type, hair colour, work, religion, values and a wealth of similar topics. Match.com site managers encourage users to build a thorough online profile that intrigues others. Profile development and self-

presentation will be examined throughout this study in order to understand the ways that individuals make use of online dating sites in the process of self-presentation and how site structure in turn affects self-presentation.

Statement of Problem

Online dating has received a great deal of scholarly attention. Some of the topics that researchers have examined include the manner in which people present themselves online and how they manage self-presentation processes in online dating sites (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006), self-disclosure practices (Gibbs, Heino, Ellison, 2006), deception and misrepresentations of the self in online dating (Lucid, 2009), the use of photographs in online dating profiles (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2009) and selecting individuals online (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010).

However, online dating studies have not yet focused on why there is a tendency of profiles that contain a normative format. Despite opportunities to generate original self-presentation using open-text boxes, many online dating profiles contain stereotypical content both in textual descriptions as well as profile photographs. As there is an apparent online trend in individuals creating and using personal pages for self-presentation (i.e. online dating profiles, Facebook and Myspace), it is important to uncover why stereotypes persist in dating profiles, if and how originality may be achieved when building a profile, and if the profile development process in online dating infringes on originality. In summary, this research will uncover to what extent the interrelationship between online daters and the online dating registration process play a role in online self-presentation. The research will also examine if there is a subsequent influence on how individuals portray originality.

Purpose

The purpose of the current study is to uncover how both online daters and dating sites are responsible for shaping the manner in which individuals present themselves online to potential suitors. The proposed study examines online dating practices by investigating the process for developing an online dating profile, textual descriptions and profile pictures provided by online dating registrants. This prompts the first research question: *1. To what extent does the profile development process on a dating site have an impact on the ways that individuals present themselves in an original way?* This will be further explored in the following section of the paper; where a description and analysis of the registration process help to uncover the differences between two dating sites: Match.com, a paid dating site and POF, a free dating site.

Furthermore, no online dating studies have yet examined why personal narratives in online dating profiles contain a normative format that highlight similar lifestyle, personality and appearance descriptors. The common use of descriptors by female online daters (which will be outlined in the results and discussion section) assists in forming a stereotypical image and narrative of females in online dating. As a result, the investigation of textual and pictorial content on profiles, specifically those of heterosexual females living in Ottawa, will uncover to which extent stereotype formation is favoured by the on-line registration process. This investigation prompts the second research question: *2. In what ways does the structure of specific sites (paid vs. unpaid) influence potential stereotypification of online daters?* This research will disclose if online dating tools prompt individuals to generate stereotypical profiles and if these tools can be manipulated in order to form original profiles.

Match.com and POF, the former being a paid site and the latter an unpaid online

dating site, have been selected for three reasons. First, both sites contain over a million subscribers, from which sample profiles will be drawn using a purposive sampling strategy. Secondly, both dating sites have search fields that allow the researcher to filter through registrants in order to select profiles for observation. Finally, the sites can be accessed free of charge. While POF offers a free service, Match.com operates under the pretence that individuals can create profiles for free but must pay a fee in order to communicate with others. The investigation of a paid and unpaid online dating arena may help to uncover patterns in how online daters are similar or differ between both online dating environments. A comparison between profiles on a free and a paid dating site can help distinguish if paying a fee improves an individual's opportunity to self-present or if the fee has an influence on the originality of information that registrants are willing to share online. It is expected that a fee-based dating site will offer a higher quality service for subscribers and therefore provide more opportunities for self-expression and self-presentation.

Registration Process for Match.com and Plenty of Fish

Before commencing the literature review, I will provide a complete overview of the online dating process, including the structure of the sites and information needed to create a profile. This information is presented here to provide a context for the remainder of the paper.

In order to subscribe to an online dating website, individuals must fill out an electronic registration form. When individuals register their information, they also build their personal online dating profile page. Since each dating site is different, this section will describe the registration process for Match.com as well as POF. A description of each registration process will help to demonstrate the manner in which the structure of a

site can influence the manner in which information is presented and therefore, how individuals present themselves.

Match.com Registration

When visiting the Match.com website, there is an automatic pop-up window that appears requesting the participant's gender and postal code as well as the gender and age range of the individual they are looking to meet (See Appendix A: Basic Registration Form).

Since Match.com is a dating website available to individuals around the world, it is essential to narrow down identifying information such as sexual orientation and location of the registrant so as to locate a pool of suitors from the same area. Daters on this website are described in the following way:

Match.com members form a diverse, global community of singles who share common goals - to meet other singles, find dates, form romantic relationships and meet life partners. Young and old alike, gay and straight, from everywhere around the world, singles come to Match.com to flirt, meet, date, have fun, fall in love and to form meaningful, loving relationships. (Match.com, December 2009).

Next, the submission of this information prompts the subscriber to register a username, password, e-mail address, birthday and postal code. Upon submitting this information, the registrant is prompted to a webpage containing male and female profiles who meet the aforementioned criteria. Match.com allows registrants to view small portions of other individuals' profiles for free. However, at this point in the registration process, a registrant is only able to view another online dater's picture, username, age, location, the number of photographs uploaded as well as the most recent logged-in date. Upon clicking on a person's miniature profile, the registrant is prompted to another page where they must begin building a personal online profile and answer a series of questions before gaining full viewing access to the profiles of other online daters.

The profile registration process comprises of two sections entitled: “About Me” and “About My Date”. The former inquires about the registrant and includes the following subsections: basics; appearance; background/values; lifestyle; interests and get to know me. The latter inquires about the traits of their ideal date and therefore collects information about a suitor’s appearance, background values, and lifestyle.

Moreover, there is a section called “In My Own Words” where online daters are requested to submit a dating headline or a short introductory phrase for their profile. There is also space where individuals can use text boxes to describe themselves and their ideal match in their own words. These text boxes provide individuals with space to be unique and distinguish themselves from the remaining online daters on Match.com. In the remaining sections, where individuals describe their appearance, background and style, online daters are forced to choose descriptions from drop down menus. In the final stage of completing the online dating profile, individuals are encouraged to submit photographs of themselves since Match.com reports that “profiles with a photo are 15 times more likely to be viewed” (Match.com, 2011).

A detailed explanation of each of the aforementioned sections will be outlined below. This will help to expose the nature of information that is requested from online dating registrants, and give an indication of the information that is exposed to profile viewers on Match.com. Screen shots of each step in the registration process are provided in order to give a more detailed view of the various response selections given to registrants. The screen shots also provide a visual indication of how each site lays out information for registrants, and whether the information requested is to be selected from a drop down menu, checklist selection or open text box.

A Step-by-Step Breakdown of Match.com Registration

On Match.com, building a personal profile begins with the “Basics” section (See Appendix A: Basics), where registrants are asked to disclose their relationship status, gender, place of origin, zodiac sign as well as the age and gender of the individual they are searching for. Respondents use dropdown menus in order to select their responses. In this section, individuals select options from a dropdown menu to describe aspects of their appearance such as: height, body type, eye color and hair color. Registrants may also narrow down the scope of their search for matches by specifying a postal code and a radius from which the online dater is willing to seek someone.

Next in the “Background and Values” section (See Appendix A: Background and Values) registrants are requested to select their ethnicity and faith from a checklist of options. Upon making selections, individuals are also given the option of expanding on their responses by submitting 250 characters of free text in regards to these topics. Moreover, registrants are asked to indicate their education level, with the option of specifying the college or university attended. Individuals are also asked to select what language they speak from a short checklist with the option of selecting ‘other’ if their language does not appear in the list. Lastly, registrants select their political affiliation from a drop down list.

In the “Lifestyle” section (See Appendix A: Lifestyle), individuals respond to questions in relation to habits and fitness, such as how often they exercise, if they smoke and how often they drink. The questionnaire also asks the registrant to disclose whether or not they have children. Moreover, registrants are asked to select their approximate salary range in addition to disclosing what they do for a living from a dropdown menu. One also has the option to use an open text box where they may share further information

about their employment. The questionnaire also allows individuals to select what kind of pets they may own or enjoy.

In the “Interests” section (See Appendix A: Interests), applicants are able to select from a list the type of exercise or sports that they enjoy. They also have the option of filling out two 250 character text boxes about what they do in their spare time and what they consider local hot spots and hot travel destinations.

The questionnaire provides a list of options to select what common interests the subscriber would enjoy sharing with their date. Additionally, individuals have the option of describing, in 250 characters, their favourite things and a description of the last book they read. Further, in the registration process, subscribers are asked to indicate the type of movie they enjoy watching. This is done by selecting one photograph icon out of a total of eight that represent the following movie genres: romance, comedy, science fiction, foreign, action and adventure, thriller, classic and drama.

In the “Get-To-Know-Me” section (See Appendix A: Get-To-Know-Me), the site collects information about the subscribers: birth order, social habits, donation habits and favourite comedian. There is also a scenario question pertaining to what one would do with the money from a big bonus and where they would like to travel, given these extra funds. Moreover, registrants are asked to indicate from a list of five vacation opportunities, which type of vacation they would most likely select if the opportunity arose.

Unique to this dating site is the option of an individual filling out a form describing the attributes of an ideal partner. This includes aspects of appearance such as height, eye and hair color as well as body type. (See Appendix A: About My Date: His Appearance). Furthermore, subscribers may limit their search by selecting a specific

ethnicity, religion, education level and language that they look for in an ideal partner. (See Appendix A: About My Date: Background/Values). The registrant can also select if they want their match to: be a smoker, drinker or have children. (See Appendix A: About My Date: Lifestyle).

Match.com allows subscribers to develop an introductory phrase for their profile in order to grab the attention of profile viewers. This is one of the few options that allow individuals to distinguish themselves from other Match.com registrants. Individuals are given the opportunity to describe themselves and their ideal match in 4000 characters. (See Appendix A: In My Own Words). This provides a subscriber with an opportunity to stand out and add an original aspect to their profile that distinguishes them from all the other people who went through the same process in order to generate a profile.

Finally, individuals are encouraged to upload profile pictures of them in order to attract more attention to their profile. Users are permitted to upload up to 26 photographs. (See Appendix A: Upload Your Photo).

Plenty of Fish Registration

The POF main webpage features a basic registration form (see Appendix B: Basic Registration) that welcomes visitors to subscribe to the online dating site. Visitors may register by providing a username, password, e-mail address, gender, date of birth, country of residence and ethnicity. This short form, which requests a few personal details from the subscriber, is also used by Match.com, and lures individuals by making them think that the registration process is short.

Following the submission of the aforementioned information, POF provides the registrant with a series of questions, which for the most part, are to be answered using a drop down menu. In the mandatory question fields, registrants are asked to disclose

information pertaining to where they live, personal physical attributes, education, religion, lifestyle and personal habits. POF identifies the location of a person in accordance to their postal code and city of residence. Furthermore, the sexual orientation of a subscriber is identified in responding to a question about the registrant's gender and the gender of their ideal match. (See Appendix B: Questionnaire. To view the types of choices that one can use to describe themselves, see Appendix B: Examples of drop down menu options).

Since both of the dating sites ask the registrant many of the same questions when submitting a personal profile, this section will only outline the main differences between POF and Match.com. The first major difference that distinguishes both sites is the fact that unlike Match.com, POF allows individuals to specify their intent for submitting a profile in the dating site. The intent can range from no commitment to looking for marriage. The ability to indicate the reason for which one is using a dating site is significant to POF because new members are able to specify precisely what their intentions are in joining the site. It enables subscribers to target individuals who are looking for the same type of relationship, whether it is dating, hangout or sexual encounter. Conversely, the intent on Match.com is implicit; everyone who registers and pays to use the site is looking for a significant other for dating or marriage purposes. POF also asks registrants to indicate their longest lasting relationship, whereas Match.com does not request this information.

Moreover, POF requests subscribers to indicate if they have a vehicle, if they do drugs, relationship history and what they would do on a first date. Additionally, POF subscribers can indicate their fish personality from a list of 29 fish types (See Appendix

B: Fish Personalities). These questions are specific to POF and are not requested from subscribers on Match.com.

Match.com subscribers are requested to provide an abundance of information about the self that is not called for on POF. These details include exercise habits, political views, zodiac sign, what the person likes to do for fun, hot spots, a list a favourite things, last read book, income, languages spoken, and information detailing the ideal date. Moreover, POF contains a question segment where individuals expose their family history including information about the marital status of their parents, birth order and the length of their longest relationship, whereas Match.com does not request this information.

One major difference between the registration processes on both sites is that Match.com requires the registrant to describe and discuss their ideal match while developing a profile. The identification of qualities in an ideal suitor is one of the most significant differences between the two sites as it allows browsing individuals to identify what an online dater is looking for in a partner in terms of appearance, lifestyle, background and values. On POF, individuals can only get an understanding of what one is looking for if they mention it in the “About Me” section.

Just like Match.com, POF allows individuals to stand out by generating a unique headline for themselves in order to capture the attention of individuals scanning through profiles. Aside from developing a headline, registrants can also submit a description of them in 100 characters, which may include information about hobbies, goals/aspirations, unique attributes and taste in music and more. Moreover, individuals may generate a list of interests. Finally, individuals may develop a blurb describing their ideal first date, this text box is optional and may also be left blank if desired.

The last step of the registration page is to submit photographs of oneself. Unlike Match.com, POF users are limited to upload only a small amount of photographs.

In order to understand this research, it is essential to comprehend the online dating registration process for Match.com and POF (as outlined above), and be knowledgeable of literature emerging on online dating. The following section provides an overview of literature related to this phenomenon.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter reviews pertinent literature related to computer-mediated communication (CMC), online dating and important aspects of online behaviour such as self-presentation strategies and identity formation.

The literature review is split up into three sections: part 1 provides an overview of technology, communication and identity. This section discusses three theories of technology, how communication differs between face-to-face contexts and CMC, and how individuals use CMC to form an online identity and present themselves. Part 2 of the literature review builds on concepts discussed in Part 1 and expands them to discussions specific to online communication and studies concerning online dating: this section provides an overview of online dating sites, the evolution of self-presentation in CMC and the various aspects of individual self-presentation online. Finally, Part 3 of the literature provides an outline of the self-presentation process in the online realm. This section examines the various self-presentation practices of individuals using online dating sites. Some of the topics covered include the strategic self-presentation of online daters, the importance of physical attractiveness, the use of photographs in online profiles, self-presentation using textual content, the formation of stereotypes online and finally the use of intentional and unintentional deception in online profiles.

Part 1: Technology, Communication and Identity

Impacts of Technology

There are various perceptions in regards to the level of impact that new technologies have on the lives of individuals. According to the theory of technological determinism, technology is the primary cause of changes at both the macro and micro levels (Chandler 1995). At the macro level, technology is seen as playing an important role in structural

and historical changes. At the micro level, it is seen as influencing social and psychological processes and the manner in which people use tools (Chandler 1995). On the other side of the spectrum is social constructivism. According to this theory, technology does not shape actors, but actors shape technology and its uses (Winner, 1993). Therefore, technology is seen not as the cause of social change but rather a tool used by actors within particular contexts. Taking a middle stance is Robert Kling (1996), who stands by the view of social realism, where technology is neither causal nor a tool. Instead, technology and people are seen to have a mutual relationship, both act upon and shape one another (Kling 1996).

Online dating can be considered to fall under Kling's (1996) stance of mutual influence. By participating in online dating services, participants are impacted by using this technology since it has altered the manner in which individuals form relationships. However, participants have also impacted the use of this communication technology through configuring tools such as instant messaging chat in order to facilitate online conversations. According to Howard's (2004) notion of circumvention, individuals use specific strategies to exploit the capacities and minimize the constraints associated with their use of information and communications technologies and therefore make technology function to the user's advantage. Latter portions of this research will explore how individuals make use of online dating sites in the process of self-presentation and how site structure in turn affects self-presentation.

Technologies and Communication

The literature reviewed for this research reveals that there is debate as to how, and to what extent CMC differs from self-presentation during face-to-face interaction. According to Sproull and Kiesler (1986), online interaction lacks social cues. This is

further explained through the Reduced Social Cues model by Sproull and Kiesler (1991), according to which the lack of social cues in CMC makes it more difficult to hold a fluid conversation. As a result, CMC communication requires more effort than face-to-face communication.

