From Pages to Faces:
A Study of Relevant Values for Online to Offline Dating

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ABSTRACT

FROM PAGES TO FACES:
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The prominence of online communication has propelled online services into popularity such as the online dating industry. Most of the online dating studies have focused on the early phases of the online relationship (Bapna, 2016; Prieler, 2017; Whyte, 2017), while the period that follows received less attention. The current research explores values important to online dating couples and these value affect couples as their relationship progresses into the long-term phase. Data is collected from the dating site Plentyoffish.com's community forum using the netnography method, and findings on how values affect different phases of the relationship periods are discussed. This paper provides additional insights on how values mentioned in existing literature change over time. It also reveals two new values (Family and Kindness). The values discovered in the long-term period also have managerial implications as they can potentially lead to the creation of long term phase related services.
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List of Symbols, Abbreviations or Nomenclature

**CMC**: Computer Mediated Communication, any form of information exchange that uses computer or the internet as medium.

**FtF**: Face to Face, communication that happens offline and in person.

**Modality Switch**: The switching of communication environment, in the context of this paper the switch is often from CMC to FtF.

**PoF**: Plenty of Fish

**URS**: Uncertainty Reduction Strategy

**URT**: Uncertainty Reduction Theory
I. Introduction

The online dating industry provides a straightforward service for its consumers – finding a match; to that end, dating sites often charge a subscription fee that allows users access to their matchmaking services. The chosen dating site for this research, Plenty of Fish, operates under a different type of system where matchmaking service is free for all registered users, however after a match has been found, users need to pay for a subscription to communicate with their match. Even though the two business models are entirely different, one commonality is the subscription fee; this can potentially cause a conflict of interest as the industry would like the subscription period to last while users want to find a partner as quickly as possible. The solution requires both users and industry to expand their definition of online dating beyond the matchmaking process. Just like a traditional relationship, after a potential partner has been identified, the relationship moves forward to additional phases. This study separates the relationship of online dating couples into three periods, Initial Signaling Phase, Interactive Phase, and Long Term Phase. The Initial Signaling Phase consists of the early period of the relationship when couples have just been matched with each other online and have started to communicate with each other. Interactive Phase consists of the period in the relationship when couples decide to move their relationship offline, actions such as real life meetings and face to face dating often signals the beginning of this phase. The Long Term Phase consists of the period in the relationship when couples mainly interact with each other offline. However, this does not mean the absence of online communication since social media
has become an integral part of people’s lives. Applying the concept of relationship phases back to online dating service industry could lead to new potential services outside the Initial Signaling Phase. The premise of this study is to explore online dating values that are important to consumers throughout the three phases. The application of relationship phases can create new meanings for values previously identified by existing literature, and through the netnography study of the online dating site community, new values were identified for each phase of a relationship. These new insights build on the previous literature in the online dating domain.

1.1 Online Dating Values

The literature review for this study mainly focuses on value related literature. The goal is to find values relevant to online dating website users; to that end, value-literature was thoroughly reviewed. The following discusses the three identified categories found within the literature. The first category consists of literature describing values within the service industry. The second category consists of communication theories that are relevant to how dating service providers perceive customer values. The final category consists of value-literature based on the user experiences.

Value studies related to service industry contain several different schools of thought. Literature on values in the service industry are mostly concerned with companies’ internal
functions. The idea is that a good product or service will naturally attract customers, thus values like "Product Leadership" are the primary focus of this literature (Bick et al. 2004). While this line of direct approach remains popular within the literature, with “Core Service” and “Speed” viewed as important to the service industry (Garg et al. 2014). Other literature finds external aspects of service values as more important since ultimately the service industry is about consumers. For example, service values such as "Hedonic" and "Utilitarian" were categorized based on consumer needs (Babin et al. 1994). Other literature listed values such as "Heritage" and "Shared Moral" based on consumers perspective (Medberg et al. 2014). For this paper, literature served as a broad overview of the potential ranges of values relevant to online dating site users. Also, a comparison between actual consumer values from online dating site users and values perceived as essential to users by service industry were reviewed.

Value studies related to the online dating industry include literature on communication methods unique to online users. The literature in this category contains many approaches to computer-based communication and examines how these tools change the dynamic of relationships in comparison to traditional dating. Existing literature regarding the nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC), modality switching (switching from one form of communication to another) between CMC, and Face to Face (FtF) are some of the examples of literature examining values important to online dating users. One of the most prominent approaches to analyzing CMC is URS uncertainty reduction strategies (URS) (Antheunis, et al. 2010). Antheunis and his colleagues published a large body of work regarding URS (Antheunis, et al. 2010). This approach to CMC suggests that the
act of communication is a process of eliminating uncertainties between couples. By eliminating uncertainties, people will understand each other better due to the positive correlation between reduction of uncertainties and attraction (Berger, et al. 1974). Aside from URS, nuances of online dating communication involve the effectiveness of communication channels. The tests were often about the efficiency of the online communication channels or a combination of different online communication channels. Often "communication cues" are the distinguishing elements for communication as the expressiveness of certain channels such as audio or video is "cue rich" compared to plain text-based messaging (Antheunis et al., 2010). Based on the traditional CMC literature, CMC oriented online dating studies were reviewed. The Hyperpersonal approach takes the behavior of science and psychology into consideration and views the online environment as a setting that nurtures communication (Walther & Joseph, 2007). Similarly, McEwan did extensive studies on Hyperpersonal Communication and concluded that there is time sensitive nature of FtF meeting under the influence of Hyperpersonal Communication (McEwan, et al. 2013). McEwan also pointed out the positive impact of Hyperpersonal communication during CMC as it creates a feedback loop that reinforces elements favorable to attraction in the online environment.

Finally, the literature on online dating values from the perspective of online dating site users are examined. Writings from this section mainly employ interview-based data gathering in order to formulate values important to online dating site users or dating couples. Nominally, works of literature in this area discuss values important to dating couples in general or specific types of couples. However, there are some twists to the
direct approach which takes interviewee psychology into consideration and created "Presentational Rhetoric" and "Articulated Rhetoric" where people signal their attractiveness online using "Presentational Rhetoric" while having actual "Articulated Rhetoric" values (Manning, et al. 2014).

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Existing literature tends to operate without time as a concept; online dating values presented by either assume that values apply to relationships in general or focuses on the initial matchmaking period (Manning, et al. 2014). Without the concept of relationship progression, there is a general lack of literature addressing the shift in relationship dynamics over time. Values that are important to individuals remain largely grouped within the online dating stage and a gap within the literature exists with understanding how these values change throughout the shifts in relationship dynamics.

This paper addresses the potential problems faced by users of online dating services during their face-to-face meetings. Therefore, conceptual frameworks concerning modality switching from online environments to offline environments are the most relevant, as are frameworks concerned with the status of the relationship after the first face-to-face meeting. While the previous research was useful in helping to achieve the goal of this
paper, the online communication portion of the existing body of work has mostly been employed by mainstream dating websites to help refine matchmaking. In-depth research in the area of online communication has been widely studied, however, the intermediate period and thereafter deserves a closer look. These existing concepts often favor online communication as the preferred form of matchmaking and the focus of this paper will be on the difficulties of Hyperpersonal communication uniquely faced by dating couples (Walther et al. 2007).

1.3 Methodology

This paper examines online dating relationships and Netnography was the chosen methodology due to the related internet community context (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is different from traditional research methods such as interviews or focus groups, due to the more naturalistic approach. Similar to the ethnographic research method, netnography immerses researchers into the community in order to obtain their perspective. In addition, the lack of interference ordinarily presented in traditional methodology leads to a lower chance of skewed results.
1.4 Research Site

The website used for this paper is the dating website Plenty of Fish and its online discussion forums (Plenty of Fish Online Dating Forum and Singles Chat, 2017). Plenty of Fish is one of the largest dating sites in the North American market with users all across the globe. It has one of the largest user bases in the industry and an active forum where users can share ideas and provide feedback for the site. The site’s usage of an advanced matchmaking algorithm and on-staff psychology experts ensures that the online aspect of the matchmaking process runs smoothly. This algorithm helps to eliminate potential problems which could originate from the online portion of the matchmaking process. Thus, the current research focuses on the phases after the initial matchmaking period.

1.5 Research Contribution

While research discussing early, and mid-phases of online dating relationships are abundant, limited research examines the long-term phase of online relationships. The research further contributes to this phase by examining whether couples who met online experience unique challenges after meeting face-to-face. It also further explores whether couples communicate partially online or move entirely offline afterward. This paper aims to address these factors affecting long-term dating post initial FtF.
The insights gained from this paper have significant managerial contributions as the new value insights identified during the Long-Term Phase can potentially lead to longevity in consumer online usage. Hidden qualities that can help online dating couples to transition their relationship offline can help users achieve a higher rate of success in long-term relationships. This success will in turn help online dating service providers in their marketing strategy. New insights identified by this paper if addressed by the online dating service providers will help couples experience a more successful smoother first date, and potentially develop a niche market for sites to specialize in moving online communication to FtF meetings.
2. Literature Review

The following literature is separated into three categories, General Values, Dating Service Values, and Value Concepts. General Values, examines value related literature regarding the retail or service industry. This section is meant to display the corporation side of values as the literature examines what firms consider to be essential values to their customers. Dating Service Values focus on corporation value literature and is narrowed down to only online dating service providers. The final section deals with Value Concepts which are literature associated with online dating values; these values are taken from the perspective of online dating site users or just people in relationships. The contrast between three sections will draw a clear picture of the discrepancy between service providers’ perception of consumer values and actual consumer values.

2.1 Literature: General Values Overview

In order to give some frame of reference for online dating values, literature review included a number of general value literature for the service industry. General Value literature consists mainly of studies done on the values of retailers or service providers. The literature explores values corporations consider to be essential to consumers; this combined with Consumer-oriented value literature can display discrepancy between a
corporation’s perceived customer values and actual customer values, thus identify values companies overlooked. General Values are split into three categories: Consumer-Oriented Internal Values which deals with values that can be manipulated by the company via structural changes. Consumer Oriented External Values are values companies perceive as necessary to consumers but are not adjustable by companies themselves.

2.1.1 Consumer Oriented Internal Values

While all the values discussed in this section are related to consumers, internal values focus on values corporations can manipulate by changing its internal structure or policies. This section mainly discusses the existing literature that identifies consumer-oriented values as internal in nature. i.e. the values that affect consumers directly. For financial institutions, trust is an essential aspect of consumer values as the businesses in question are directly linked to their financial situation. Medberg identified four values regarding the financial institutions, two of which are internal values: “Shared Moral” and “Responsibility” share a general theme of trustworthiness (Medberg, et al. 2014). "Shared Moral" is a sense of familiarity which makes the bank feel more trustworthy, and "responsibility" is the bank’s willing to forgo short-term gains to maintain customers' trust. Bick added "Product Leadership" onto the list. (Bick, et al. 2004). "Product Leadership" instead of being a statement of a company's trustworthiness is just a direct appeal to consumers by offering the best product or service in this case. Garg expanded on Bick's line of thinking
and added more values that go for direct consumer appeals: "Servicescape," "Core Service," "Employees," "Speed." (Garg, et al. 2014). Follow the theme of a better product, but more in term of service, "Servicescape," "Core Service" positions the business optimally to create positive service environment couple with relevant market. "Employee" focuses on training service-oriented employees and "Speed" focuses on shorten response time thus improving service quality. Garg's paper while still talking about the financial sector is more closely related to the values of more general B2C businesses such as retail. Lehtinen identified "Physical Quality," "Interactive Quality," "Corporate Quality," "Process Quality," and "Output Quality" as values important to the retail sector (Lehtinen, et al. 1991). "Corporate Quality" is similar to Medberg's idea of "Trustworthiness," it is a value that improves consumer image of the company, while "Output Quality" is similar to Bick's idea, it is about the end product's quality.