According to Walther (1996), interpersonal communication can be improved in CMC through the use of hyperpersonal communication. According to this model, levels of affection and emotion that develop through CMC relationships can equal or surpass face-to-face relationships. Individuals are able to use the Internet to form groups with people with similar interests. This allows individuals to interact purposively with others of like minds. Other distinctions of interaction in online dating, as compared with face-to-face dating, include fewer cues (due to the absence of nonverbal clues) and an increased ability to manage self-presentation (Gibbs et al., 2006).

Online daters have the ability to manage the manner in which they present themselves through text and images in CMC. According to Walther (1996), individuals consciously manage self-presentation via written communication by taking time to plan and create the message they want to convey. In terms of profile pictures, Whitty (2007) argues that physical appearance is important when communicating through online dating sites. Her study (2007) revealed that online daters are selective when choosing pictures to post on their profile. Therefore, in the absence of nonverbal cues and with a reduction of social cues, daters focus more attention to cues given off (i.e. grammar in textual portions of the profile) and cues given (i.e. profile photographs) when creating a profile or corresponding with others.

Identity Formation and Self-Presentation through CMC

Following the creation of a dating profile, individuals can begin to search for people with whom they wish to interact. Online interaction provides individuals with a unique opportunity to explore the various aspects of the self. Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) has been used by various researchers to understand CMC and the latter's use by individuals in the process of self-presentation. Individuals often have multiple screen names, web pages and e-mail addresses representing different aspects of themselves (Lengel et al 2004). Since new technologies have impacted the manner in which people interact and communicate, technology may also influence self-presentation and identity formation online. According to Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998), the Internet and online interaction can be viewed as a means for creating and negotiating identities.

Walther, Slovacek, and Tidweel (2001) examine the importance of visual images of individuals interacting through CMC. They note that individuals can be strategic in their presentation. CMC permits individuals to have more control over their presented identities. The aforementioned benefits afforded by CMC allow for new stronger relationships to develop that may not be possible with face-to-face interaction: "online communicators may exploit the capabilities of text-based, nonvisual interaction to form levels of affinity that would be unexpected in parallel offline interactions" (Walther et al., 2001, p.110).

In accordance to Goffman's (1959) work on identity performance and presentation of the self, identities are not pre-determined but are instead performed according to time, place and audience. Furthermore, Phillips (2009, p.304) indicates that identity is:

social not merely in the sense of being relational; it is also social in the sense that it is negotiated. We do not stride into the social world as wholly formed individuals. Nor are we putty in the hands of the collective. Instead, we become who we are in relation to others, as others become themselves in relation to us.

Using this perspective, the construction of identity online can be defined through physical and textual performances in the online realm (Phillips, 2009).

Whitty (2007) applies Goffman's theories as a framework to examine online dating site users. Her study sets out to understand how individuals present themselves through their profiles and how they interact with potential dates. Most participants in Whitty's (2007) study report embellishing their self-presentation in order to attract other online daters. While members of the dating site use the absence of physical presence as an opportunity to present an ideal self, they actually expect a more "authentic" presentation from others (Whitty 2007). Latter portions of the literature review will provide a more detailed description of theories concerning various aspects of self.

As mentioned in the introduction, this study will primarily focus on female online daters who have been found to reproduce the very stereotypical self-presentations that men desire. In order to examine and discuss self-presentation in online dating and the various aspects of self that individuals portray, it is important to first distinguish and identify the manner in which online self-presentation practices differ between men and women. The following section will highlight these differences. The differences will help highlight the importance of focusing on female profiles.

Gender Online

Haraway (1991, p.151) argued that, in earlier stages of the Internet, digital technology would be able to trouble the social-constructed dichotomy of men and women and as a result, form a world without gender. There also were hopes that social media would

influence women to go against media stereotypes and provide them with an opportunity to construct a new definition of what it means to be a female (Dixon-Scott, 2002). However, in the new millennium, Plant (2000) found that, as during pre-internet times, the constraints experienced in the virtual realm reflect the manner in which patriarchal values shape the technical through a political economy of the female body. This is to say that there are suggestions that social media are being shaped by a commercial agenda that advantage images of an online girl “who is highly sexualized and commoditized” (Shade, 2007, p. 72). While the political economy of the female body has remained relatively stable, the focus of male self-presentation has changed overtime. The following paragraphs provide examples of how self-presentation of men has evolved and how female self-presentation has remained unaffected, despite enhanced opportunities through online media for self-exploration and identity play (Turkle, 1995).

Research on newspaper personals and the online dating arena has revealed that men and women use different techniques when presenting themselves in online profiles or advertisements. These differences distinguish what each gender believes is sought by the opposite sex and what each gender looks for in a match. The examination of various studies that outline gender differences in self-presentation will assist me in understanding and identifying how women and men self-present and provide a basis from which to compare such presentational behaviour to the individuals in my own study.

Given that there are few studies focusing on gender differences in online dating, it may be useful to examine earlier studies that look at self-presentation by men and women in newspaper personal advertisements. Latter portions of this section will highlight how self-presentation by men and women has changed overtime from newspaper advertisements to online dating profiles.

Upon reviewing personal advertisements, Lynn & Bolig (1985) found that women have been shown to prefer older and financially secure partners whereas men seek physical attractiveness and youth. Similarly, in a study based on newspaper personal advertisements, men emphasized their financial resources, status, and occupation; in contrast, women drew attention to their physical attractiveness and body shape (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992; Hirschman, 1987; Jagger, 2001). In accordance to these finding, a more recent study examining online dating profiles by Hancock and Toma (2009, p. 380) concluded that women's photographs are significantly less accurate than men's whereas women's photographs contain on average, three times as many discrepancies as men's. Additionally, Whitty (2008) found that, in dating profiles online, women are more likely than men to include a photo and misrepresent physical appearance by either using an out-dated picture or posting glamour shots. These findings coincide with earlier findings on newspaper personals where men reported to seek out youth and physical attractiveness in women.

However, a review of literature on gender-based self-presentation revealed a change in regards to the way that men portray themselves in newspaper advertisements versus online profiles. Earlier studies based on newspaper personals reveal that women look for both ability to provide and indicators of social status, such as education and career in men (Lance, 1998; Woll & Cozby, 1987 1987). However, Fiore and Donath (2004) found that men who present themselves in their profiles as older, more educated, and with higher levels of self-reported attractiveness receive more messages. Furthermore, men in Whitty's (2008) online dating study generated profiles with the assumption that women look for a man of large size and strength. These findings on self-

presentation strategies reveal that the focus of men has shifted from status and career in newspapers advertisements to status and appearance in online dating profiles.

The pressures of meeting the desires of another dater can lead online daters to embellish online profiles. Since the initial encounter between parties takes place through CMC (rather than face-to-face), online daters have more control over their self-presentation and can embellish profiles in order to appear more attractive. Whitty (2008, p.1717) found that, while men in her study were dishonest about height and relationship status, many women are more deceitful about appearance. A large number of women usually receive more messages when they do not describe themselves as “heavy,” have higher levels of self-reported attractiveness, and post a photo on their profiles. More specifically, Scheib, Gangestad and Thornhill (1999) found in their study that most men prefer youthful and slender women who have lustrous hair, large eyes, full lips, small noses, and clear and smooth skin. In essence, while men continue to seek out attractive and young women, women continue to reproduce the very stereotypical self-presentations that men desire. Since this finding is based on literature reviewed in the current study, the finding is a general tendency, which may be subject to many exceptions.

Additional examples of the gender differences seen through self-presentation will be provided in latter sections of the literature review based on Arvidsson’s (2006) study of daters from Match.com.

Part 2: Online Dating Sites: The Evolution of Self-Presentation and Emergence of a New Online “Self”

Online Dating Sites

Dating sites vary between paid and unpaid systems but most of them operate on a hybrid system where individuals can post profiles for free but where fees must be paid by

those wishing to contact other daters (Hardey, 2002, p. 572). The difference between being a member of a free website versus a paid website is of importance in the current study when describing and analyzing self-presentation. This is because the second research question examines if the structure of paid and unpaid sites influences potential stereotypification of online daters. For this reason, the site structure of Match.com, a paid dating site and POF, a free dating site, will be examined in this research. Since no academic research has yet examined the differences between paid and unpaid dating sites, any findings will stem from my own observations of the two sites.

Once an individual decides to join a site, they create a profile. Typically a profile includes a photo or multiple photos in addition to information about the online dater including what he or she is seeking in a partner, age, location, interests, smoking and drinking habits, education, careers, a user name, and a body description. Online daters enter desired criteria including sex, age, and geographical location and there are options for advanced searching. Next, online daters view profiles of potential partners and can initiate communication by sending a message of interest. If sites are fee-based, as is the case with Match.com, online daters must pay before having further contact. Messages are sent through the site, not personal email addresses. Participants can then share personal contact information and move the relationship off the site or offline.

Evolution of Self-Presentation

New communication technology offers individuals with far more self-presentation capabilities than was possible with former methods of self-presentation. Earlier forms of mediated matchmaking, such as newspaper personal advertisements during the mid-19th century and video dating which became popular in the 1980s, did not afford users the same opportunities as Internet matchmaking services. Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006,

p.416) affirm that online dating sites have an expanding user base and increased self-presentation capabilities that were not possible with newspaper advertisements. Self-presentation in online dating sites can now be carried out by “using a wide range of multimedia content, such as text-based descriptions, photographs, and video recordings, and to interact using both asynchronous and real-time communication tools, such as e-mail, instant messaging, and chat rooms” (Gibbs et al. 2006, p.153).

Unlike face-to-face communication, computer-mediated interaction allows individuals to engage in deliberate self-presentation. Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006, p.153) indicate that “using the Internet to meet potential dating partners presents individuals with new challenges in regard to self-presentation and self-disclosure behaviours”. This is done in the process of constructing an online dating profile where individuals strategically select certain words and photographs in order to be portrayed in a particular way. Ellison et al., (2006, p. 153) indicate that two key features of CMC, a reduction of communication cues and the potential for asynchronous communication, allow users to carry out “selective self-presentation”. The former allows users to place more emphasis on controllable verbal and linguistic cues while the latter provides individuals with more time to generate well-crafted messages (Ellison et al., 2006, p. 153). Even though strategic self-presentation is possible in any form of CMC such as instant messaging, email, chat rooms and social networking, it is frequently described as a common practice carried out by individuals in online dating. Strategic self-presentation is discussed in greater detail in an upcoming section of this literature review.

Online dating services rely on controllable verbal and linguistic cues since there are not a lot of nonverbal communication cues. The controllable aspects of CMC allow individuals to present themselves online in a way that is “more selective, malleable, and

subject to self-censorship in CMC than it is in face-to-face interaction” (Walther, 1996, p. 20). In addition, since online dating is conducted in a diachronic environment, users are granted more time to consciously create messages to other users. In essence, “the mediated nature of online dating gives participants more opportunities to present themselves positively and deliberately” (Ellison et al. 2006, p.153).

Furthermore, Bargh et al. (2002) found that in comparison to face-to-face interactions, Internet interactions allowed individuals to better express aspects of their true selves—aspects of themselves that they wanted to express but felt unable to. The relative anonymity of online interactions and the lack of a shared social network online may allow individuals to reveal potentially negative aspects of the self online (Bargh et al., 2002).

Aspects of Self

As previously mentioned, a study conducted by Bargh et al., (2002) on university undergraduates revealed that the ‘true self’ concept is more accessible in memory during Internet interactions and the ‘actual self’ more accessible during face interactions.

However, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the various theories surrounding aspects of self, it is important to review research from which Bargh et al., based their own study.

Carl Rogers (1951) theorized on the concept of the ‘true self’, which he defined as traits or characteristics that individuals possess and would like to have but are not usually able to express. Rogers, a founding father in psychotherapy research, theorized that much of what happens in therapy has to do with the client feeling that “he was not being his real self, often he did not know what his real self was, and felt satisfaction when he had become more truly himself” (p. 136). The ‘true self’ is conceptually distinct from both

the 'ideal self' or 'possible selves' on the one hand and the 'actual self' on the other since it is a self that exists psychologically (i.e. a present, not a future version of self), but not fully expressed in social life (i.e. not the 'actual self').

Moreover, Higgins (1987) distinguishes between ideal, ought, and actual self-concepts: the 'ideal self' contains those qualities one strives someday to possess, the 'ought self' those qualities one feels obligated to possess, and the 'actual self' those one actually expresses to others at present. Aside from the actual self, the ideal and ought self are concerned with future and potential versions of self that do not yet exist in present time.

Since the Internet can be used as a platform for self-expression and affords individuals with anonymity in computer-mediated communication (CMC), individuals should be able to express the 'true self': those identity-important and phenomenally real aspects of self not often or easily expressed to others. Many dating sites allow daters to maintain a level of fantasy through anonymous emailing and voice services. For example, on Match.com, anonymous voicemail and telephone calls give daters the opportunity to 'hear how his voice sounds' and therefore imagine 'him' in more detail, before deciding whether one wants to meet or not (Hecht, 2003). Gibbs et al., (p.156, 2006) indicate that "the anonymity of CMC encourages individuals to experiment with new forms of representation that vastly diverge from their "real life" identities". However, on the contrary, Hardey (2002, p. 583) finds that "the anonymity of individuals that characterises dating sites rarely seems to facilitate the construction of fantasy selves, but acts as a foundation for the building of trust and establishing real world relationships". Moreover, anonymity is compromised on dating sites when individuals post personal profiles pictures and identifying information.

The incorporation of technology into everyday life has caused scholars like Turkle (1995) to reassess the already established definitions of the self and their applicability to interactions occurring through these media. Turkle's research (1995) focuses on understanding the problems of the self online, and how it changes under the influence of online interaction. Turkle (1995) indicates that CMC gives participants more freedom to explore playful, fantastical online personae that differ from their "real life" identities. According to Turkle (1995), the Internet serves as a ground where individuals can manipulate identity through role-play and online engagement with others as well as "try out" new ones" (Whitty, 1996, p.356).

To build on earlier discussions surrounding the impact new technologies have on the lives of individuals, Turkle's (2011) most recent book examines how we develop technology and how it develops us. In her work, Turkle (2011) explores how individuals are changed as technology continues to offer more alternatives for face-to-face interaction. Individuals are constantly connected through electronic devices, and this has resulted in the emergence of a new self, "our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology" (Turkle 2011, p.16).

Part 3: Self-Presentation Processes in Online Dating

Strategic Self-Presentation

Online dating sites provide individuals with a template to openly inform other online daters about them. Similar to other personal homepages like MySpace and Facebook, online dating sites are interactive sites in which the structure is set up for interaction based on open profiles which display personal information and pictures in effort to lure other daters. However, each online dating website is set up differently and the

information that is disclosed about individuals is closely examined in introduction section of this research paper.

Most often, individuals who take advantage of online dating services are strategic in their self-presentation online in order to increase the chances of moving a relationship from online to an offline setting. Whitty (2008, p.2) indicates that “online communicators may exploit the capabilities of text-based, nonvisual interaction to form levels of affinity that would be unexpected in parallel offline interactions.” As a result, the limited cues in online dating settings may produce exaggerated or idealized perception of others (Walther, 1996).

According to Gibbs, Ellison and Heino (2006), the ability to produce exaggerated or idealized self-presentation may have some implications. Firstly, individuals interacting online may be less honest during self-disclosure in light of increased opportunities to manipulate identity (Gibbs et al., 2006, p.156). Secondly, the anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communication, as is available on Match.com through anonymous voicemail and telephone calls, may encourage online daters to “experiment with new forms of representation that vastly diverge from their “real life” identities” (Gibbs et al., 2006, p.156). However, as will be discussed in forthcoming portions of the literature review, anonymity is lost in the instance that an online dater posts a profile picture to their dating profile (Hardey, 2004). Concealing one’s identity in online dating would be counterproductive to the use of this communication technology, since dating sites, such as Match.com and POF, are designed to allow individuals in close geographical areas an opportunity to meet when they otherwise may not (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008) and, therefore, move an online relationship over to the offline realm.

Control over self-disclosure has an effect on both parties taking part in online

since individuals rely on their imagination to build a complete picture of a party online. According to Gibbs et al., (2006) “limited cues in CMC are likely to result in over attribution and exaggerated or idealized perceptions of others and that those who meet and interact via CMC use such limited cues to engage in optimized or selective self-presentation”. This suggests that individuals strategically leave certain sections of the profile blank, so that negative attributes can be left out of the picture. Furthermore, ambiguity in online profiles leaves others to fill in the blanks about an unknown partner and potentially visualize a person who represents an ideal match. In fact, Match.com site managers encourage users to build a thorough online profile; however, “the effect is primarily that of leaving blanks that stimulate curiosity and fantasy,” (Arvidsson, 2006).

In terms of idealized and exaggerated self-presentations, Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel and Shulman (2009, p.232) found that distorted online self-presentations are generated in order to draw in more attention and interest. Due to impression management motives, online dating subscribers are faced with a dilemma: “presenting oneself as more attractive but stretching the truth to do so, or presenting oneself more honestly (in anticipation of the face-to-face revelation) but risking being less attractive to a larger pool of suitors in doing so” (Walther et al., 2009, p.232). According to Walther et al. (2009, p.232), online daters in his study tend to be more honest with their self-presentation in the case that they decide to meet someone from the online realm in an offline setting, “the anticipation of meeting offline increases their desire for authentic clues about their partners’ appearance, behaviour, and attitudes”. Therefore, participants in his study expect honesty in the formulation of the content for self-descriptions and message exchanges, even though honesty may result in less successful self-presentation.

Moreover, Whitty (2008, p.1716) indicates that individuals attempt to represent themselves in an honest fashion, so that the online relationship can carry over to the offline realm with no big surprises, “individuals who are able to express their ‘true’ self-online are more likely to develop strong Internet relationships and bring these relationships into their ‘real’ lives”. However, the participants of her study find themselves trying to balance an honest representation of themselves while also selling an ideal version of them (Whitty, 2008, p.1716). According to Whitty (2008, p.1716), the development of a profile that represents the true self in combination with some minor exaggerations is intended to open up the possibilities and attract a pool of candidates that an individual can choose from. She indicates that dating sites are a place where individuals can “identify their true self or play around with presentations of themselves” to a certain extent, so that individuals do not disappoint partners when meeting face-to-face (2008, p.1716).

Some scholars (Hardey, 2004; Heino, Ellison and Gibbs, 2010) indicate that the manner in which individuals present themselves online can be seen as a marketing of the self. Hardey (2004, p.210) indicates that “users adopt a strategy of ‘marketing the self’ that involves shaping information so that it meets what they believe are the characteristics desired by an ideal partner”. By shaping or distorting information in a profile, individuals deceive other online daters. The desire to attract attention forms a “pressure to present an idealized online persona, which may not be a completely honest representation of one’s “true self”, (Gibbs et al., 2006, p.170). According to Hardey (2004, p.211), the manner in which individuals present themselves is vital since self-descriptions provide introductory information, based on which others decide whether to enter into communication. Since individuals can only rely on profiles in making a decision to contact someone on a dating

site, users work their profiles to make them appealing. The following sections discuss the importance of physical appearance in online dating and the types of photographs individuals post to their profile.

Physical Appearance

The importance of attractiveness on the Internet is a contested subject. According to Levine (2000), CMC gives individuals who do not fit a stereotypical model of human beauty a chance to have an equal opportunity to be found desirable. This can be achieved by flirting online, where individuals attract others based on words, charm, and seduction as opposed to physical attraction cues (Levine, 2000, p.565). However, the majority of the literature reviewed for this paper revealed that an individual's physical appearance is an important and decisive factor in forming relationships with others online. This is demonstrated through Whitty's (2008) case study in which the women misrepresented themselves by posting glamour shots as well as outdated or slimming photos on profiles.

Furthermore, Sprecher (2009, p.770) indicates that "customers on dating websites who are interested in finding a romantic partner are likely to insist on looking at the others' posted photographs before investing any time in seeking additional information or initiating communication". Therefore, self-presentation online relies on users of dating sites to post a personal photograph, since most individuals base initiating conversation off of picture visuals on profiles.

Profile Photographs

Match.com and POF both advise online daters that personal photographs are vital for online dating success since many individuals decide to initiate contact with an online dater based on a profile picture. According to Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006, p.430) the

photographs used on the profile are necessary in order to warrant or support the claims made in textual descriptions. As a result, daters use photographs not only for the purpose of visualizing their appearance, but also to confirm that the self-descriptions provided in textual format match what is seen through visual image. For example, a photograph of a female posing at a bar and another photograph of the same female standing in a lab coat while working in a medical office, function on many levels. According to Siibak (2009) “on the one hand the photos are supporting the discursive claims made in the textual part of the profile; on the other hand they are giving an overview of a person’s self-concept and physical characteristics”. Given the fact that individuals have the capability of editing digital photography as well as carefully selecting and controlling the images released to the public eye, selective self-presentation has been extended from the textual context to the profile photograph.

According to some scholars, photography guarantees an unhindered proximity of representation. Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce developed a theory indicating that a sign may stand for its object because of a likeness to it (icon), a connection to it (index); or because of a habit or a law (symbol). In his early work, Peirce (1955, p.106) argued that photographs are instructive for the reason that “they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent...this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature.” Consequently, for Peirce, photographs belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection. Peirce acknowledges that “the photograph does indeed ‘resemble’ the thing photographed,” (Winston & Tsang, 2009, p.460) and as a result, this form of resemblance in Peircean terms is called iconicity. Since a photograph is depicted as corresponding point by point to and resembling the object photographed, it

is no wonder that Peirce depicts a photograph as “an index having an icon incorporated in it” (Winston & Tsang, 2009, p.463). By describing a photograph as indexical, Peirce acknowledges the ongoing power of photography’s claim on the real, even though many critics believe that digital imaging undermines Peirce’s claims.

Brian Winston and Hing Tsang believe that Peirce does not pay attention to the reality that manipulation of an image is a prevailing characteristic of the photographic process at every stage, particularly in the dark room. To counter Peirce’s notion of photography as an index, Winston and Tsang (2009, p.461) argue that a photograph “can be physically ‘forced’ through framing, development, and printing, etc., not to correspond point by point to nature. This is clearly the case with...wide-angle lenses, filters, black and white, the specific limited modes of color film representations, cropping.” Winston and Tsang (2009, p.460) regard Peirce’s account of a photograph as both iconic and indexical as naïve; “the trouble is that physical connection, physiological compulsion, is an inadequate descriptor of photographic reality.” The authors believe that an indexical physical connection between a photograph and object seem unlikely due to the complexity of photographic data as well as the possibility of manipulation of the photograph.

Winston (1995, p.259) argues that digitalization is responsible for removing the truth claim from photographic images, “digitalization destroys the photographic image as evidence of anything except the process of digitalization... for documentary to survive the widespread diffusion of such technology depends on removing its claim on the real. There is no alternative.” Digital technology has enabled individuals to manipulate, reshape and fake photographic and movie images, and as a result has put an end to the essence of documentary photography and film and their claim on the real. Arlid Fetveit

(1999, p.795) also agrees with Winston on the fact that digital technology has facilitated manipulation practices on photography and therefore it is no longer clear whether one is looking at an ordinary photograph or one that has been manipulated.

Online daters have the option to post pictures of themselves on their online dating profile. Adam Arvidsson (2006, p.678) indicates that “most [profiles] have photos, usually faces (this is strongly recommended by the Match.com guidelines), but sometimes full body shots”. The only disadvantage to posting personal photos online is that it undermines the anonymity of individuals posted on the site. Hardey (2004, p.211) indicates that “others are concerned that, as the photographs can be viewed by the casual visitor to the site, there may be potential for embarrassment if their image is easily recognized”. Even though major online dating sites ensure privacy, new media technologies have played a role in invading the privacy of citizens.

Valerie Steeves (2006) indicates that, since the digital environment has altered the experience of privacy, citizens worry about new technologies invading social boundaries. Even though basic identifying information such as gender, age and postal code are revealed during online dating registration, the choice to reveal one’s personal identity, (i.e. name), is in the hands of online daters. The next section will discuss the textual portion of dating profiles, as written sections also provide online daters an opportunity to market information about themselves as well as qualities they seek in an ideal match.

Self-Presentation through Text

Arvidsson (2006) found that women and men have different techniques in presenting themselves on dating sites. However, the dominant element of the vast majority of the profiles surveyed in this case study contained an “‘experiential ethic’ of self-discovery, an orientation towards touching, revealing or sharing one’s true self through open-hearted

and intimate communication with others, or through an active or experientially rich life conduct,” (Arvidsson, 2006, p.680). The majority of users present themselves as already living experientially rich lives with a good social life, “I love, travelling, working out, reading books, and spending time with family and friends” (Arvidsson, 2006, p.680).

Furthermore, Arvidsson (2006, p.681) indicates that individuals on Match.com emphasize that they possess qualities that enhance their lives through contact and new experiences; “they are ‘easy going’, ‘intelligent’, confident’ and ‘have a passion for life’”. Users would then seek partners with whom to share a life conceived as an ongoing quest for enriching experiences,” (Arvidsson, 2006, p.681). These are some of the ways in which individuals describe themselves and what they are looking for in a partner. Individuals who browse through profiles may view the various written texts and descriptions in order to make a decision whether to pursue an individual or not based on profile descriptions.

In examining Match.com, Arvidsson discovered the struggle that men have had in building their profiles. This struggle appeared to stem from the pressures that force men to adapt their self-presentation online to the expectations of the predominately female environment, one man indicated: “I don’t feel comfortable having to describe myself, but I understand it has to be done, so here we go, (LM, 31)” (Arvidsson, 2006, p.682). It appears that male users are under the impression that there is a separate brand identity set out for them. This brand identity is “centered on a problematic emphasis on the self and its experiences and complexities, that they [male users] have to wrestle with when making their self-presentations on the site,” (Arvidsson, 2006, p.682).

Online dating profiles limit individuals in terms of the characteristics that one may use to describe him or her self. Online daters complete their profiles by selecting the

most fitting description from drop down menus in addition to filling out open-text fields. As a result, online dating sites can be seen as a breeding ground for stereotype formation since all individuals using a particular dating site are limited to the same descriptors when generating an online profile. The next section will address the likeness among online profiles by linking this trend to profiles becoming stereotypical representations of a male or female online dater. Furthermore, the literature will address how stereotypes are formed and identify the factors that help to generate stereotypes in online dating profiles.

Stereotypes

Marilynn Brewer (1996, p.254) defines stereotyping as “the use of stereotypic knowledge in forming an impression of an individual”. Brewer indicates that (1996, p.257), if there is a lack of individuating information, then stereotypes are used for impression formation. The use of category stereotypes is reduced as more individuating information becomes available. However, if there is too much mixed or complex information, a perceiver then returns to using stereotypes. David Jacobson (1999) argues that, not only do stereotypes function in order to reduce information overload, but “they may also operate to augment an ‘information-impooverished environment,’ a condition that characterizes much text-based CMC”. According to Meiser and Hewstone (2004, p.599), stereotype formation consists of “both the extraction of true correlations and the emergence of erroneous correlations between group membership and other variables in the social environment”.

In their study of online discussions, Postmes and Spears (2002) found that, when gender stereotypes are primed, de-individuation (i.e. the lack of individuating information) increases both the degree to which impressions of others are stereotypic as well as the extent to which people behave stereotypically. In the early stages of the Internet, there were hopes that through digitized media, an array of first-person

performances would enable the destruction or destabilization of constraining accounts of gendered identity (Plant, 2000). However, the reality remains that gender stereotyping has not disappeared in this medium, and is sometimes even accentuated (Christofides, Islam and Desmarais, 2009, p. 897).

Through analyzing personal advertisements, Miller, Smith, and Trembath (2000) set out to uncover how potential partner preferences of men and women influence self-presentation. Subsequently, the researchers found that men expressed a preference for attractive women while self-presenting as financially stable and many women expressed a preference for financially stable men, while self-presenting as physically attractive. These findings suggest that men and women self-present based on traits that they feel are desired by preferred partners. Additionally, a study conducted by Rudman et al. (2001) found that both men and women are likely to identify with gender stereotypes if they felt that the stereotypes were positive stereotypes. The findings from these two studies indicate that, if daters consider a specific gender stereotype as one that is positive or desirable, a dater is more likely to identify with it.

In online dating, positive or desirable stereotypes may form as a result of a limitation on the characteristics that individuals use to describe themselves in online dating profiles. The limited descriptors embedded in the online dating registration process, serve to facilitate the filtering process through which individuals search for potential suitors. Heino, Ellison and Gibbs (2010, p.437) affirm that individuals are able to use a search engine in order to filter through profiles to look for individuals with specific characteristics. As a result, online daters select individuals based on limited discrete characteristics rather than on holistic impressions. According to Heino et al. (2010, p.437), filtering mechanisms in online dating encourages a market mentality

where individuals shop for people with perfect qualifications. In this type of partner shopping, online daters are able to “increase the odds of a long-term relationship because it allowed them to target individuals with certain characteristics and to avoid those with qualities that were “deal-breakers” (Heino et al., 2010, p.438).

In order to assess whether the Internet facilitates original self-presentation or if instead dating sites inhibit original self-presentation and enforce stereotypes, this research will examine online dating profiles and the text through which online daters express and describe themselves. In examining earlier forms of mediated dating, Hardey (2004, p.211) concluded that the limited space available in newspaper dating advertisements promoted stereotypical descriptions of male and female daters. As a result, individuals marketed themselves and shaped information using culturally stereotypical descriptions of masculinity or femininity and chose self-descriptions to fit what they believed would be desired characteristics by an ideal partner.

Furthermore, the limited textual space available in newspaper dating advertisements limited the amount of space that individuals could use to describe themselves. Conversely, online dating offers an open environment for self-presentation- “dating sites...allow individuals to develop lengthier and more complex descriptions of the self than have been possible through the print media” (Hardey, 2004, p.211). However, online dating studies demonstrate that the characteristics which daters self-present on the Internet may be more dependent on traits that an individual believes are attractive rather than the traits the individual actually possesses. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of deception in online dating.

Deception

Intentional Deception

Deception has been identified as one of the greatest disadvantages of online dating. A survey conducted by Gibbs, Ellison and Heino reveals that many individuals are suspicious, “86% of online daters believe that others misrepresent their physical appearance” (Gibbs et al., 2006). Additionally, online daters often mesh characteristics of their true self with a version of ideal self. Catalina Toma, Jeffrey Hancock and Nicole Ellison (2008, p.396) indicate that “in the absence of direct physical contact between daters, characteristics such as weight and height can be easily misrepresented, photographs manipulated and status and income exaggerated”. Online dating facilitates deceptive behaviour for the reason that individuals have direct control over self-presentation. As a result, information disclosed can portray a skewed image of an individual in order to come off in a more favourable fashion. .

Researchers have found that some online daters intentionally use deception in order to lure others to their profile and ultimately find a match. Lucid (2009, p.44) introduces social distance theory as a factor that may encourage deception or lying. According to this theory, individuals are more likely to lie if there is social distance between a person and the person being lied to. Since CMC has decreased nonverbal cues and asynchronous interaction, individuals are more likely to lie more when communicating via e-mail and instant messenger, and less likely when communication on the phone and face-to-face. According to Lucid (2009, p.44), individuals use online deception in order to “strategically attract dates, to present an “ideal” self that they hope to become in the future, to circumvent the technical aspects of sites such as search filters, to compensate for a lack of closed-ended options that suited them, or to deceive others into meeting them”. However, individuals are deterred from deceptive behaviour when

they intent to meet an individual face-to-face (Lucid, 2009, p.45).

Whitty (2008, p.1715) indicates that people often experiment with various photos and descriptions to ensure success in attracting others. The participants of her study admitted to misrepresenting themselves in their profile in order to attract others. As many as 51% of the study sample admitted to lying about: “their looks, their current relationship, age weight, socio-economic status, and interests,” (Whitty, 2008, p.1715). The participants of the study indicated that the misrepresentations were considered to be exaggerations rather than deliberate lies (Whitty, 2008, p.1714). Women were more likely to lie about their looks and post outdated photos on their profiles for the reason that men are more likely to scope out females who are physically attractive (Whitty, 2008, p.1715). One interviewee indicated reasoning behind her misrepresentation, “there is a thing for body type and you can pick ‘slim, average, athletic, a bit over weight’. Do you know any chick that is going to tell you that they are a bit overweight?” (Whitty, 2008, p.1715).

The profile embellishments described in Whitty’s (2008) study give an indication about the inaccurate and misleading information that some online users display in order to increase attention to their profiles. The findings also reinforce the notion that self-presentation is usually used to express gender specific traits that are expected within the context of heterosexual norms. If daters self-present in order to attract partners, they may be more likely to rely on stereotypical traits than if they were self-presenting with the goal to describe their actual preferences and characteristics. Since the ultimate goal is to find a match, daters have an incentive to self-describe in a way that will lure others to their profile.