2.1.2 Consumer Oriented External Values

Companies can focus on internal values to attract customers, but as B2C companies, external values are likewise important, and the values in this section are more varied as values with direct interaction with consumers often cover more approaches. Initially, Parasuraman identified "Tangible," "Reliability," "Responsiveness," "Assurance," and "Empathy" to the list of values for consumers. (Parasuraman, et al. 2002), which outlines the earliest service values identified as important. Babin summarized consumer values
into two broad categories "Utilitarian" and "Hedonic" (Babin et al. 1994). In a broad sense, consumers view product or service either as utility purchase or pleasure purchase hence the two values. Going back to the banking sector; Medberg identified two other values important to customers of banks, these two values are external: "Relationship," "Heritage" (Medberg et al. 2014). "Relationship" and "Heritage" would fall under "Hedonic" even though pleasure is not exactly the sentiment, rather "good wills," they are also similar in the sense that they both require long-term service to take effect. Consumers either inherit the service from the previous generation or themselves have been using said bank's service for a long time thus built a good relationship with the bank. Medberg's identified values fail to address short-term values for banking customers which Angelis did address in her paper. Angelis and colleagues identified "Professional Service," "Marketing Efficiency" and "Effective Communication" as important values for banking (Angelis, et al. 2005). "Professional Service" is like the initial phase of Medberg's "Relationship," but keeping promises and continuously provide good services, and eventually, consumers and bank will build "Relationship." "Effective Communication" is the ability of employees to understand customers' problems thus able to serve them better. "Marketing Efficiency" differs from the previous two is about the effective advertisement for the service. Chen expanded on the trustworthiness theme of Medberg by adding "Perceived Risk" as a counter value (Chen, et al. 2005). Garg took a more dynamic approach with inclusion of multiple consumers in mind and added the following: "Customization," "Value Added," "Convenience," "Presence of Other Customers," "Online Aesthetics," "Online Hedonic Elements," "Online Functional Elements" (Garg et al. 2014). "Customization" specializes product or services for individual customers thus enhance adaptability, "Value Added"
introduce supplementary services to enhance the value of the main product. "Convenience" is the ease of access of service or product, "Presence of Other Customers" addresses changes perception in consumers, and the final three values related to online resources businesses can put out to attract customers. So far, the literature has been focusing on the "hedonic" aspect of consumer values. Smith expanded on "utility" aspect of consumer values (Smith, et al. 2016). "Price," "Quality," "Flexibility" are values aim to increase the utility of the service or product on display. Overall, the external consumer values identified describe consumers' needs and desires and are more flexible than internal values simply due to more areas open for manipulation.

2.2 Literature: Dating Service Values Overview

Dating services share many values with general businesses; however, there are some unique ones. "Uncertainty Reduction" is the act of online dating service users attempt to familiarize themselves with their potential matches, Antheunis split online dating service URS (Uncertainty Reduction Strategy) into three different categories: "passive," "active" and "interactive" (Antheunis, et al. 2010). Passive Strategy is mainly about observation, in term of the online community, passive uncertainty reduction can be browsing public information displayed. Active strategy requires proactive effort such as reaching out to people online and initiate the communication, but the target of communication is often not the target of interest. Example of such communication would be like asking others about
the target of interest. Third and final uncertainty reduction strategy is Interactive Strategy. In interactive strategy user actively communicate back and forth with the target of interest. Traditionally, reduction of uncertainty is considered positive for relationship development, but the categorization of URS opened up the way for more in-depth analysis. Not every act of URS has the same effectiveness on relationship attraction, and URS are also not the only factors that should be taken into consideration. Antheunis’ study shows that among the factors tested, the biggest contributing factor to Attraction is similarities shared, followed by interactive URS, then passive URS. Active URS proves to be detrimental to Attraction. Burgoon added communication cues as another element of online dating values: “text-based,” “audio based,” “visual-based” communication was tested for effectiveness in uncertainty reduction (Burgoon, et al. 2003). Burgoon’s study has shown that communication including audio cues, but not visual cues yield better interaction results. According to the study, meeting with audio cues alone surpass those with the combination of the visual and audio cue, even though audio communication is also considered quite basic, it yields more promising uncertainty reduction than tested face to face communication. While knowing the effectiveness of each format is essential, for the topic of modality switching, learning about what previous forms of communication or initial communication does to conversations thereafter is vital. Online dating services’ uniqueness lies in the fact that it is by nature over the web. The web reveals much information about people but also hides just as much, which often means the time the highest value to consumers from dating services is to sift through the information and provide accurate data.
2.3 Literature: Studies Relating to Values Concept

Literature in this section is mostly focused on the value concept of dating couples. The literature reviewed under this section is written from the perspective of the consumers, more specifically people in a relationship or want to be in relationships. The values discovered in this literature are largely representative of our understanding of values regarding dating. This section is split further into three categories. Initial Signaling Values consist of values prominent during the early phase of an online relationship where users signal their availability to others. Interactive Values consist of values important for couples who are shifting from online to offline environment. Long-term Values encompass values for couples who successfully weathered the shift and have stable offline relationships.

2.3.1 Initial Signaling Values:

During the initial phase of online dating, users tend to emphasize their positive attributes to form positive initial impressions to enable further interactions. The value rhetoric advertised by users during this initial phase generally consists of things they feel others will appreciate thus increase the chance of further interaction. Manning coined the phrase "presentational rhetoric" to describe these signaling values which consist of "No drama," "Harmony," "Seriousness" and "Life experience" (Manning et al. 2014). The general
theme of presentational rhetoric in Manning’s paper is stability; users wish to signal their maturity and dependable nature; this, however, is not necessarily true to their actual character; presentational rhetoric at the end of the day is a tool to emphasize their positive aspects. Manning’s other category for signaling values is "articulated rhetoric." "Articulated rhetoric" is more implicit. In a sense, these values are what users want out of the relationship themselves and also what they want to signal but will not because they feel these values do not carry a positive impression. "Articulated rhetoric" in Manning's paper includes "Hard work," "Humor," "Spontaneity," "Finding the one," and "Physical appearance." These values are notably less about stability and more about the joy of dating experiences. However, “Hard work’s implied financial stability is largely similar to the presentational rhetoric. Other studies also contributed to the list of values used as signals. Debnam’s study on young adults’ dating values can also be viewed as presentational rhetoric for that age group (Debnam, et al. 2014). The research method employed by Debnam to discover the values is through interviews with individuals within the group in a private setting which is largely similar to what Manning did to find the presentational rhetoric for his paper. Values listed by Debnam's paper include "Trust", "Good Communication", "Honesty", "Respect", "Self Confidence", "Individuality", "Understanding" and "Compromise," while different from Manning's presentational rhetoric. There is a general lack of "self-indulgence" present in articulated rhetoric.
2.3.2 Interactive Values:

After the initial advertisement for the signaling phase, new values will emerge which are related to the interactions of dating couples online or offline. The main goal of interactions at this phase of dating is to reduce uncertainties about each other, to do so, URT (uncertainty reduction techniques) are often employed. Earlier works such as Berger and Calabrese's paper formulated values affecting uncertainty reduction during interactions between the two parties. "Communication environment", "Nonverbal affiliated expression", "Information seeking", "Intimacy level", "Recipatory rate", "Similarity", and "Liking" (Berger, et al. 1974). The values listed by Berger are not only aspects that affect uncertainty reduction, but they are also sometimes signs of uncertainty reduction such as "Similarity" and "Intimacy level," these values not only affect uncertainty reduction, they also show the progress of uncertainty reduction. "Recipatory rate" also became one of the key study focus of later papers on uncertainty reduction in online dating which came in the form of "Self-disclosure." "Self-disclosure" is an important tool used during the process of (computer-mediated communication) CMC (Gibb, et al. 2006). Self-disclosure is more of an interactive experience similar to articulated rhetoric. Users initiate self-disclosure online by disclosing something about him/herself, this, in turn, will invite the other party also to share something about themselves and the process goes back and forth achieving uncertainty reduction. Gibb categorized four values important to the effect of self-disclosure: "Honesty," "Amount," "Intent," and "Valence." "Honesty" in here is related to the degree of honesty in self-disclosure. "Amount" is about the amount of information disclosed, "Valence" is about whether the information disclosed is positive or negative.
Generally speaking, the values for self-disclosure is asking "how much should the user disclose" and "what information should be disclosed?". The end goal is to reduce uncertainty for both parties which will lead to increase attraction. Gibb expanded further upon self-disclosure by adding three more elements into the equation "Privacy Concern," "Self-Efficacy" and "Internet Experience" (Gibb et al. 2011). The new elements mostly act as controlling factor to self-disclosure, "Privacy Concern" and "Internet Experience" helps reduce risk of information sharing during "Self-Disclosure" by controlling the amount or content shared while "Self-Efficacy" is more aligned with the previous elements identified by Gibb, act more as a gauge for the act of "Self-Disclosure". Finally, Donn's 2002 paper contains some more additions to the values important to computer-mediated communications, these values are tied to the limited means of communication in an online environment: "Paralanguage", "Disinhibition", and "Geography" (Donn, et al. 2002). "Paralanguage" essentially about communicates personality through the style of the text. "Disinhibition" talks about how people tend to share more with others regarding their private life via CMC compare to physical interactions; this, of course, is not always the case due to anonymity afforded by CMC making some weary of sharing but the medium itself encourages more disinhibition. "Geography" is straightforward as CMC lessens the constraint of geographical locations, but the long-term effect of physical long distance may be negative, hence brings forth the values within online dating that are long term.
2.3.3 Long-Term Values

The end of CMC means the end of online matchmaking and the first step towards long-term relationships, while some of the problems came with long-term relationships by default, others may appear due to the online origin of these relationships' conception; beyond that, the history of people's relationships also plays a role in the matter. Potârcă and colleagues identified "Relationship history," and "Presence of children" (Potârcă et al. 2015) as some key values for people who have experiences in dating and thus experienced breakups at one point or another. Both "Relationship history" and "Presence of children" are realistic values and have potentially lasting effects on ongoing relationships. With regards to those who are new to the relationship but manage to reach the long-term phase, Baker summarized "Common Interest," "Obstacles." "Length of contact and postponing of physical intimacy" and "Conflict resolution" as the key to long-term relationships in an online environment. (Baker, et al. 2002). One interesting point regarding long-term relationship values is the fact that many "Presentational Rhetoric" present during the advertising phase of online dating coincides with the values necessary to a long-term relationship. The current researches on long-term relationships of couples who met online are either specific to a demographic such as Potârcă's paper describing gay couples or Baker's paper describing teens and young adults. There seems to be a gap in the long-term values important to online dating website users, as such it is one of the goals of this paper to identify values in that regard.
3. Methodology

Methodology section describes the research method employed for this study. This section details the method used for data collection and reason for using it. This section also includes a detailed description of the research site and finally reasoning for choose this site for study.

3.1 Netnography

This study’s method of research is netnography. Netnography is a research method pioneered by Robert Kozinets, this method of research adapts ethnographic research techniques to online environment (Kozinets, 2002). Traditional research methods such as focus groups, surveys and interviews while effective often create disruption within the online community, this type of disruption can be largely sidestepped by netnography as its ethnography root specialized in naturalistic and unobtrusive research. In addition, because netnography being very similar to a regular online community’s intended modus operandi, it is often less time consuming and resource hungry (Kozinets 2006, Langer & Beckmann 2005). For the purpose of this paper, netnography is an excellent fit since the community in question is that of an online dating service user base and in order to observe
qualities displayed by users, un-obstructive methods of information gathering will create least amount of distortion in data.

3.2 Research Site

The Plenty of Fish website ([www.pof.com](http://www.pof.com)) is a dating service operating from Vancouver. Markus Frind founded the website in 2003 and sold in 2015 to its competitor Match (match.com) for $575,000,000 (Kosoff, 2015). As of now, it is a subsidiary of Match.com. With a large active user base averaging around four million per day, Plenty of Fish is one of the largest dating websites on the market ([Datingsitesreviews](http://www.datingsitesreviews.com), 2018). The website is being consistently updated, and the frequency of updates did not decrease in recent years despite having been acquired by Match.com. For example, in 2017 Plenty of Fish released a new feature called "Spark" which allows users to quote and comment any part of a user profile by picking up and dragging a new conversation icon over an area of someone's profile. This tool was designed to help users to initiate conversations easier ([Globaldatinginsights](http://www.globaldatinginsights.com), 2017). Updates to features were most prominent in 2015; incidentally, this was when Match.com acquired the website. Other activities for the website include introducing the service to other platforms, acquiring other websites, and posting studies regarding relationships, personalities, and psychologies.
The registration process (*Appendix A*) for the website is relatively easy compared to some of the other dating sites. Firstly, users must fill out a table asking for key information including username, password, email, gender, birthday, country, ethnicity, bot check as well as confirm their consent to the website services. After the initial registration, Plenty of Fish has users fill out a more detailed form as a basis for their user profile (*Appendix B*). Aside from the information users provide at the initial phase, new information relevant to matchmaking also needs to be inputted. This includes user appearance such as hair color, ethnicity, body types, as well as, information regarding users’ preference for potential matches. This includes a preference for partner’s drinking or smoking habits, car ownership, number of children, occupation etcetera. In this phase of the registration, users are also given the option to write some description for themselves for others to read. The overall information filled out on this page is used by the search algorithm of the forum to optimize results. However, Plenty of Fish also has a smart search system that will list results of potential matches based on clicks rather than just criteria inputs. Therefore, if the click behavior of a user is different from his or her actual listed search criteria, Plenty of Fish will still include the search results that may not fit the listed criteria but do fit the click pattern (Allthingsonlinedating, 2017). The final parts of the registration process are a couple of personality tests (*Appendix C*) that help users understand their own quirks and compatibility with different personality types.