Moreover, there are individuals who provide a false representation of self with malicious intent. One common example of online infidelity is when married individuals generate profiles and present themselves as single in order to carry out extramarital sex (Lucid, 2009, p.43). In fact, there are already online dating sites intended for individuals who are already in relationships. One example of this is Ashley Madison, which advertises itself as an online dating service and social network service marketed primarily to people already in a relationship.

Unintentional Deception

Deception may also be an unintentional result due to technical constraints. Ellison et al., (2006) found that misrepresentation of the self in online dating may be a cause of the technical constraints imposed by online dating sites. For instance, individuals were found to make alterations to traits such as age due to the technical constraints of a website's search filters. Dating sites are known to ask registrants to choose self-descriptors based on options in drop down menus that later may work against them when other online daters are making online searches and filtering through profiles for an ideal candidate. According to Lucid (2009, p.41), the technical interface of some online dating websites promotes minor misrepresentations since daters are provided with close-ended responses when describing themselves. However, this becomes problematic when the online daters do not feel that the descriptor accurately matches their appearance. As an example, someone who has a shaved head may want to indicate their hair type as such rather than bald (Ellison et al., 2006). Thus, technical constraints may have an impact on the accuracy of self-descriptions in an online dater's profile.

Gibbs, Heino and Ellison (2006, p.169) found that honesty during self-disclosure may have a detrimental effect whereas "intentional and positive self-disclosure lead to

greater success". Gibbs et al. (2006, p.169) explained that this outcome is due to less honest individuals not revealing "flaws or negative characteristics that could turn off potential dating partners and may be outright lying about characteristics such as age, weight and physical appearance, or income". However, misrepresentation was not always intentional by online daters but rather a result of "an inaccurate self-concept, fudging demographic information such as age to avoid being "filtered out" in searches, and portrayal of an idealized or potential future version of the self" (Gibbs et al., 2006, p.170).

According to a study conducted by Whitty (2008), participants using online dating sites attempt to balance an honest representation of themselves while also selling an ideal version of them. Misrepresentation of the self in online dating may be correlated with the negative effects that some individuals may have experienced in being honest. A study conducted by Ellison et al. (2006) revealed that honesty has a negative effect on success, particularly in self-presentation. The authors indicate that in being dishonest, individuals form a "favourable impression on others through online dating because they are probably not revealing flaws or negative characteristics that could turn off potential dating partners" (Ellison et al. 2006).

In essence, online dating services have altered the way in which people present themselves to others. Dating sites have empowered individuals to become the masters of their own content and identity. Since each Internet user has the ability to maintain and control their identity online, it is not difficult to be deceitful. Online dating facilitates deceptive behaviour for the reason that individuals have direct control over self-presentation and the information disclosed. Furthermore, the online dating environment has generated pressures for individuals to be attractive when engaging in their self-

presentations in online profiles. As a result, people have resorted to various tactics to improve self-presentation in online dating profiles. Individuals resort to deceptive behaviour in order to construct a profile that reflects one's 'ideal self'.

Chapter III: Methodology

This research paper will examine the manner in which individuals present themselves through Match.com, a paid online dating website, and POF, a free online dating website. The research aims to examine whether there is a difference in the way that individuals present themselves through online dating profiles in paid versus unpaid dating sites. The research will examine each dating site individually and determine whether the structure and layout of the website improve or inhibit self-presentation. Furthermore, selected profiles will be scanned to examine whether individuals use a similar format in presenting themselves on the site or if each individual uses their own style and method of self-presentation. The researcher hopes to determine whether online dating sites encourage original self- presentation of females or if stereotypes are formed as a result of limited descriptors found in the registration process.

Research Design

This chapter describes the research methods used to address the following research questions: (a) RQ1: *To what extent does the profile development process on a dating site have an impact on the ways that individuals present themselves in an original way?* (b) RQ2: *To what extent does the structure of specific sites (paid vs. unpaid) influence potential stereotypification of female online daters?*

Ethnographic Content Analysis of Dating Sites

Thus far, the current study has examined the manner in which online dating sites have played a role in influencing or shaping social definitions and social practices for online dating. The next step is to use ethnographic content analysis (ECA) in order to observe online dating sites and the profiles created. ECA is a combination of conventional content

analysis and participant observation. While conventional content analysis provides a means for quantifying documentary material for statistical analysis by classifying key words, themes and ideas into a set of categories, an ethnographic approach deepens content analysis by collecting descriptive narrative data, as well as numerical information.

According to Altheide (1987, 1996), an ECA refers to a method used for finding, identifying, retrieving, and analyzing documents in order to make sense of their relevance, significance, and meaning. The emphasis is on discovery and description, including search for contexts, underlying meanings, patterns, and processes rather than mere quantity or numerical relationships between two or more variables (Altheide 1996). According to Altheide (1987, p.68), ECA is used to "document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships. Its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis".

According to Altheide (1996, p. 2), a document is "...any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis" and is examined to gain an understanding of "...the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up social reality shared by members of a society". In the current study, I am observing self-presentation as well as the interface and subscription process of online dating websites. Participating in the online dating subscription process and immersing myself in the online dating environment while lurking in the personal profile pages of others, helps me to understand the social reality of online dating, the process in generating online profiles and the role of online daters.

ECA is the preferred method of analysis since the data analysis for ECA can be textual or statistical and presented in tables and text. When observing online dating profiles, there is an abundance of textual information and some pictorial content that must be analysed in order to draw conclusions on both the stereotypification of online daters and differences between paid and unpaid sites. As Altheide (1996) explains:

ECA follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development-sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis. The aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study, including an orientation toward *constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances. (p. 16).

Since this research is solely based on the content analysis of online profiles without any follow-up interviews with online dating participants, it is not possible to validate deception. Even though online daters have admitted to embedding lies within their self-presentation (Whitty, 2008), this study is not concerned with the authenticity of online profiles. Instead, it examines personal narratives and descriptions used by daters to self-present. Therefore, since I cannot speculate whether individuals are authentic or deceitful, I will consider the content of each profile at face value and simply analyze the characteristics and descriptors which females in Ottawa use in order to present themselves to other daters.

Process

The problem in the current study is to examine online dating profiles originating from two dating sites in order to explore how both online daters and dating sites are responsible for shaping the manner in which individuals present themselves online to potential suitors, and if specific sites influence potential stereotypification of online daters.

The second step is to “become familiar with the process and context of the information ... (and) explore possible sources of information” (Altheide 1996, p.24). In order to fulfill this step, I joined Match.com as well as POF and became familiar with the interface and registration process. Furthermore, while registering for the dating sites I made sure to follow guidelines provided by the sites. According to Altheide (1996, p.24), the third step is to “become familiar with several examples of relevant documents, noting particularly the format. Select a unit of analysis, which may change”. Before I began to build my own profile, I reviewed materials from both of the dating sites and then proceeded to join in order to establish familiarity. My unit of analysis in the study included a step-by-step examination of the profile creation process and the personal profiles of various online daters from Match.com and POF. Ultimately, this research encompasses an examination of profile development on Match.com and POF as well as the individual profiles selected for analysis.

Sample

A purposive sampling strategy (Step 7; Altheide, 1996) was used since the goal of the present research paper is to examine how technology impacts individuals who make use of online dating sites and how the structure of specific sites influences self-presentation. Although initial ambitions were to analyze and compare homosexual and heterosexual men and women, the length constraints of a research paper and the complexity of a multidimensional analysis, (individuals from both genders with various sexual preferences) lead me to inevitably narrow the scope of this research. As a result, the sample group for this study will only include heterosexual females.

Heterosexuals were selected as the target sample group since almost all studies reviewed for this research discussed heterosexual online daters. Since I did not find

enough research on homosexual online daters, I decided to focus my attention on heterosexuals. Moreover, as discussed in the literature review, the constraints experienced in the virtual realm reflect the manner in which patriarchal values shape the technical through a political economy of the female body (Plant, 2000). Since stereotypes continue to define what it means to be a female in online media, it would be interesting to examine whether this finding is also prevalent in profiles found on dating sites.

After registering and navigating through multiple dating sites such as: Match.com, eHarmony, Chemistry.com and POF, I decided to restrict my focus to Match.com and POF. The primary reason why I decided to examine these two particular sites is because they permit an online dater to search and filter through other online daters. The search and filtering function of a dating site is an essential feature for this research project, as I am able to select the sample group while using specific search criteria. Other dating sites, such as eHarmony, provide online daters with daily matches but do not allow an individual to go through all online daters in the database. Dating sites which do not permit an individual to seek out and filter through a pool of online daters cannot be used for this research, since it would be impossible to search for the target sample group.

POF and Match.com both have millions of subscribers. According to the POF website, there are 32 million members who have registered to the online dating site. Furthermore, Match.com was selected for this research analysis as it is amongst the top-five consumer ranked sites and is discussed by Arvidsson (2006) in *Quality Singles: Internet Dating and the Work of Fantasy*. POF offers a distinct element to the analysis of dating sites since it is a free service and can help to determine if a fee has an influencing factor in self-presentation.

In order to examine the sites, I became a member of both Match.com and POF and created a profile. Next, I obtained an ethical clearance based on secondary use of data from the University of Ottawa. The individuals from whom the data has been collected are online daters willing to make up a profile in order to present themselves to potential suitors. However, the data I collected does not permit the identification of any individuals because daters typically use usernames to identify themselves.

Online dating subscribers from Match.com and POF completed a questionnaire in order to generate a complete online dating profile. Individuals who subscribed were willing to provide personal information such as age, sex and location in order to find suitors. The information I obtained from the sites is available to any individual who joins the websites and therefore, the materials are not privileged.

This research will not require the researcher to come in contact with online daters who have generated profiles on the dating sites. Rather, I will be conducting an observational study in order to examine the profiles of online daters in order to answer the aforementioned research questions.

Participants and Recruitment

During the registration process, online dating sites require that registrants provide a postal code in order to identify a dater's location. This information facilitates the matchmaking process by narrowing down matches to those who live in close proximity of the registrant. Since I provided the postal code of my residence in Ottawa, my dating matches will default to those individuals who live in Ottawa. For this reason, the females selected from the study will be from Ottawa.

Furthermore, since I registered to both dating sites as a heterosexual female, my matches automatically default to heterosexual males. However, subscribing as a

heterosexual female does not limit my matches to just heterosexual men. In fact, online daters who subscribe to POF and Match.com can perform an advanced search in order to customize and narrow down their search requirements. The advanced search option allows registrants of any sex and sexual orientation to filter searches to seek out both heterosexual or homosexual males and females. In the case of the current research, I was able to search for my target audience which are heterosexual females in Ottawa.

Twenty participants were selected from the two dating sites using a filtering tool. In total, 10 females were found on Match.com and 10 on POF. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 30 years old. The main requirements in selecting the females included: being heterosexual, living in Ottawa (as my matches will be based on my geographical location), looking for a relationship and having a profile picture. Once the females were selected, they were assigned a nick-name in order to protect their identity. The profile pages of the sample group were printed and stored until I further analyzed the content and images on the profile. The females selected were not contacted at any point during the study, as the research is an observational study only.

Data Collection

According to (Altheide, 1996), the next step was to collect data using the protocol and keep descriptive examples. The documents (which consisted of screen shots of the profile creation process) were collected and can be found in the appendix section of the paper. Further, profile pages of female online daters were printed and coded. Each female profile contained an identifier number in order to conceal the identity of the online dater. Throughout the analysis, data was examined in order to determine emergence of themes, or as stated by Altheide (1996), "recurring typical themes that run through a lot of the reports" (p. 31). The reoccurrence of themes helped identify the existence of stereotypical

self-descriptions in online profiles or provided an indication of how individuals portrayed originality. The definition of an original profile in this research is any profile that a) uses a distinct way to display information (i.e. through the use of headings and listing personal information in bullet form) or b) contains unique narrative content, i.e. original self-descriptions, unconventional styles of writing and portrayal of emotion (i.e. sarcasm) relative to all profiles in the study.

Furthermore, several steps were taken in order to seek out stereotypes in profiles. First, I initiated a general review of all profiles in order to familiarize myself with the content in each profile. Next, I generated a list of words that recurred in profiles and kept track of how many profiles contained the same descriptors or same photograph techniques. In the textual portions of the site, stereotypes were identified as any self-generated characteristics that were recurrent throughout lifestyle, personality and appearance traits in all profiles. Furthermore, I examined all profile photographs to determine if there are common trends in the way that individuals visually present themselves (i.e., if images include face or full body, and if pictures display common trends or contexts). Based on the observation of textual and pictorial portions of dating profiles, I produced a list of words outlining the most common self-descriptors. In the results and discussion section, my findings on profile pictures are described and complimented with statistics, which outline common practices by females for visual self-representation.

Data Analysis

In order to determine whether online dating sites facilitate original self-presentation or if instead dating sites inhibit original self-presentation and enforce stereotypes, I examined two sides of the online dating process.

Firstly, all textual data, either self-generated or self-selected from a pre-determined list, was scanned for reoccurring themes. Based on these observations, I constructed a chart that categorized these findings in accordance to various sections of the profile. The collection of this information helped determine whether individuals generally report similar characteristics and traits in the textual portions of the dating profile (i.e. aspects concerning lifestyle, personality and appearance traits). While looking for key words or personal characteristics in online dating advertisement narratives, I also examined whether the two various online dating sites prompted individuals to provide certain personal information. Such an observation helped conclude whether individuals were prompted in the profile development process to provide similar narratives in open-text sections of a dating profile. As indicated in the literature by Miller et al. (2000); Rudman et al. (2001), if daters consider a specific gender stereotype as one that is positive or desirable, a dater is more likely to identify with it. In light of this notion, I was able to identify stereotypical profiles (relative to the profiles in my own study) based on commonly listed lifestyle, personality and appearance descriptors. The common use of these traits is also reinforced through Arvidsson's (2006) study on Match.com daters.

Secondly, I broke down the registration process for POF and Match.com in order to understand the steps required to build a dating profile. This process is fully captured through both written explanation and visual demonstration. The following sections describe in detail how to register for POF and Match.com, as well as what each site has to offer and how the two sites differ. Throughout the instructions, there are references to images of each step of the registration process (see Appendices).

Moreover, I was able to determine if the structure of the site influenced potential stereotypification of females by analysing profile content, the registration process and

comparing my findings to previous research on stereotypes as discussed in this paper. By breaking down the steps in the registration process, I was able to understand which sections promoted or inhibited original self-presentation. Moreover, previous knowledge obtained in the literature review, which outlined aspects of women's unchanged self-presentation in newspaper personals and online dating, allowed me to make conclusions on the effect of technology on female stereotypification.

The registration process was fully captured through both written explanation and visual demonstration. The following sections describe in detail how to register for POF and Match.com, as well as what each site has to offer and how the two sites differ. Throughout the instructions, there are references to images of each step of the registration process (see Appendices).

Chapter IV: Results and Discussion

Based on the review of scholarly literature and the analysis of both online profiles and profile development process, we cannot establish a definite correlation between the profile development process and the infringement of originality or stereotypification of online daters. An examination of the registration process and the functionality of the sites reveals that dating sites restrict originality to a certain extent, through the use of preselected descriptions, in order to facilitate filtering functions which help to categorize and match daters within the online dating system. However, even though Match.com and POF limit online daters to preselected descriptions, there are opportunities on each site to develop original content in order to avoid developing a stereotypical profile.

Despite opportunities to expand in open-text spaces, most profiles observed on POF and Match.com contained similar descriptions and responses, which will be discussed in further detail below. The four females who developed original profiles managed to capture more attention by using existing communication tools, (i.e. the open-text box); in order to develop unique standout profiles using two distinct methods.

As previously indicated, an original profile in this research is any profile that a) uses a distinct way to display information or b) contains unique narrative content that is dissimilar from descriptions provided in other dating profiles. Females that made use of the first approach generated headings within their personal narrative to organize information and wrote content in bullet format. Females who made use of the second approach developed content using a unique style of writing and portrayed emotion not found in the remaining profiles. Surprisingly, no females describe their appearance in any open-text section. Instead, females post attractive pictures of themselves in various contexts. Thus, in the remaining sections of the paper, any reference to personal

narratives refers to an online dater's depiction of personal lifestyle and personality characteristics and does not include descriptions of personal appearance.