The front page of the Plenty of Fish website mainly consists of pictures of potential matches. The layout consists of pictures that cover the majority of the website’s space. The menu navigates the user to other parts of the site situates on top of the match pictures.
The top row list functions related to the user account and technical support. "My Tokens" is the first of these options. Tokens are a type of currency that can be used to enlist certain extra functions that help users find matches in various ways. The first function of the token is to allow users to use the “Super Yes” option in the “Meet Me” search. “Super Yes” yields a 56.3% increase in the likelihood of a mutual match. The second function of the tokens is to highlight the user’s profile, making the viewing of the user’s profile more likely. The third function of the tokens is to raise the message priority to be high. This feature moves the user’s message above others with lower priority; this is similar to grocery shelf placement, it is a way to make a user’s message more visible, thus increasing the chances of reciprocity.

"My Profile" is the second option listed beside "My Tokens" (Appendix D), this is where users can alter information about their profile. "My Profile" and the option beside it, "Edit Profile" appear to be redundant given the fact that either will lead to a page that can switch between the two via submenu. Redundancy aside, "Edit Profile" allows the user to go back to the profile form first filled during registration and make changes. “My profile” is the profile of the user. Other users of the site can access this page when they click on the photo in the search results. This page allows users to get a general idea of what is being displayed and makes easy adjustments as the edit profile link is one click away. The top section of the profile consists of a row of photos displaying potential matches, similar to those from the main page but taking only a fraction of space. Below the top section are the profile owner’s username and a headline, followed by key information about the user such as smoking habit, body type, ethnicity, age, intention, location, profession and
personality listed in a clear and concise manner. Key information is followed by a link from Plenty of Fish that lists tips on how to improve one’s profile, and below it is the user photo which takes up the majority of the page’s space. A message section is present should users wish to send a message to the owner of the profile with the option to set the priority of the message using Token previously mentioned. The area below message displays more detailed information about the profile owner such as eye color, hair color, second language, car ownership, and a link to the full personality quiz results of the user which was taken during registration. At the bottom of the page, three visually striking links are present: "Add to Favorites,” "Message Now” and "Send a Gift Now.” The three links are followed by yet another row of photos similar to the one on the very top of the page.

The help page of Plenty of Fish is very standard (Appendix F), with a menu on the left-hand side that organizes information into different categories and the content of each menu item is listed on the right-hand side of the help page.

The account menu bar is followed by a second menu bar on the main page of the website.

![Figure 3.1: pof.com main menu bar](source)

This row of functions does not have much in common. The menu serves as the main navigation hub that users can use to access different functions of the site. “Inbox” links to the message function of the website (Appendix E). Plenty of Fish users normally
communicate with each other using the site's messaging system. The messaging system of Plenty of Fish comes with four functions that will be displayed when “Inbox” is clicked. Similar to pages accessed via account menu, the pages linked to “Inbox” also has rows of photos situated on both top and bottom of the page; sandwiched between the two rows of photos are four features of the site’s messaging system. The first function is “Messages” (Appendix G), "Messages" is the inbox of the site’s message system, other users' messages will be listed under this function, as stated previously on "My Token", users who spent tokens can have their message prioritized and display ahead of those who did not spend tokens to prioritize their message. "Sent Messages" is the second function of "Inbox," in here, messages user sent to others are displayed. "Contact History” display all the users who have been in contact; there are search functions tacked onto page allowing users to filter various aspects of contacts. Users can filter whether the contact was made by themselves or the other party; gender and age are also parameters users can manipulate to refine the search for contacts. The final tab of "Inbox" is "Top Prospects." "Top Prospects” is a matchmaking function embedded into the messaging system of the site. Pof.com will search through contacts of the user to find the best matches and recommend user to maintain contact with these matches. “Top Prospect” does not use the same search algorithm as the website’s main search engine; it does not take match chemistry or personality into consideration. “Top Prospect’s algorithm seems to draw from much simpler data such as age and location. However, despite using location data, there have been cases where “Top Prospect” recommend matches living outside the recommended distance. (Bestdatingsites, 2015).
"Meet Me" is the second function on the menu next to "Inbox." "Meet Me" is a function of the site that styles after Tinder, a popular mobile application used for meeting up and dating. "Rate Image" is the first sub-function of "Meet Me," it is a user-generated tribunal system for profile images. People can vote on whether a profile image is appropriate for the site given several guidelines, as such “Rate Image” is not a function purely for the benefit of the users. "Rate Image" exist to lighten the workload for moderators and at the same time improve the site. "Meet Me" is a sub-function with the same name as its root menu name. "Meet Me" serves as an easy and simple way to find potential matches; pictures of potential matches are displayed at the center of the page while a list of other photos of the same user is displayed in smaller size below the main picture, the smaller pictures can be enlarged when clicked. Above the displayed main picture is a question "Do you want to meet him/her?" followed by options "Yes" "Super Yes" "Maybe" "No." As stated above in "Token" section, "Super Yes" function is only available to users who have tokens and willing to spend it on this function, the site boasts a 56.3% increased chance of mutual liking when using "Super Yes" option. "Yes" and "Maybe" both constitute as approval of the profile being viewed. Further research into the distinction between the two options resulted in the consensus that there may be no difference between a "Yes" and a "Maybe," the difference between the two options are more psychological than anything else (All Things Online Dating, 2017). The final option on the page is "No" as a negative response to the profile photo shown. A recent change made to the site switched the placement of the four responses; traditionally "Yes" response is on the left and "No" on the right, but recent changes made it so "No" is on the left and "Yes" is on the right with two other options in the middle; this creates a counter-intuitive feeling when clicking to
prevent clicking through pictures without thinking. Below the profile picture is a link to picture owner's profile, the existence of this link means that the profile information of the picture owner is not directly displayed on the "Meet Me" page. It is likely set up to prevent clutter, and for users who like to learn more about the owner of the picture on display, they still have relatively easy access to that information via the link provided. "Users who want to meet you" is the third tab of the "Meet Me" menu, it is situated beside "Meet Me" tab, it is a premium service that lists the users who expressed desire to meet, an email notification will accompany any positive response to meet in order to notify user that someone is interested. "Users you want to meet" and "Mutual meet me" are the final two tabs on the "Meet Me" function, similar to "Users who want to meet you," these two tabs display users into people user responded positively to, and people who responded positively to each other mutually.

"Search" is the third function of the second menu on pof.com, as its name implies it is used for searching potential matches. Due to the existence of premium service, free users are not automatically given the ability to see people who are interested in them via "Users who want to meet you" tab from "Meet Me" function. A monthly subscription fee is required to access the message linked via email. Due to site’s restriction, "Search" function does not provide a search by username function as the username is stated on the notification email and it would be easy to bypass the premium feature if "Search" function can help locate users by name. Instead of search by name, users are given options to select parameters they would like to set for potential matches and the search function will list all available matches that fall within given parameters. For more fine-tuned searches,
"Search" also has an "Advanced Search" (Appendix H) option which lists everything user needed to fill during registration, the user can select acceptable parameters for each of the options listed to create the most comprehensible search parameters.

"Online" is the fourth function of the second menu on pof.com. "Online" is a list of all the users who are online at the time of access. The page displays profile pictures of potential matches in a square formation and at the bottom of the page is a "Next Page" button which leads to another similar page. The list of users does seem to have been filtered with user preference as the profiles shown does not contain any users who are male should the profile indicates a preference for female matches.

“Chemistry” is the fifth function of the second menu on pof.com, it consists of five subcategories mostly related to personality quizzes users took during the registration process. The first tab is "Chemistry Assessment," this tab shows the user a list of potential matches found based on the statistic model generated by the site. Plenty of Fish (POF) employs a team of PhDs worked on the statistic model for "Chemistry Assessment" and the team’s confidence in said model's result. Below the menu tab for "Chemistry" are three links. The first link is "View Full Test Results below," this link allows users to view the test results of the questionnaires they took during the registration process. "Remove Test Results from my profile" allow users to remove the test results and retake them. "Take/View Relationship Needs Test" will move user straight to the next tab of the menu which is “Needs Assessment” (Appendix I). Below the three links is a simple parameter setting the user can use to filter out some of the results, including many results the user
wants to be displayed and the distance between user’s current location and matches’ location. Following the setting is the actual list of profiles yielded from PoF’s matchmaking model, the length of the list is flexible depending on how many users want to be displayed, and if "View Full Test Results below" link above is clicked, at bottom of the page, a display of the personality test result is shown below the match photos. "Need Assessment" is the second tab in "Chemistry" which can also be accessed via "Take/View Relationship Needs Test" link from "Chemistry Assessment" tab. Similar to the previous tab, "Need Assessment" gives the user the option to remove test results and retake the tests. The user can also opt to have the result of this test displayed on the profile; there is a preview link which allows users to see what the profile would look like should they add the test result to it. The test result is separated into different categories; each category generally starts with a summary of the personality type assessed by the test, followed by food for thought as a commentary on the result and suggestions catered to said result, and finally, it highlights some aspect of personality that user might have overlooked or undervalued. Some categories do not follow this specific format such as "relationship readiness," communication" and "attitudes toward love" but the format is present in "Interdependence," "Intimacy," "Self-efficacy," "Conflict Resolution," and "Sexuality." "Psychological Assessment" is the third tab under "Chemistry", clicking this tab will bring user to a page that doesn't seem to be connected to "Chemistry" menu as the tab menu listing "Chemistry Assessment" and "Needs Assessment" is not present on the page, the only way to navigate back is to click "Chemistry" and go back via the main menu, this makes "Psychological Assessment" seems like a standalone page even though it can be accessed via "Chemistry" root menu. The content of "Psychological Assessment" is
another set of tests, the unique aspect of the tests on this page is the fact that the tests are aimed toward user's ideal match's personality, the test delved into the direct and implied desired personality user look for in a partner. "Psychological Assessment" does not seem to keep a permanent record of the result as other tests do, rather a user needs to retake the test in order to see the result each time. "Keeper Test" and "Sex Test" are the last two tabs in "Chemistry. Similar to "Psychological Assessment" which does not have a link on the page which redirects the user to other tabs within the same root menu, these tests evaluate what kind of partner would be best suited to have a long-term relationship with and what kind of partner would be best suited for intimacy.

"Upgrade" is the last option on the site's main menu following "Chemistry." "Upgrade" link to the page that allows the user to upgrade their account to premium in exchange for a monthly subscription fee. The "Upgrade" tab on the menu is uniquely colored in gold rather than aquamarine like rest of the tabs to make the tab more eye-popping. At the very top of the page key benefits of upgrading to premium is summarized into a single sentence. “As an upgraded member, you will show up FIRST on Meet Me. This means that new users will let you know if they are attracted to you or not within minutes of signup! Messaging users who already find you attractive is the most effective way to use the site” (Plenty of Fish, 2017)! Space below the header is separated into two sides: left and right. The left side of the page which is placed in a more prominent position list the subscription options consist of a 12-month plan, 6-month plan and 3-month plan, with longer duration subscribed the monthly fee for subscription drop as an incentive to subscribe for a longer period. Below the subscription plans are options for payment, pof.com accepts credit card
payment and PayPal payment. A simple form needs to be filled out in order to complete the transaction via credit card. On the right side of the page, a list of benefits for premium membership is displayed including benefits such as showing up first on "meet me" and unlocking extended profile for every user. At the bottom of the page is a small section listing success stories of couples meet via the site and their comments.

The third menu on pof.com main page is the last menu on the said page, and this menu lists various search options for users to choose from.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Matches</th>
<th>Will Respond</th>
<th>Sent Msg</th>
<th>Favorites</th>
<th>New Users</th>
<th>My City</th>
<th>Viewed Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Figure 3.2 Third menu bar*


First of such option is "My Matches." "My Matches" is a simple and straightforward way to find matches, a basic parameter setting is presented to user at the top of the page followed by a list of photos that fit within given parameter, as mentioned before "My Matches" has a smart search algorithm that takes the search parameter into not only consideration but also the search pattern of the user. The layout is very simple with photos displayed in rows, and for matches who share a similar interest with the user, a number is displayed beneath the profile indicating how many common interests do they share.