Eighteen of the twenty profiles selected for the study are written in a positive fashion in effort to market the most attractive qualities. Earlier research suggests that marketing and promoting oneself are an important part of mediated dating (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992) and that, in constructing personal profiles in print ads, users highlight characteristics they believe will be most sought after by potential partners (Hirschman, 1987). Since many females form similar narratives, stressing positive information on their lifestyle and personality, there appears to be a trend in what female online daters posit as appealing qualities one should possess in order to be a successful dating partner.

Moreover, Hardey (2004, p.210) indicates that "users adopt a strategy of 'marketing the self' that involves shaping information so that it meets what they believe are the characteristics desired by an ideal partner". Considering the repetition of similar qualities and interests from profile to profile, females from both dating sites have either purposely or inadvertently established what they may believe to be characteristics desired by an ideal partner. By continually using these same descriptors, female online daters assist in reinforcing stereotypical narratives. Since literature does not acknowledge the existence of stereotypes in online dating profiles, I was unable to initially define how they are formed in the online dating context. Based on my review of literature on online dating and stereotypes in addition to the findings from my study, I developed a hypothesis on how stereotypes form in online dating.

As previously indicated, according to Meiser and Hewstone (2004, p.599), stereotype formation consists of "both the extraction of true correlations and the emergence of erroneous correlations between group membership and other variables in

the social environment”. Based on academic literature and findings in this research, I conclude that stereotypes form in the online dating environment based on a variety of factors. First, since online dating profiles limit individuals in terms of the characteristics that one may use to describe him or her self, online daters complete their profiles by selecting the most fitting description from drop down menus, in addition to filling out open-text fields. Second, the pressures of finding an online match may encourage daters to be more dependent on traits that an individual believes are attractive rather than the traits the individual actually possesses. Miller et al. (2000) and Rudman et al. (2001) indicate in their studies that if daters consider a specific gender stereotype as one that is positive or desirable, a dater is more likely to identify with it. In essence, a combination of limited descriptors in dating profiles and a common perception of traits that men desire, contributes to the formation and ongoing reproduction of stereotypical narratives in online dating.

1. Originality: Limited by Profile Development and Fee?

The introductory section details the registration process of Match.com and POF. However, upon comparing and analysing the two dating sites, it became apparent that Match.com provides individuals with far more opportunities to express themselves in their own words than POF. On Match, registrants are permitted to expand on the following topics in 250 characters: 1) roots, heritage and culture, 2) faith, 3) education 4) employment 5) preferred activities in free time 6) favourite places 7) favourite things (i.e. music, food shows) and 8) last book read. Furthermore, online daters are asked to generate 9) a dating headline in 140 characters, and finally 10) a description of themselves and an ideal match in a maximum of 4000 characters.

On POF, subscribers have four sections in which they can write their own ideas and thoughts. First, just like Match.com, individuals are requested to provide a headline for their profile. Second, a description of themselves in a minimum of 100 characters with no maximum character limits imposed. Next, daters can list their interests. POF instructs individuals to space interests using commas to ensure they link to similar user profiles. Finally, daters have an option to describe their ideal first date. In this open-text section, no character limits are imposed.

A comparison between open-text boxes available on each site reveals that Match.com guides and assists online daters more in providing customized descriptions on various topics to compliment pre-selected responses provided in drop down menus and lists. Match.com guides daters by providing an abundance of opportunities to market themselves as ideal suitors through open-text. POF does not allow subscribers to expand on any responses that were pre-selected during registration. The only sections on POF in which individuals are able to provide detailed explanations and original content are in describing themselves and their ideal date. As a result, subscribers of POF have less room to be original, as most of their registration process consists of pre-established responses.

The literature reviewed for this research revealed that dating sites strive to limit descriptors in order to facilitate the filtering process through which individuals search for potential suitors. An image of search engines from Match.com and POF appear in Appendix C. Heino, Ellison and Gibbs (2010, p.437) affirm that individuals are able to use a search engine in order to filter through profiles to look for individuals with specific characteristics. As a result, online daters select individuals based on limited discrete characteristics rather than on holistic impressions. Due to technical constraints, original text provided in a free text box is not analyzed during a search using a search engine,

since the search tool, for the most part, only recognizes responses preselected for registrants. The only exception is on Match.com, where individuals can search profiles using a single “keyword”.

Despite the fact that there are more opportunities on Match.com than POF for self-expression, profiles on both sites appear similar, since females use many of the same descriptors when describing oneself and an ideal partner. These descriptors are listed and described in sections below. A majority of females in the study did not take advantage of open-text writing spaces in order to come across as original. Only two out of the ten female participants on Match.com took advantage of the extra ten open-text spaces where they were able to expand on pre-selected responses. The remaining eight females only used the “About Her & Who She’s Looking for” section to describe themselves and their ideal date. Furthermore, all female daters on POF developed a personal narrative using the “About Me” section; however not all females made use of the “First Date” open-text section on POF.

In light of these findings, by paying a fee for online dating, Match.com users were provided with more opportunities to expand on ten responses that were pre-selected during registration. However, the majority of female daters did not take advantage of all the open-text spaces in which daters can distinguish themselves from other daters. In fact, sixteen daters from both sites reported many of the same lifestyle and personality descriptors, while presenting physical appearance through photos based in similar contexts. Furthermore, of the four original profiles, two were found on Match.com and two on POF. As a result, a fee did not influence the originality of information that individuals are willing to share in search of a profiled other.

An analysis of the two dating sites revealed key differences in the registration process, information requested and ability to develop free text. However, I found that females from both sites used a lot of the same content in order to describe their personality traits and lifestyle and the qualities they look for in an ideal date. Arvidsson (2006, p.680) also found that there is a generally accepted normative model for self-presentation on Match.com, as many of the profiles in his study contained similarities. The specific content of the online dating profiles selected for this research will be discussed while answering the second research question (in what ways the structure of specific sites (paid vs. unpaid) influence potential stereotypification of female online daters?).

2. Stereotypification Generated through Site Structure

This section discusses the types of self-generated characteristics listed in online dating profiles regarding both personal and preferred partner characteristics. Results from this study reveal a total of 10 characteristics commonly described in personal and preferred partner descriptions which are grouped into three overarching categories: lifestyle, personality and physical characteristics.

The profiles selected from Match.com and POF have some striking similarities. The following paragraphs outline common trends and examples of content developed in the personal narratives of females on both dating sites.

2.1 Commonly Used Lifestyle, Personality and Appearance Traits

After reviewing the content of all profiles on both sites, I found that all females report similar aspects of lifestyle such as physical activity, interests, culture as well as friends and family and aspects of personality like honesty, humour, being easy-going and

confident. Below is a chart listing the various lifestyle, personality and physical traits that were prominent in the profiles of females on POF and Match.com. Additionally, I describe each term and provide examples of quotes from personal narratives on both sites. Following the chart, I further explain the details of the findings.

Category	Brief Description	Examples of Quotes from narratives
Lifestyle		
Active	Expressing a preference in athletic activities, outdoor ventures, sporting events or travelling	<p>“spent the last few years living overseas, working when needed and otherwise gallivanting around various countries and continents”</p> <p>“I like sports and being outdoors. I am extremely active and can be found at the gym most days of the week.”</p> <p>“I am a traveller so I love being outdoors as much as I can throughout the summer”</p> <p>“Travelling is also a big passion of mine. Turkey is my next trip. I’ve recently started running and I’ve signed up for my first 10k”</p> <p>“I miss globe trotting and look forward to exploring the rest of the world”</p> <p>“I love to be active (I think I’m mildly addicted to endorphins)”</p> <p>“I just bought a tennis racquet, tennis anyone?”</p>
Interests	Expressing various personal interests in the “Interests” section of the dating site.	<p>Top reoccurring interest: Camping, cooking, reading, travel/sightseeing, fitness, music, coffee and conversation, dining out, wine tasting</p>
Culture	Expressing preference for or personally enjoying intellectual or artistic endeavours, for example, museums, music, art, film, theatre, or culinary arts.	<p>“I also have my down time which consists of staying in with less extravagant activities like curling up with a book, watching a good movie, trying a new recipe, or drawing.”</p> <p>“ I play the flute and I’m relearning how to play guitar”</p> <p>“ I love cooking and have taken culinary arts”</p> <p>“I love going to live shows, a museum exhibit”</p> <p>“I love sports, arts, music, food and anything that has to do with design”</p>
Family /Friends	Expressing a preference for or personally having priority in family or friend ties, having or taking care of children and spending quality time with family.	<p>“family and friends are very important to me”</p> <p>“ I value my time with family and my friends”</p> <p>“On my down time I love spending time with friends and seeing my family”</p> <p>“My free time is pretty much for my family and friends”</p> <p>“ I’m super close with my family- not in a pathological way- my sister is my roomie, and the latest love of my life is my brothers baby boy”</p> <p>“My family is great and they are my crème de la crème”.</p>

		<p>“Absolutely wonderful family and group of friends. I have a daughter who is by far the greatest part of my life”</p> <p>“I am actually very family oriented and spend most of my time with them”</p>
Career	Expressing a preference for or personally having a career that is fruitful and/or enjoyable.	<p>“Intelligent and has his own career, not dependant on someone to support him”</p> <p>“Passionate about what I do for a living”</p> <p>“I work in healthcare now, in the field I actually went to school for which is something I am proud of”</p> <p>“I have a good job that I love”</p>
Personality		
Honesty	Expressing preference for or personally being trustworthy, sincere, frank or straightforward	<p>“also I’m honest, I have a good heart and loyal”</p> <p>“I really value honesty and open-mindedness”</p> <p>“I’m honest and I expect the same in return”</p> <p>“I am looking for someone who is honest with similar qualities”</p> <p>“I am looking for someone who is caring, compassionate, loyal and grounded”</p>
Funny	Expressing preference for or personally being playful, carefree, funny or likeable.	<p>“affectionate lady with a great sense of humour”</p> <p>“my friends describe me as fun, funny, easygoing, open-minded, always up for anything”</p> <p>“my true self is very silly”</p> <p>“ I am an intelligent person who loves to laugh”</p> <p>“looking for someone who thinks of himself as a nice funny guy”</p> <p>“I love a guy with a good sense of humour”</p>
Easy-going	Expressing preference for or personally being easy to get along with and/or spontaneous	<p>“I am easy-going, I love to laugh and have a good time”</p> <p>“I am fun, funny and easy-going and open-minded”</p> <p>“someone who is spontaneous/adventurous would compliment me best”</p> <p>“I like to get out and do just about anything”</p> <p>“I love spontaneity and people that can think for themselves and make most situations fun”</p> <p>“I am happy and easy-going, will try anything once”</p> <p>“I love spontaneity and being easy-going”</p>
Confident	Expressing preference for or personally being accomplished, successful and happy with life.	<p>“I have already accomplished most goals I have set for myself (i.e. got a college education, and loving a great job)”</p> <p>“I own a house and a car and I am an independent woman who knows what she wants”</p> <p>“Happy with where I am in life and I am looking for someone in the same spot”</p> <p>“I am a content and happy lady”</p> <p>“ I am a confident person, independent, thick-skinned and I don’t get offended easily”</p>

Physical Appearance		
Appearance	Expressing preference for having a specified physical makeup, a certain height, muscularity, or attractiveness.	On Match.com, all females indicate a height preference and eight out of ten women have a body type preference of average, athletic or toned. Only one female lists a preference for specific hair or eye colour. On POF, no females express a preference for any physical traits.
	Personally having a specified physical makeup, a certain height, muscularity, or attractiveness.	Match.com and POF prompt all registrants to complete physical descriptions on height, body type, hair and eye colour. All females submitted information on these physical characteristics.

As previously mentioned in the literature, if daters consider a specific gender stereotype as one that is positive or desirable, a dater is more likely to identify with it (Miller et al. (2000); Rudman et al. (2001)). In accordance with this notion, the qualities listed in the chart above help to identify stereotypical profiles (relative to the profiles in my own study) based on the common use of these traits.

The following section further describes the information in the chart above by explaining whether each dating site prompts individuals to provide the information pertaining to each topic and what the common trends are among females for each category.

Lifestyle

Registrants of both sites commonly express the following four lifestyle preferences through preselected responses or in the personal narrative section.

Active

Match.com allows individuals to indicate their sports and exercise habits in two ways. First, by selecting the types of activities daters take part in from a list of pre-selected activities. Second, by indicating the number of times a week they exercise. On average,

females on Match.com indicate that they exercise 2 times per week. POF does not prompt subscribers to reveal any information in regards to an active lifestyle. However, all females from both sites list an interest in athletic activities, outdoor ventures, sporting events or travelling in their personal narratives. Examples of popular activities listed by females included outdoor activities such as canoeing, camping, walking and running.

Interests

Match.com requests that subscribers list their interests. This is done through checking off prelisted interests in a box (see Appendix A: Interests). By limiting interests to a list of 23 items, individuals are limited in the way that they can express their interests. POF has a separate section where individuals self describe all their interests in an open-text box (see Appendix B Deadline/Description/Interests/First Date). Once entered, the interests become hyperlinks and link to other matches with the same type of interests. The top three interests shared amongst females from both sites are: camping, travel and cooking. In fact, eighteen out of twenty female daters selected for this study indicate an interest or a passion for travel. The daters describe places where they have travelled to previously as well as destinations they hope to visit soon.

Culture

Both POF and Match.com require that individuals list their ethnicity by choosing an option from a drop down menu. Additionally, both sites also request that subscribers select their religion and educational background from a drop down menu. One difference between the sites is that Match.com requests that subscribers indicate languages spoken while POF does not request such information. In terms of discussing culture, nineteen out of twenty females express a preference for or personally enjoying intellectual or artistic endeavours, for example, museums, music, art, film, theatre, or culinary arts.

Family

On both sites, references to family and friends can only be made in open-text sections.

Seventeen out of twenty females express a preference for or personally having priority in family or friend ties and spending quality time with family.

Personality

In the POF 'About Me' section and Match.com's 'About Her' section, users indicate their personality traits. Below is a list of the most reoccurring traits used by online daters from both sites. Females most often describe themselves and their ideal partner as honest, funny, easy-going or spontaneous and confident.

Honesty

Females on both dating sites express a preference for or personally being trustworthy, sincere, frank or straightforward. In some cases, females list honesty and loyalty together when speaking about themselves or what they expect in a partner.

Funny

Females on both dating sites express a preference for or personally being playful, carefree, funny or likeable. Females who describe themselves as silly or funny often indicate in their personal narratives that they would like to meet a humorous or funny man.

Easy-going

Females on both dating sites describe themselves and their ideal partner as easy to get along with and/or spontaneous. Many of the females portray themselves as easy-going individuals who enjoy spontaneity and adventure. These females came across in their personal narratives as open-minded and open to new experiences.

Confident

Females on both sites describe themselves and/or their ideal partner as being accomplished, successful and happy with life. Females who write about their happiness and successes make it known that they have achieved personal goals such as finding a rewarding career or owning a car or home. Many of the female daters indicate being content with their job or career. Similar to a case study conducted by Arvidsson (2006), females in the current study give the impression of living successful and experiential lives. Arvidsson (2006) found that the dominant element of the vast majority of the profiles he surveyed contained “an ‘experiential ethic’ of self-discovery, an orientation towards touching, revealing or sharing one’s true self through open-hearted and intimate communication with others, or through an active or experientially rich life conduct”. The current study also found that the majority of users present themselves as already living experientially rich lives with a good social life, “French, fun loving, honest, affectionate little lady with a great sense of humor who is secure and happy with herself. I’m very social and I can dance my face off or have a mature educated conversation in practically any situation” (Match.com, 24).

Physical Appearance

The researcher expected to find female participants expressing preference for or personally having a specified physical makeup, a certain height, muscularity, or attractiveness. This expectation is based on Whitty’s (2008, p.1715) study which found that women are more likely to lie about their looks and post outdated photos on their profiles for the reason that men are more likely to scope out females who are physically attractive. However, on the contrary, females on Match.com specified a desire for certain

physical traits (i.e. height and body type) only because the dating site prompts individuals to specify a preference.

Appearance

Match.com has a section called “Appearance” where individuals describe themselves as well as the traits that they seek in a potential suitor. Match.com requires the registrant to describe and discuss their ideal match while developing a profile. However, POF does not prompt daters to indicate any preferred physical traits of an ideal date anywhere on their profile page. The only way daters may search for others on POF is by using the search option and filtering through a pool of potential suitors by selecting specific search criteria. The research found that none of the females from both sites describe preferred physical attributes in their personal narratives. Females on Match.com are prompted to select the height, body type, eye and hair colour of their ideal date as part of the registration process. Only one female describes all the aforementioned aspects while the remaining females have no preference on eye and hair colour. No females on POF indicate any preferred physical attributes of a potential suitor.

As previously indicated in the literature review, Miller et al. (2000) found that women in their study expressed a preference for financially stable men, while self-presenting as physically attractive. Furthermore, in newspaper personals, women drew attention to their physical attractiveness and body shape (Jagger, 2001) since men were found to seek physical attractiveness and youth in women (Lynn & Bolig, 1985). However, in the current study, no females highlight characteristics which describe personal appearance in any open-text sections of a dating profile. This finding is surprising considering an abundance of literature that emphasizes the importance of attractiveness in online dating.

Furthermore, details on personal appearance, on both sites, are prompted through drop down menu selections in order to describe certain physical traits. POF does not have a specific section where individuals can outline their physical characteristics. Instead, personal descriptors are scattered over various sections of the dating profile. Since all daters only make use of generic pre-established responses to describe their appearance, individuals must resort to viewing personal profile pictures in order to get a visual image of the person. The following section discusses the rules governing picture uploads, as well as the importance of profile pictures for online dating success.

2.2 Profile Pictures: The Rules and Regulations

Both of the sites advise users to post photos, as members with photographs receive more attention than members who have no pictures. On the images section of the profile development process, POF states in bold, large type font “Add 8 images to your profile or upgrade and upload 16. Your face **MUST** be clearly visible in your **MAIN IMAGE**. All images **MUST** contain you” (November 2012). Furthermore, under the tab “Improve your profile”, POF suggests the following: “Make sure you include a photo. Profiles that have pictures are viewed ten times more than profiles that are bare. The more people that see your profile, the more chances you have of finding your match!” (November 2012). Finally, POF warns subscriber in bold caps that uploading nudity will get your account deleted.

In contrast with POF, Match.com permits subscribers to post a total of 26 profile photographs. Match.com’s photo upload page states “More Photos = More Success” (November 2012) and further into the profile creation process Match.com advises: “profiles with a photo are 15 times more likely to be viewed” (November, 2012). In both of the sites, uploaded photos have to be approved by the site prior to posting pictures live

to the public. Females in this study can only rely on profile photographs to make judgements on the physical appearance of other online daters since none of the registrants provides a description detailing physical attributes of the self or an ideal partner. According to Humphreys (2004) profile photographs are a key component of online self-presentation and relational success as daters are more likely to observe a profile that contains a photograph. The following findings indicate how users make use of photo uploading tools on both sites as well as the types of pictures posted by the female participants.

2.3 Trends in Personal Profile Pictures

Participants on POF posted between two to eight photographs on their page. Only one female posted two photos, two females had four photos and the remaining females had more than five photographs. Three females posted a maximum of eight photos on their profile.

On Match.com, females post between one to thirteen photos on their profile page. One female only posted a single photograph, another female posted three photos, two females posted four photographs and the remaining posted between five to seven photos. Only one female posted thirteen photos. However, no females posted the permitted maximum amount of twenty-six photos.

The chart below displays the amount of photographs posted by all twenty female participants (ten from each dating site). As is demonstrated in the chart, on average females on POF and Match.com posted between five and six photographs. In the case of Match.com, this number is low since the maximum number of photos permitted is twenty-six and the greatest amount of pictures posted was only thirteen. Despite the fact that Match.com provides registrants with a large maximum amount of photo uploads,

individuals do not take advantage of the space in order to present themselves: in fact, despite a major difference in maximum permitted photo uploads, females from both sites, on average, posted the same amount of profile pictures.

Number of Photographs posted by females on POF and Match.com												
Participants	P#1	P#2	P#3	P#4	P#5	P#6	P#7	P#8	P#9	P#10	Average	Max # Photos
POF	2	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8	8	5.7	8 (free)
Match.com	1	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	7	13	5.6	26

In the current study, all of the females uploaded flattering photographs of themselves to their profiles. In terms of the types of pictures that were posted, most of the females posted a variety of photos in order to show themselves in various aspects of life. Almost all of the females added a face and full body picture to their profile in order to provide male daters with a visual perspective of their facial features as well as their body type. The female who submitted one photograph to her profile on Match.com submitted a full body image that presents her face and body at the same time. The researcher found a correlation between the types of interests reported and the contexts which photographs display. Those females who had more than two images included photographs of themselves with family and friends, on vacation in various areas around the world, and/or performing various physical activities.

A study (Hancock & Toma, 2009) examining the accuracy of online dating photographs found that female photographs were found to be less accurate than male photographs. Hancock and Toma (2009, p.367) indicate that the images in female profiles “were more likely to be older, to be retouched or taken by a professional photographer, and to contain inconsistencies, including changes in hair style and skin quality”. As indicated in the literature, Scheib et al. (1999) found in their study that men prefer youthful and slender women who have lustrous hair, large eyes, full lips, small noses, and

clear and smooth skin. Therefore, the modifications and inconsistencies in profile images could stem from women feeling a pressure to present in this fashion. Observations, based on the examination of all the profile pictures, lead me to believe that “the posting of photographs may represent a form of visual equivocation meant to resolve the tension between authenticity and self-enhancement” (Hancock & Toma, 2009, p.383).

Based on the analysis of narratives and profile photographs, the participants in the current study appear to be trying to create a balance between keeping their profiles real, as well as selling themselves by describing how they would like to be. The former represents a portrayal of an ‘actual self’ while the latter is a display of an ‘ideal self’. While all females describe themselves in their narratives, some of the females also express their ‘ideal self’ by including goals for the future in their narratives and therefore expressing “qualities or achievements one strives to possess in the future” (Bargh et al., 2002). For example, one female on POF makes a “Goals” list which outlines certifications and activities she would like to attain during the summer. Since I am only able to search for these versions of self from scanning profiles, it is possible that some qualities are not captured as ‘ideal self’. Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, (2006, p.426) found in their study that “individuals might identify themselves as active in various activities (e.g., hiking, surfing) in which they rarely participated”. This example demonstrates the manner in which people may describe themselves the way they want to be, which can only be confirmed by getting to know an individual’s lifestyle in real life.

3. The Original Profiles: How to Catch Someone’s Eye

Since there are millions of online dating profile available for browsing on each of the two dating sites, it is likely that daters browse through profiles until one captures their attention. Although there are many opportunities to provide a personal touch in open-text

sections on Match.com, participants rarely use these spaces to expand on generic responses. As a result, individuals who use original ways to present their personal details stand out from amongst the remaining profiles. As previously defined, original profiles in this research include any profile that a) uses a distinct way to display information (i.e. through the use of headings and listing personal information in bullet form) or b) contains unique narrative content, i.e. original self-descriptions, unconventional styles of writing and portrayal of emotion (i.e. sarcasm) relative to all profiles in the study. Since sixteen profiles contain similar content which resembles stereotypical self-presentation outlined in previous studies, I constructed a definition of an original profile based on factors that differentiate originals from the majority. These differences are relative to the total users of both websites. The female daters who have the most original dating profiles manage to capture more attention by using one of the two aforementioned techniques (i.e. distinct information display and unique narrative content). The following paragraphs describe the manner in which females distinctively provide their personal narratives on POF in the “About Me” section and under “About Her & Who She’s Looking for” on Match.com. I will focus on these two sections because they are the primary open-text-boxes in which online daters discuss and describe themselves and an ideal date. As previously mentioned, the remaining sections were seldom completed by online daters.

In the first instance, two females generate headings in open-text sections and write all relevant information under each corresponding heading. On Match.com, one female provides a short introduction about her self, followed by two sections with the headings “I love” and “I don’t like”. Under each heading the female lists in bullet format things and qualities that she likes or dislikes.

The second original profile on Match.com also uses headings in order to distinctively provide personal details. The female online dater divides her narrative into four sections for which the headings read: “What I’m up to”, “Personality”, “Extras” and “For Fun”. In the first section, she provides a brief overview of her current circumstances in terms of school, work and living arrangements. Further, she discusses her interests and what she likes to do when being in a relationship. Under the “Personality” heading, she discusses her most prominent personality traits and how she is regarded by her family and peers. The “extras” section discusses random personal facts concerning tattoos, piercings, favourite shows and past time activities. Finally, in the “For Fun” section, she writes a small poem representing her personality traits and interests.

Additionally, a profile on POF features the headings “Goals for 2012” and “I’m looking for a guy who...” as a way to highlight information. The first heading lists five adventurous activities involving sharks, helicopters, deep sea water activities and bungee jumping. In comparison to all other profile narratives that list common lifestyles and personality characteristics, these activities would capture the attention of the reader. The second heading contains 4 bullets, which list challenges and demands that the female dater sets out for an ideal suitor. In comparison to other profiles selected for the research, writing a personal narrative using headings and bullets is a unique way to outline personal information. Narratives with headings and bullets visually differ from the profiles written in typical paragraph format. Furthermore, the information is displayed in a reader friendly manner and the headings help individuals to quickly learn about the likes and dislikes of the dater.

For the most part, originality on POF comes in a different format than the one on Match.com. More specifically, the first unique profile stands out because it commences

with admittance to not enjoying writing personal descriptions. Further, the female dater warns the reader that her profile may not be interesting and, as a result, be a difficult read. From the outset, it becomes apparent that the profile is written in a blunt, honest and straightforward manner. Furthermore, the female describes her career as “decent” and does not portray her lifestyle as anything overly exciting but rather indicates that it is quite plain. Her narrative goes against what Arvidsson (2006, p.680) describes as an ‘experiential ethic’ of self-discovery in which individuals on dating sites commonly present an “active or experientially rich life”.

Moreover, when the female describes herself, she lists qualities that she “thinks” she possesses. The use of the statement “I think I am” by the female dater demonstrates uncertainty. This is a contrast from all other female daters in the study, which confidently assert personal qualities without using words that express doubt. Furthermore, the female dater indicates that she has not travelled much. This statement is peculiar as all females in remaining narratives discuss their various travel adventures. It appears that the female is aware that others address travel in their profiles and, as a result, needs to confirm that she has not. Overall, the female provides a self-description that comes across as lacking self-confidence and living a life lacking an ‘experiential ethic’. These findings are contrary to what Arvidsson (2006) found in his research and what I found in the other female profiles.

The second female who has an original profile on POF, commences her narrative by expressing doubt in the success of online dating. However, she indicates that it may be an easier way to meet people than in a coffee shop. The remainder of the profile contains short but very meaningful sentences, constructed with wit and at times sarcasm. For example, she describes herself as driven, but is not entirely sure to what at this point in

her life. Furthermore, she indicates that her idea of a first date includes of couple of pints at the local watering hole. The female dater provides what she considers ‘meaningless tidbits’ about her, which in turn portrays an abundance of information on the female’s personality, likes, dislikes and interests. Each sentence in the narrative tells a different story about the online dater.

In comparison to other profiles examined in this study, the female makes use of complex vocabulary (i.e. indubitable) and correctly implements commas through out her narrative. At the end, the female concludes her “About Me” section by acknowledging that she could have described herself by using “indubitable nonsense” of how she is a “nice, independent, funny, green-eyed girl”. This comment indicates that the female dater is aware that most other female daters use these types of stereotypical self-descriptions; however she has chosen to move away from stereotypical self-descriptions and instead provides a self-description that is unique amongst female dating profiles.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The introduction of matchmaking services on the Internet has allowed the user base to expand significantly and increased the capabilities of users. Self-presentation in online dating sites can now be carried out through the use of a variety of multimedia content, such as text-based descriptions (personal narratives) and photographs, and to interact using both asynchronous and real-time communication tools, such as e-mail, instant messaging, and chat rooms (Ellison et al. 2006). The controllable aspects of the Internet realm, (i.e. controllable verbal and linguistic cues and more time to generate well-crafted messages), allow individuals to present themselves online in a way that is “more selective, malleable, and subject to self censorship in CMC than it is in face to face interaction” (Walther, 1996, p. 20). In essence, the mediated nature of online dating gives participants more opportunities to present themselves positively and deliberately (Ellison et al. 2006).

Although individuals are provided with an opportunity to develop personal narratives on both Match.com and POF, the findings from the research demonstrate that individuals prefer to use pre-selected responses rather than developing original content. This conclusion is based on the fact that respondents filled out most pre-established response questions but in many cases did not make use of open-text sections. This was most prominent on Match.com where only two out of the ten female participants took advantage of the extra ten open-text spaces where they were able to expand on pre-selected responses.

Online dating sites limit individuals to self-describe using generic pre-established responses; however these limited descriptors serve to facilitate the filtering process through which individuals search for potential suitors. Daters are able to provide a

personal touch by developing personal narratives in open-text spaces. However, most profiles observed on POF and Match.com contained similar descriptions and responses. Females were found to report on the similar aspects of lifestyle such as physical activity, interests, culture as well as friends and family and aspects of personality like honesty, humour, being easy-going and confident. These commonly reported traits assist in the formation of a stereotypical female profile on Match.com and POF. The common use of these traits is also reinforced through Arvidsson's (2006) study on Match.com daters.

Essentially, technology only limits individuals in some sections of profile development, in order to provide standard responses which can later be used when searching for daters using a search engine. However, open-text spaces, where individuals are granted creative freedom to self-describe, contained a normative format with similar content in sixteen out of twenty profiles. Moreover, female daters, on average, posted the same amount of photographs (five or six) which were all photographed in a similar manner. All but one profile contained but a facial and full body profile picture, Furthermore, there was a correlation between interests specified in female profiles and the context in which pictures were taken (i.e. with family and friends, on vacation in and/or performing various physical activities).

In the four instances where originality was achieved, daters used a distinct way to display information through the use of headings and listing personal information in bullet form or used clever sayings, analogies and humour to attract other daters. Moreover, a few females who created an original profile countered Arvidsson's (2006, p.680) notion of an 'experiential ethic' of self-discovery, through which individuals describe themselves as living an active or experientially rich life conduct. Moreover, one female develops an original profile by acknowledging stereotypical descriptors typically

presented in dating profiles and by making an effort to distinguish herself from the majority of profiles by using unique self-descriptions. For example, the female describes herself as indecisive, boring and plain, all of which are descriptions that completely oppose what females stereotypically present (i.e. confident, outgoing and living an exciting life).

By paying a fee for online dating, Match.com users were provided with more opportunities to expand on ten responses that were pre-selected during registration. However, only two females took advantage of these spaces while the remaining eight females only completed the “About Her & Who She’s Looking for” section. A comparison between profiles on a paid and unpaid site revealed that a fee does not have an influence on the depth of information that individuals are willing to share in search of a profiled other. Furthermore, despite the dissimilarities in the structure of both sites, females on both sites described themselves using similar self-descriptors.

In essence, the registration process cannot be blamed for the lack of originality in personal narratives, as individuals generate their own content in open-text spaces. The commonalities featured in the narrative section, in addition to using pre-established responses as self-descriptions, resulted in the development of stereotypical profiles on both Match.com and POF. Finally, the structure/set up of the paid and unpaid sites had no influence on the stereotypification of online daters. Even though the registration process for each site is different and provides daters with various opportunities to generate original content, female daters resort to similar techniques of self-presentation and describe themselves or their ideal date using common characteristics regardless of fees and site structure.

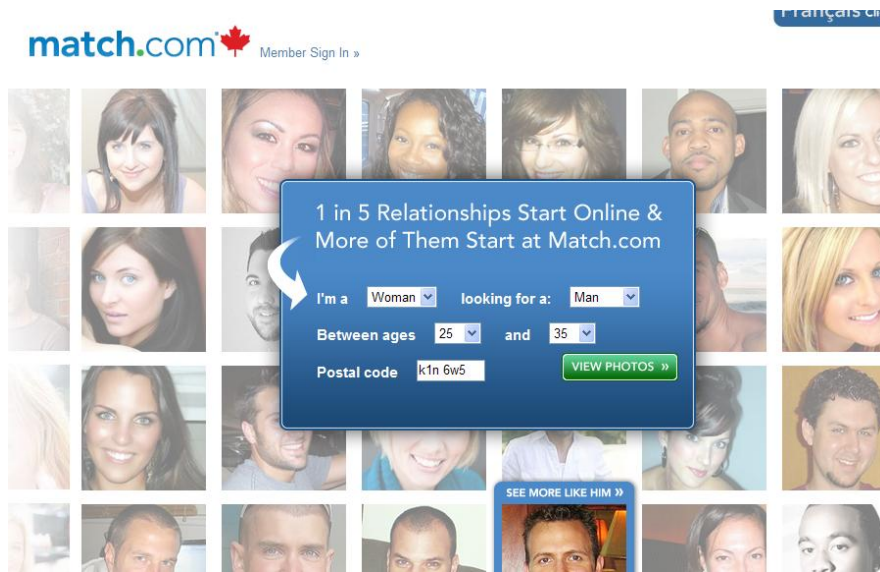
Future Research

Since this study was based on the observation of dating profiles, I was unable to verify and discuss my findings with the females featured in the profiles. As a result, it would be useful in a future study to interview online daters in regards to the issues discussed in the current study. By interviewing daters, one would gain a more thorough understanding of whether online daters feel as though the profile development process impacts their ability to be original, and if the structure of a site influences stereotypification. It would also be useful to get in touch with the individuals who created original profiles in order to investigate whether they intentionally developed stand out content.