Below the match-photos is a row of links which takes the user to other tabs within the search menu. On the bottom of the page, PoF lists success stories from couples who met each other through the site. "My Matches" has an alternative search function called "Ultra
Match”, the functionality of “Ultra Match” seems similar to “Chemistry” from the previous tab, it is a search function employs supposedly better algorithm than default search, “Ultra Match” can be accessed via free account although online sources indicate it used to be a premium service at one point (n.d, Editors, A). The setup for "Ultra Match" is quite similar to "Chemistry Assessment" with one long list of profile photos and a simple search parameter setter on top, the difference being the existence of a numbering system displayed on the edge of each profile photo numbering each in ascending order. The second option within the search menu of pod is "Will Respond", "Will respond" list potential matches which are more likely to respond to messages from the user, the layout is similar to "My Matches" however there are no search parameter settings on top of the page, the page lists profile photos and end with a next page link. “Sent Msg” is the next item on the menu (Appendix J), this tab is the same as the “Sent Messages” tab from main menu’s “Inbox” tab. “Favorites” is the fourth tab on the search menu, in here, users can see profiles favorited by them. The option to favorite is at the bottom of every profile page for any user. "Favorites" also has two other sub-tabs " Who Fav’d me" and "Favorites Updates" (Appendix K, Appendix L), "Who Fav’d me" shows people who favorited user's profile and "Favorites Updates" shows new updates to pictures for any profiles favorited by the user. "New User" is the fifth tab on the search menu of PoF. “New User” produces a list of new users living within the set distance, the distance itself seems fixed in place, but the age range of potential matches can be set in the search parameter. "My City" is the sixth tab on the search menu of PoF. “My City” is a location-based search function that list matches who live nearby, the setup for “My City” is essentially the same as “New User” with the exception of more options on search parameter settings. Aside from age
range which “New User” tab can also adjust, “My City” also allows the user to set the maximum search distance. In addition, there is a simple filter that allows the user only to see matches whom user have contacted before or purely matches user have never contacted before or just any matches. “Viewed me” is the final tab on PoF’s search menu. “Viewed me” display potential matches who have viewed user; the pictures of potential matches who have viewed the user’s profile is displayed below a link which allows the user to sort the pictures by the time of the last viewing. A second sub-tab is included within the "Viewed me" tab called "Users who I viewed," it shows the profiles user have browsed in the past. This concludes the site description for www.pof.com

https://forums.plentyoffish.com is the forum for Plenty of Fish dating site (Appendix M). The forum has a very classic layout sporting the same color scheme as the main site. Similar to the main site, the layout for the forum display a header menu which can be used to navigate to different parts of the main site, the tabs within the menu seem to be a mixture of various tabs from different menus on the main page of pof.com. Below the menu is a short description/advert for the main site. Following the description is the search function for the forum, the user can switch from Canadian Forum to US Forum via the two-links listed beside the in-site search bar. The main body of the forum is presented similar to many other online forums with forum categories each addressing a unique aspect of the community. There are five main categories within the forum: "Love Stuff Section," "Fun Stuff," "Worldwide," "General Discussion Forum" and "Help Section." Each category also contains a number of subcategories.
The first category of the forum is “Love Stuff Section” (*Appendix N*). The main category of the forum is rightly dedicated to all aspects of relationships. “Relationship Issues” has the highest thread and post count. It is the subforum where PoF users can talk about general issues regarding relationships, topics such as cheating, relationship issues are all present in this subforum. The range of topics posted is very broad and sometimes include threads that should belong to other categories such as topic "Username search is it gone?" inside Relationship subforum even though the topic is about website functionality. The presence of these misplaced threads seems to suggest a lack of moderation for the forum. "Dating Experience" is the second subforum of the category, it focuses more on members’ story of their dates and community, it’s also there to help members to figure out problems that can happen during a date by bouncing the problem around the community for feedback. "Dating over 30" is the subforum for discussing dating experience for members over the age of 30. The content within said forum contains questions regarding dating someone older, threads seeking help for regarding dating over 30 or complains about the site. "Single Parents" deal with dating for members who are divorced or separated and have to care for a child or children. The main theme on this subforum seems to be about the difficulty of dating for single parents especially single mothers. "Profile Overview" is a technical subforum that deals with members' request to evaluate certain profiles, it is a way for members to communicate with moderators of the site to help improve its quality. "Dating over 45" is similar to dating over 30, it is mostly a platform for people who are over 45 to talk about the trials and tribulations of dating. A lot of threads on "Dating over 45" subforum seems to be also about dating over 60 which does not have its own subforum. "Ask a Guy" is a subforum for women who need advice
on the relationship from the opposite sex, generally filled with questions regarding male behaviors and protocols. "Ask a Girl" is similar to "Ask a Guy" only it's for men to ask about women. "Dating & Love Advice" is a subforum for people asking questions regarding dating, it can range from specific questions about dates to generalized question such as "Are all good girls gone by age 24?" Questions not about dating but rather general life questions can also be seen on this subforum. "Broken Hearts" is the last subforum of the "Love Stuff Section" category, it mainly deals with post-breakup topics such as how to re-orientate one's life, support seeking for breakups and even warning against specific individuals on site.

"Fun Stuff" is the second category of the forum (Appendix O), there are only four subforums within this category, all of them are related to topics outside dating, yet each subforum is oddly specific for topics that should've been quite broad in range. "Recipes & Cooking" is a subforum where members can share their cooking recipes and request recipes. "Stories / Creative Writing" showcase writings from community ranging from normal fictions to erotica, even interactive writing threads where the community write a story together by replying to what's written in previous posts. "Humor" is a subforum where postings are essentially a collection of jokes ranging from visual humor via pictures to political humor. "Travel" subforum consists of posting about questions for local customs in a foreign country, stories about traveling and posting about planned events in specific locations.
“World Wide” is the third category of the forum (Appendix P), the category contains subforums with different countries as their namesake and one other subforum called "Testimonials." The five countries that have subforums in "World Wide" are "Ireland," "France," "Brazil," "UK," and "Australia." The general content of the subforums is similar, with the “UK” forum being noticeably larger than all the rest combined by a large margin. The "World Wide" subforums are normally not topics about specific regions but rather topics from and for people from the said region, which is a good indicator that the UK boasts much larger user base for PoF than countries like Ireland. The final subforum in "World Wide" is "Testimonials" which seems out of place in the "World Wide" category. The content of this subforum consists of posts attest to finding love through the site but also warning against certain individuals most likely due to a failed connection.