Furthermore, one finding that was particularly unexpected was the lack of attention that individuals put on physical appearance in their dating profiles. A future exploration into the importance of physical appearance would assist in determining if individuals put great weight on appearance, as well as how and if it is assessed when daters scan through profiles. Finally, since online dating is often perceived as being rich with deception (Toma et al., 2008), it would be useful in a future study to conduct interviews with online dater in order to verify the degree to which online daters mesh characteristics of their true self with a version of ideal self, since the current study only addresses this notion based on observable textual content. The further investigation of the aforementioned aspects of online dating can assist both online daters and dating sites to improve self-presentation aspects of this phenomenon.

Appendix A

Basic Registration Form



Basics


The screenshot shows the 'Basics' registration form on Match.com. On the left side, there is a user profile for 'nunomiguel1980', a 31-year-old from Vanier ON, Canada, with a 'View Profile' link. Below the profile is a navigation menu with options: 'ABOUT ME', 'BASICS', 'APPEARANCE', 'BACKGROUND/VALUES', 'LIFESTYLE', 'INTERESTS', 'GET TO KNOW ME', 'ABOUT MY DATE', 'IN MY OWN WORDS', and 'PHOTOS'. The main form area is titled 'BASICS 1 | 2' and includes a progress bar with a tree icon. The form contains the following sections:

- Introduction:** 'This is an important first step toward finding your match. The more you tell us, the better matches we can give you. Welcome to our community! What brings you here today?' with a dropdown menu containing the text 'A friend found someone great on Match.com, so I'm giving it a go.'
- Relationship Status:** 'What is your relationship status?' with a dropdown menu set to 'Never Married'.
- Gender:** 'What is your gender?' with a dropdown menu set to 'Woman'.
- Search Preferences:** 'Where should we search?' with radio buttons for 'Search by radius (US, Canada and UK only)' (selected) and 'Search by region (country, state/province or city)'. The radius search section includes fields for 'living within 50 miles' and 'of ZIP/Postal code k1n 6w5', and a dropdown for 'in Canada'. There is also a checkbox for 'I only want to see matches who have photos.' which is currently unchecked.
- Who are you looking for:** 'Who are you looking for?' with a dropdown set to 'Men' and age range dropdowns set to '18' and '30'.

A 'SAVE & CONTINUE »' button is located at the bottom right of the form.

BASICS 1 | 2

10%



Where did you grow up?

Canada

Ontario

Ottawa

What's your sign?


Capricorn

SAVE & CONTINUE »

Appearance

APPEARANCE

10%



How tall are you?

5 feet 8 inches

Which of these best describes your body type?

About average

What is your eye color?


Blue

What is your hair color?

Blonde

SAVE & CONTINUE »

Background and Values

BACKGROUND/VALUES 1 | 2 14% 

Which ethnicities best describe you?

<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Black / African descent
<input type="checkbox"/> East Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Latino / Hispanic
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White / Caucasian
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Tell us more: (Optional)
250 characters remaining


For example, you may wish to share something about your roots, heritage or culture.

What is your faith?

<input type="radio"/> Agnostic	<input type="radio"/> Atheist
<input type="radio"/> Buddhist / Taoist	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Christian / Catholic
<input type="radio"/> Christian / LDS	<input type="radio"/> Christian / Protestant
<input type="radio"/> Hindu	<input type="radio"/> Jewish
<input type="radio"/> Muslim / Islam	<input type="radio"/> Spiritual but not religious
<input type="radio"/> Other	<input type="radio"/> Christian / Other
<input type="radio"/> No Answer	

Tell us more: (Optional)
250 characters remaining

SAVE & CONTINUE »

BACKGROUND/VALUES 1 | 2 19% 

What's your level of education?

<input type="radio"/> High school	<input type="radio"/> Some college
<input type="radio"/> Associates degree	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Bachelors degree
<input type="radio"/> Graduate degree	<input type="radio"/> PhD / Post Doctoral
<input type="radio"/> No Answer	

Which college/university did you attend?

What languages do you speak?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese
<input type="checkbox"/> Dutch	<input type="checkbox"/> French	<input type="checkbox"/> German
<input type="checkbox"/> Hebrew	<input type="checkbox"/> Hindi	<input type="checkbox"/> Italian
<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Norwegian	<input type="checkbox"/> Portuguese
<input type="checkbox"/> Russian	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/> Swedish
<input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog	<input type="checkbox"/> Urdu	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Describe your political views.

Conservative

SAVE & CONTINUE »

Lifestyle

LIFESTYLE 1 | 2

How often do you exercise?

Do you smoke?

How often do you drink?

Do you have children?

SAVE & CONTINUE »

LIFESTYLE 1 | 2

What's your current annual income?

Less Than \$25,000 \$25,001 to \$35,000
 \$35,001 to \$50,000 \$50,001 to \$75,000
 \$75,001 to \$100,000 \$100,001 to \$150,000
 \$150,001+ No Answer

What do you do for a living?

Tell us more: (Optional)
250 characters remaining

Do you want to share more about your job? If you are self-employed, for example, what kind of business are you in?

Which pets do you have (or you like but don't have)?

	I have	I like but don't have	No opinion
Birds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cats	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exotic pets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fish	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Horses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SAVE & CONTINUE »

Interests

INTERESTS 1 | 2 | 3

33%

UPLOAD PHOTOS

ABOUT ME
BASICS
APPEARANCE
BACKGROUND/VALUES
LIFESTYLE
INTERESTS 1
GET TO KNOW ME
ABOUT MY DATE
IN MY OWN WORDS
.....
PHOTOS

What sort of sports and exercise do you enjoy?

<input type="checkbox"/> Auto racing / Motocross	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerobics
<input type="checkbox"/> Baseball	<input type="checkbox"/> Basketball
<input type="checkbox"/> Billiards / Pool	<input type="checkbox"/> Bowling
<input type="checkbox"/> Cycling	<input type="checkbox"/> Football
<input type="checkbox"/> Golf	<input type="checkbox"/> Dancing
<input type="checkbox"/> Inline skating	<input type="checkbox"/> Martial arts
<input type="checkbox"/> Running	<input type="checkbox"/> Skiing
<input type="checkbox"/> Soccer	<input type="checkbox"/> Swimming
<input type="checkbox"/> Tennis / Racquet sports	<input type="checkbox"/> Walking / Hiking
<input type="checkbox"/> Weights / Machines	<input type="checkbox"/> Yoga
<input type="checkbox"/> Other types of exercise	<input type="checkbox"/> Hockey
<input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball	

What do you like to do in your free time? (Optional)
Movies? Art museums? Baseball games? Share a few of your weekend pastimes.
250 characters remaining

What are some of your favorite places? (Optional)
Share a few of your local hot spots and travel destinations.
250 characters remaining

SAVE & CONTINUE »

INTERESTS 1 | 2 | 3

38%

UPLOAD PHOTOS

ABOUT ME
BASICS
APPEARANCE
BACKGROUND/VALUES
LIFESTYLE
INTERESTS 1
GET TO KNOW ME
ABOUT MY DATE
IN MY OWN WORDS
.....
PHOTOS

What common interests would you enjoy sharing with your dates?

<input type="checkbox"/> Exploring new areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Alumni connections
<input type="checkbox"/> Book club	<input type="checkbox"/> Camping
<input type="checkbox"/> Coffee and conversation	<input type="checkbox"/> Business networking
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooking	<input type="checkbox"/> Dining out
<input type="checkbox"/> Fishing/Hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening/Landscaping
<input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies and crafts	<input type="checkbox"/> Movies/Videos
<input type="checkbox"/> Museums and art	<input type="checkbox"/> Music and concerts
<input type="checkbox"/> Nightclubs/Dancing	<input type="checkbox"/> Performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> Playing cards	<input type="checkbox"/> Playing sports
<input type="checkbox"/> Political interests	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Spiritual
<input type="checkbox"/> Shopping/Antiques	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel/Sightseeing
<input type="checkbox"/> Video games	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteering
<input type="checkbox"/> Watching sports	<input type="checkbox"/> Wine tasting

Share a few of your favorite things. (Optional)
Tell us about your favorite music, TV shows, foods - anything goes!
250 characters remaining

What's the last thing you read? (Optional)
Whether it's a novel or a magazine, your latest literary adventures can spark a conversation.
250 characters remaining

SAVE & CONTINUE »

INTERESTS 1 | 2 | 3

The kind of movies I like:

Romance

Comedy

Science Fiction

Foreign

Action & Adventure

Thriller

Classic

Drama

SAVE & CONTINUE »

ABOUT ME

BASICS

APPEARANCE

BACKGROUND/VALUES

LIFESTYLE

INTERESTS <

GET TO KNOW ME

ABOUT MY DATE

IN MY OWN WORDS

.....

PHOTOS

Get-To-Know-Me

GET TO KNOW ME 1 | 2

Tell us your birth order:

the only child the oldest

the middle the youngest

from a large family No answer

If my friend and I ended up at a party where I didn't know anyone else I would:

Walk straight up to someone and introduce myself

Just wait for the host to introduce me

Hang out with my friend

Say to myself, "I'm leaving in an hour, max"

No answer

I'm most drawn to charities that:

Save the planet Save animals

Help people Fight illnesses

No answer

Which of these comedians makes you laugh the most?

Jim Carrey Jon Stewart

Chris Rock Tina Fey

Jay Leno Ellen DeGeneres

No answer

Let's say you got a big bonus. What would you do with it?

Treat myself to something special

Celebrate with friends and family

Save half and spend the rest

Donate to a cause I really believe in

Reduce my credit card balance

No answer

SAVE & CONTINUE »

ABOUT ME

BASICS

APPEARANCE

BACKGROUND/VALUES

LIFESTYLE

INTERESTS

GET TO KNOW ME <

ABOUT MY DATE

IN MY OWN WORDS

.....

PHOTOS

GET TO KNOW ME 1 | 2

If I had 2 weeks off and could take any vacation I desired, I'd:

Take off for Europe with no plans

Head to an exotic beach to listen to the waves

Drive across the country

Stay at home and relax

Explore the wonders in Asia

SAVE & CONTINUE »

About My Date: His Appearance

HIS APPEARANCE

How tall should he be?

From ft. in. to ft. in.

Body type: No Preference

<input type="checkbox"/> Slender	<input type="checkbox"/> About average
<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic and toned	<input type="checkbox"/> Heavyset
<input type="checkbox"/> A few extra pounds	<input type="checkbox"/> Stocky

Eye color: No Preference

<input type="checkbox"/> Black	<input type="checkbox"/> Blue	<input type="checkbox"/> Brown
<input type="checkbox"/> Grey	<input type="checkbox"/> Green	<input type="checkbox"/> Hazel

Hair color: No Preference

<input type="checkbox"/> Auburn / Red	<input type="checkbox"/> Black
<input type="checkbox"/> Light brown	<input type="checkbox"/> Dark brown
<input type="checkbox"/> Blonde	<input type="checkbox"/> Salt and pepper
<input type="checkbox"/> Silver	<input type="checkbox"/> Dark blonde
<input type="checkbox"/> Grey	<input type="checkbox"/> Platinum
<input type="checkbox"/> Bald	

SAVE & CONTINUE »

About My Date: His Background/Values

HIS BACKGROUND/VALUES

61%

ABOUT ME

ABOUT MY DATE

APPEARANCE

BACKGROUND/VALUES

LIFESTYLE

IN MY OWN WORDS

.....

PHOTOS

Ethnicities: No Preference

Asian Black / African descent

East Indian Latino / Hispanic

Middle Eastern Native American

Pacific Islander White / Caucasian

Other

Education level: No Preference

High school Some college

Associates degree Bachelors degree

Graduate degree PhD / Post Doctoral

Religion: No Preference

Agnostic Atheist

Buddhist / Taoist Christian / Catholic

Christian / LDS Christian / Protestant

Hindu Jewish

Muslim / Islam Spiritual but not religious

Other Christian / Other

Languages spoken: No Preference

English French Spanish

more >>

SAVE & CONTINUE »

About My Date: Lifestyle

HIS LIFESTYLE 1 | 2

76%

ABOUT ME

ABOUT MY DATE

APPEARANCE

BACKGROUND/VALUES

LIFESTYLE

IN MY OWN WORDS

.....

PHOTOS

Smoking: No Preference

No Way Yes, but trying to quit

Occasionally Daily

Cigar aficionado

Has kids?: No Preference

No

Yes, and it's OK if they sometimes live at home

Yes, and it's OK if they live at home

Yes, as long as they live away from home

Alcohol: No Preference

Never Social drinker

Moderately Regularly

Want kids?: No Preference

Definitely Someday

Not sure Probably not

No No, but it's OK if my partner has kids

SAVE & CONTINUE »

In My Own Words

ABOUT ME
ABOUT MY DATE
IN MY OWN WORDS
.....
PHOTOS

IN MY OWN WORDS

76%

YOUR DATING HEADLINE

Your headline is a great way to grab people's attention. It will be displayed at the top of your profile and in search results.

140 characters remaining (2 character minimum).

A headline is a short introductory phrase for your profile. Think of it as a personal motto or even as a statement reflection of your personality.

NOT SURE WHAT TO USE FOR YOUR HEADLINE?

Check out these headline starters:

- What is your motto for life?
- Is there something witty that you often say?
- What is your favorite quote or saying?
- Do you have a funny phrase you often use?
- What are a few words that describe you?
- What are a few words about who you're looking for?
- Is there something inspirational you often tell people?

chemistry.com by match.com

BONUS! Double my chances at finding love. Send my profile to Chemistry.com as well, the sister site of Match.com. (you will receive a follow up email from Chemistry.com)

SAVE & CONTINUE »

ABOUT ME
ABOUT MY DATE
IN MY OWN WORDS
.....
PHOTOS

IN MY OWN WORDS

80%

DESCRIBE YOURSELF AND YOUR IDEAL MATCH

This is a short description of who you are and what you're looking for. Need tips? [See examples »](#)

4000 characters remaining (200 character minimum).

This is an opportunity to express yourself and tell other people what is unique about you and what you are looking for in your partner.

NEED SOME INSPIRATION?

Here are some things you can write about to get you started:

- How would your closest friends describe you?
- Who or what makes you smile?
- What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What are you grateful for?
- What type of person are you hoping to attract?
- How would you describe your social life?
- What types of things make you laugh out loud?
- What are you looking for in a relationship?
- What are the things in life you're most passionate about?

SEND FOR APPROVAL »

Upload Your Photo

ABOUT ME
ABOUT MY DATE
IN MY OWN WORDS
.....
PHOTOS

PROFILE CONFIRMATION 95%

THANK YOU!

We have your profile and it's now being read, like all submissions, by our Customer Care team.


Once it's approved – usually within 24 hours – we'll send you an email to let you know it's live on the site.

You will also receive an email shortly containing important information from [Chemistry.com](#).

Member Spotlight

Consider my profile for the member spotlight. [Learn more](#)

NEXT STEP - UPLOAD YOUR PHOTO

 Profiles with a photo are **15 times more likely** to be viewed!

Make sure your photo:

- Is an acceptable file type: .jpg, .bmp, .gif or .png
- Is less than 5 MB


You can also [email us your photos](#)

match.com's advice center
Want help picking [the right photo?](#)

I'll [upload my photo later](#) |

Upload Another Photo: (25 remaining) Finished adding photos »
You can also email us your photos. (5 MB max file size)

My Photos (1) Select a photo to edit ✎

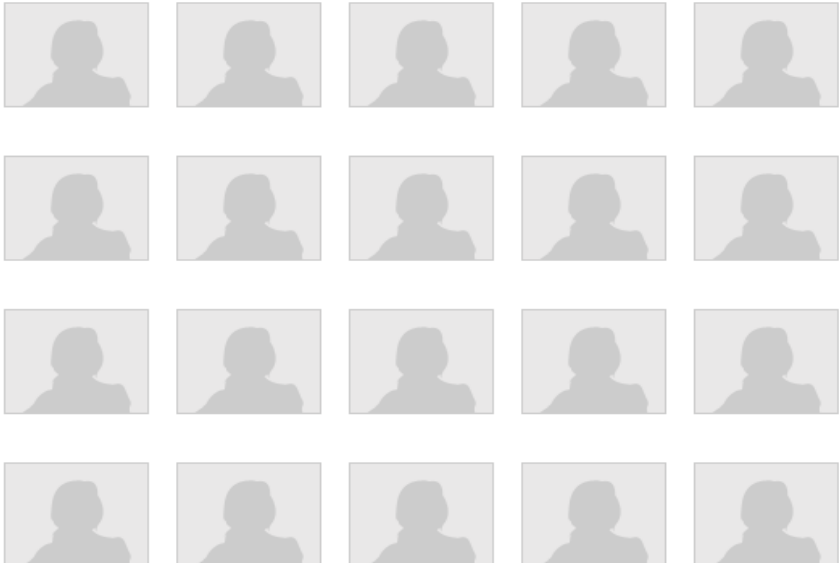


★ pending primary photo

Click & drag the images to order your photos. To replace your primary photo drag your photo to the primary photo area.

★ Photo can be set as primary.

PHOTO TIPS
.....
Use photos that feature you.



Appendix B

Basic Registration

POF Sign In Help Register

INBOX | Ultra Male | SEARCH | ONLINE (281202) | FAVORITES | MEET ME | CHEMISTRY | UPGRADE

Over 30,000 New People Join Every Day!
Millions of people use plentyoffish because they want to find their soulmate!

Username	<input type="text"/>
Password	<input type="password"/>
Confirm Password	<input type="password"/>
Email Address	<input type="text"/>
Confirm Email	<input type="text"/>
Gender	<input type="text" value="Man"/>
Birth Date	<input type="text" value="January"/> <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="1994"/>
Country	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
Ethnicity	<input type="text" value="Caucasian"/>

Questionnaire

Complete this questionnaire to meet your soulmate!

Over 32,000 couples have sent in a testimonial telling us how Plentyoffish helped them find their soulmate. Each one of those people took the time and effort to fill each section. What you put into this process is what you are going to get out of it, so please take the time to fill out every field.

We match you based on what you enter here. If you enter that you want a relationship then you will see mostly users who want relationships throughout the site. If you will not date a smoker then you will not see smokers.

***All Field Are Mandatory**

Postal code/Zip	<input type="text"/>	province	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
City	<input type="text"/>	Do you want children?	<input type="text" value="Prefer Not To Say"/>
My Gender	<input type="text" value="Female"/>	Marital Status	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
Seeking	<input type="text" value="Male"/>	Do you have children?	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
Height	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	Do you smoke?	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
I Am Looking for	<input type="text" value="Select"/>	Do you do drugs?	<input type="text" value="Select"/>
Hair	<input type="text" value="Select"/> <input type="text" value="Hang Out"/> <input type="text" value="Long-term"/> <input type="text" value="Dating"/> <input type="text" value="Friends"/> <input type="text" value="Intimate Encounter"/>	Do you drink?	<input type="text" value="Prefer Not To Say"/>
Body Type	<input type="text" value="Select"/> <input type="text" value="Hang Out"/> <input type="text" value="Long-term"/> <input type="text" value="Dating"/> <input type="text" value="Friends"/> <input type="text" value="Intimate Encounter"/>	Religion	<input type="text" value="Non-religious"/>
Do You Own A Car?	<input type="text" value="Prefer Not To Say"/>	Your Profession	<input type="text"/>
Education	<input type="text" value="High school"/>		

Examples of Drop Down Menu Options

Do You Own A Car? Prefer Not To Say

Education High school

When it comes to d... describes

- High school
- Some college
- Some university
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree

Body Type Prefer Not To Say

Do You Own A Car?

Education

- Prefer Not To Say
- Thin
- Athletic
- Average
- A Few Extra Pounds
- Big & Tall/BBW

children? Prefer Not To Say

Marital Status Select

Do you have children?

Do you smoke?

Do you do drugs?

- Select
- Single
- Married
- Living Together
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Not Single/Not Looking

province Select

Do you want children? Prefer Not To Say

Marital Status Non-religious

Do you have children?

Do you smoke?

Do you do drugs?

Do you drink? Religion Non-religious

Your Profession

- New age
- Islamic
- Jewish
- Catholic
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Anglican
- Sikh
- Methodist
- Christian - other
- Baptist
- Lutheran
- Presbyterian
- Other

province Select

Do you want children? Prefer Not To Say

Marital Status Want children

Do you have children? Undecided/Open

Select

Intent

When it comes to dating what best describes your intent?

Select

- Select
- 1. I'm looking for Casual dating/No Commitment.
- 2. I want to date but nothing serious.
- 3. I want a relationship.
- 4. I am putting in serious effort to find someone.
- 5. I am serious and I want to find someone to marry.

Income - We use income and birth order behind the scenes for matching

Select

Family

My birth father and mother are: Select

They had Select together of which I am Select

Would you date someone who has kids? Select

Longest Relationship

What is the longest relationship you have been in?

Select

- Select
- Under 1 year
- Over 1 year
- Over 2 years
- Over 3 years
- Over 4 years
- Over 5 years
- Over 6 years
- Over 7 years
- Over 8 years
- Over 9 years
- Over 10 years

income and birth order behind the scenes for matching, they will **not** be displayed on your profile.

Select

mother are: Select

They had Select together of which I am Select

Would you date someone who has kids? Select

Would you date someone who smokes? Select

Income

Income - We use income and birth order behind the scenes for matching, they will **not** be displayed on your profile.

Select
Select
Less Than 25,000
25,001 to 35,000
35,001 to 50,000
50,001 to 75,000
75,001 to 100,000
100,001 to 150,000
150,000+

My birth father and mother are: together of which I am

Would you date someone who has kids?

Would you date someone who smokes?

Family

Family

My birth father and mother are:

They had which I am
Select
Still Married
Divorced
Separated
One has passed
Both have passed
Not Together

Would you date someone who has kids?

Would you date someone who smokes?

Headline (ex. looking for good-hearted man)

Description - (Minimum of 100 characters)

For your own safety, do not include your name, phone number, or address. People will read both your profile AND message when deciding if they should write back to you. When people search on the site the following

Family

My birth father and mother are:

They had together of which I am

Would you date someone who has kids?

Would you date someone who smokes?

- Select
- 1 Child
- 2 Children
- 3 Children
- 4 Children
- 5 Children
- 6 Children
- 7 Children
- 8 Children
- 9 Children

Headline (ex. looking for good-hearted man)

Family

My birth father and mother are:

They had together of which I am

Would you date someone who has kids?

Would you date someone who smokes?

- Select
- the oldest
- second born
- third born
- fourth born
- fifth born
- sixth born
- seven born
- eight born
- ninth born

Headline (ex. looking for good-hearted man)

Kids?

Would you date someone who has kids?

Select

Would you date someone who smokes?

Select
No
Yes
I only date single parents

Smoker?

Would you date someone who has kids?

Select

Would you date someone who smokes?

Select

Headline (ex. looking for good-hearted man)

Select
No
Yes
I only date smokers

Deadline/Description/Interests/First Date

Headline (ex. looking for good-hearted man)

Description - (Minimum of 100 characters)

For your own safety, do not include your name, phone number, or address. People will read both your profile AND message when deciding if they should write back to you. When people search on the site the following description will be their first impression of you.

If you want to be successful and not waste your time do this:

1. Talk about your hobbies.
2. Talk about your goals/aspirations
3. Talk about yourself and what makes you unique.
4. Talk about your taste in music.

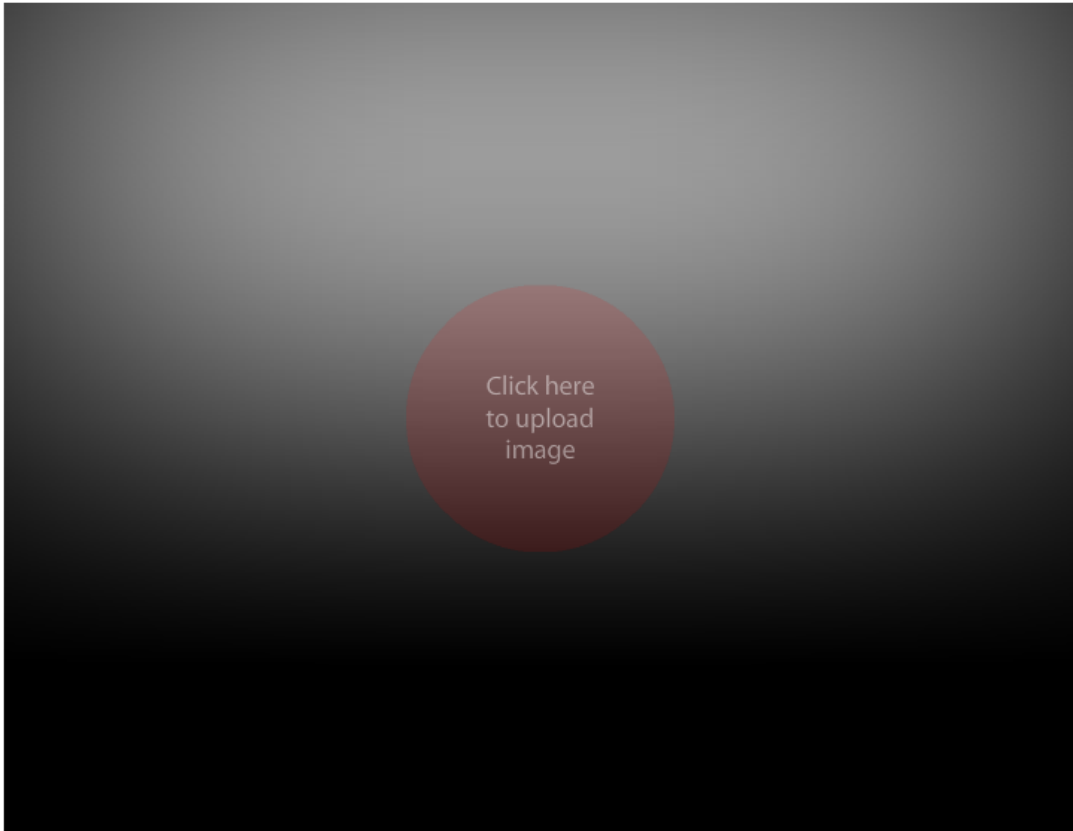
Interests - (Separate interests with commas)

First Date (optional) - The longer your description, the more likely it is you will get responses.

Upload a Picture

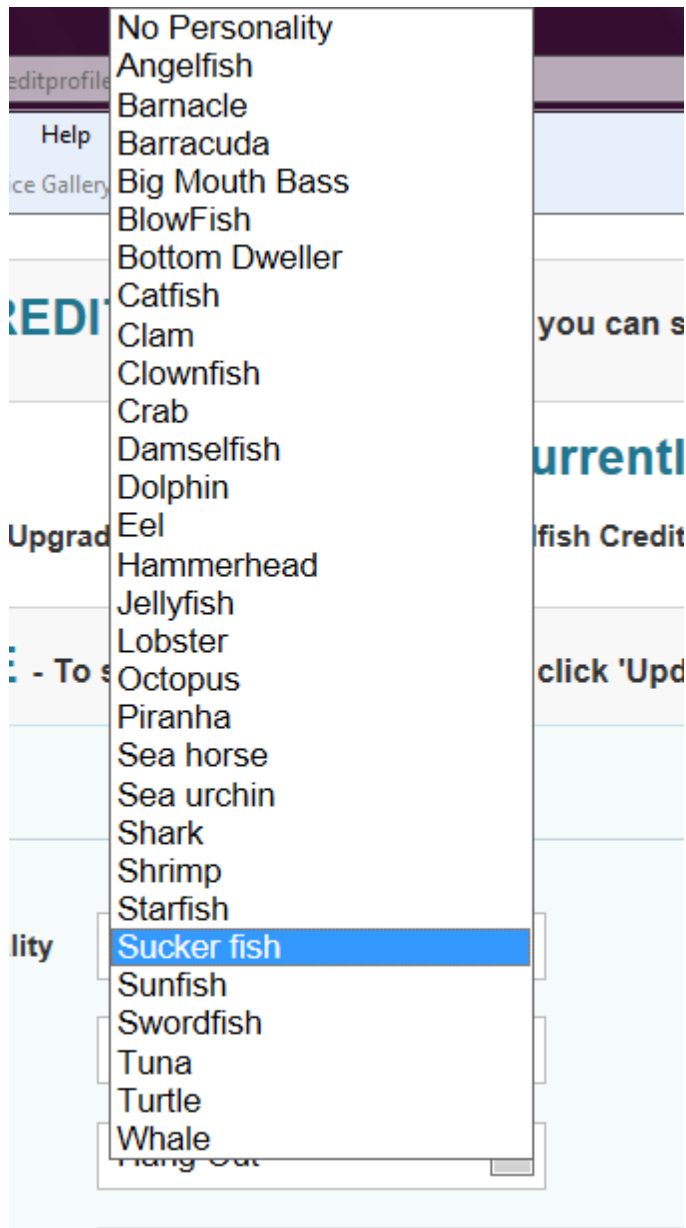
The chance of you getting replies to your messages if you haven't uploaded a photo is extremely low.

Please upload a photo! You can mark your images as private and add captions to images. Click below to upload your image, once it's uploaded click on save to crop your image.



If you can't use the flash upload above use, this one...

Fish Personalities



Appendix C

Search Engines

POF

Basic Search	Advanced Search	Username Search	Marriage
<p>If you are searching for multiple interests, separate them with a comma. For local searches in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, you can search by postal code or zip code instead of a city name. Have fun searching through millions of dating profiles!</p>			
I'm A	Male	Marital Status	I don't care
Seeking	Female	User Wants children?	I don't care
Age	25 to 35	Smokes?	I don't care
Country	Canada	Does drugs?	I don't care
City or Postal Code / Miles		Interest	One Interest per search
Province		Display Type	Detailed
Minimum Height	I don't care	Drink	I don't care
Maximum Height	> 7' (> 213 cm)	Users With Children	I don't care
Religion	I don't care Non-religious New age Muslim	Hair Color	I don't care Black Blond(e) Brown
Ethnicity	I don't care Black Caucasian Hispanic	Zodiac Sign	I don't care Aquarius Aries Cancer
Pets	I don't care No Pets Cat Dog	Eye color	I don't care Blue Hazel Grey
Search Type	I don't care Long-term Dating Hang Out	Body Type	I don't care Didn't Answer Thin Athletic
Education	I don't care High School Some University Associates Degree	Income	I don't care Not Answered Less Than 25,000 25,001 to 35,000
Family Orientation	I don't care Not Family Centric Average Family Centric Strongly Family Centric	Easygoingness	I don't care Not Easygoing Average Easygoing Very Easygoing
Self-Confidence	I don't care Average Self-Confidence High Self-Confidence	Openness/ People Dependent	I don't care Not Dependent on others Average Openness Big People Person
Profession	I don't care Business owner Blue Collar Sales Medical Field Student	Intent	Anything Casual dating/No Commitment. Wants to date but nothing serious. Wants a relationship. Is putting in serious effort to find some Wants to find someone to marry.
Sort by	Last Visit		
<p>Go Fishing!</p>			

Pick and choose characteristics to build your ideal match.

Custom Search

[Start new search](#) | [Save search criteria](#)

BASICS

I am a:

Between ages: and

Photos only Online now

Search by: ZIP Region (country, state or city)

miles of

APPEARANCE

- Height
- Body type
- Eye color
- Hair color

INTERESTS

- Sports & exercise
- Common interests

BACKGROUND / VALUES

- Marital status
- Ethnicity
- Faith
- Education
- Languages
- Political views

LIFESTYLE

- Smoke
- Drink
- Exercise frequency
- Has kids
- Wants kids
- Occupation
- Salary range
- Pets
- Sign

KEYWORD ?

SEARCH NOW

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