“General Discussion” is the fourth category of the forum (Appendix Q), it deals with all manners of non-match related topics not covered in “Fun Stuffs" category. “Science / Philosophy” consist of topics regarding from political ideologies to posts about canceling subscription which is probably misplaced. "Plentyoffish get together" is a subforum used to plan events for community members, it also serves as a soundboard for people who wants advice on event ideas or themes. "Sports" is a subforum for sports fans who wish to talk about their sport or professional team of their choice, down to players on said team. There are also threads complaining about certain players who are viewed as unsavory sort by the community. "Art / Music" while in theory consist of both art and music within the subforum. Most topics are about music with some movies and other medium sprinkled in. Forum users post about their favorite band or promote their music to the community.
"Health & Fitness" has topics about general health tips, but also topics asking about certain symptoms trying to pinpoint a cause and find solutions. "Off Topic" is the final subforum of "General Discussion," while the topics covered by this subforum are comprehensive, the most recent topics being discussed all seem to be political, more specifically US politics, other topics ranging from social protocols to beer quality.

“Help Section” is the last category of the forum (Appendix R), subforum "Technology and Computers" contain postings regarding technical difficulties encountered by users, this includes login difficulty, various questions about a specific feature of the site and request for moderator involvements. "Plentyoffish site / Suggestions / Help" serves the same function as "Technology and Computers" although it is likely that the role of site-related technical questions was originally intended to be posted on this subforum while "Technology and Computers" was intended for electronics help required. "Volunteer Moderators Only" is empty, it could be the subforum can only be viewed by users with special privileges such as moderators and web admins. "Event Host Forum" is also empty, given the same topic seem to be covered by "Plentyoffish Get Together" in "General Discussion."
3.3 Site Selection Criteria

Research site selected for this paper is a well-known and well-populated dating website that contains an active community. The site also has a forum that has been used by members to share their experiences regarding dating in general. The site chosen also met Kozinets (2010) guideline/criteria for choosing a website/online community site to conduct netnography.

(1) Relevant (relating to research focus and question)

An online community should be selected for a research study if it is “focused and research question-relevant segment, topic, or group” (Kozinets, 2010, p 89). This research focus is on online dating users' consumption experience; thus, the chosen dating site Plenty of Fish (pof.com) is relevant for this study. The forum of the website has various sections that addressed to problems encountered during relationship and values relevant to maintaining the dating relationship. Also, the forum has postings from many people who are long-time users or ex-users of the site.

(2) Active (recent and regular communications)

An online community should be selected for a research study if it has “higher traffic of postings” (Kozinets, 2010, p 89). The site's forum remains active with a high number of postings during this study period thus satisfies Kozinets' definition of active community. The site itself has over ten thousand active users online at the time of initial access. As of 3/6/2018, the seven subforums have great postings (on the day of access), and twenty-
one subforums have a high number of posting on June (the month of access). During the study period, high traffic of postings existed as well.

(3) Interactive (flow of participants’ communications)

An online community should be selected for a research study if it has “more between-member interactions of the type required by the research question.” (Kozinets, 2010, p 89) The interactions between participants are frequent in Plenty of Fish forum. Many threads posted are in the form of questions, and after receiving answers from fellow community members, the thread posters would often reply, to either confirm or expand on the topic. Thread posters often go back to the thread they posted to clarify their topic or to bounce back feedbacks thus increasing the interactivity of the thread. An example of a thread poster responding to replies can be seen as follow:

Jcon321:
I have been dating a guy for one year.
I have not met, as he has yet to introduce me to any of his family, work colleagues or friends (people who are important in his life)
We are both very active on social media. We both have separate user accounts. I am very present in his social mee, but he does not want to be tagged in any photos I put up of us both. He prefers that I take food selfies, although he is present in the photographs.

Jcon321:
Continued... He does not talk to me at all on social media. He "likes" other peoples posts/pics but has not once liked my many daily posts and pictures. He ignores my comments but will respond to others who have commented on his posts. I have discussed the issue with him but he does not give any definitive answers

Blackbeauty744:
He sounds married.
Jcon321:
I have go to his home regularly. There is no sign of any wife at his residence

Lindts:
If you need to post her Jcon to ask... then I think you know the answer. He is with somebody.

Jcon321:
Typing error * I have gone*

Blackbeauty744:
This involves too much secrecy for me to comfortably stay in this relationship.

Jcon321:
Where is the evidence? I am present in his social media accounts. There is definitely not anyone online who could be associated with him. There is no wife at home as I frequently visit his home/place of residence

As can be seen, Jcon321 actively replies to posters and answer questions that require clarification.

(4) Substantial (a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel)

An online community should be selected for a research study if “it has a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel” (Kozinets, 2010, p 89). As of 1:43 pm 1/25/2018 the subforum ‘Relationship Issues’ has 25966 threads and 2101795 posts. The subforum ‘Dating Experiences’ has 12313 threads and 920754 posts. Also, the subforum ‘Dating Over 30’ has 1894 threads and 221242 posts; the subforum ‘Single Parents has 7418 threads and 316246 posts; the subforum ‘Profile Reviews’ has 67133 threads and 597524 posts; the subforum ‘Dating Over 45’ has 2233 threads and 406619 posts; the subforum. ‘Ask A Guy’ has 17001 threads and 588291 posts; the subforum ‘Ask A Girl’ has 23764 threads and 765585 posts; the subforum ‘Dating & Love Advice’ has 16311 threads and 617390 posts, and the subforum ‘Broken Hearts’ has 11289 threads and 407964 posts.
Latest postings were posted on the day of data extraction showing signs of regular communication. Multiple threads in larger subforums such as Relationship Issues are active at the time of data extraction, indicating the community’s energetic vibe.

(5) Heterogeneous (a number of different participants)

An online community should be selected for a research study if “it has larger numbers of discrete message post” (Kozinets, 2010, p 89). Due to the size of PoF users the participants of community in question are quite large. Moreover, the forum of PoF has subsections for people from different parts of the world such as from Ireland, France, Brazil, the UK and Australia. Canada also has its own forum. In addition, users in various phases of relationship have been identified in forums, the differences in relationship phases are heterogeneous in nature and fitting to the topic of discussion.

(6) Data-rich (detailed and descriptive data offered)

Kozinets (2010) suggests community used for data collection should have “more detailed or descriptively rich data” (Kozinets, p.6, 2002). Threads posted in forums received upward of five hundred replies and contained vivid descriptions indicating richness of the data. An example of such thread would be “Am I being made to feel less than a woman for lack of ‘assets’” (Plenty of Fish forum, 2017)? This topic had 702 replies as of 2018 March 6th and contained many vivid descriptions.
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this paper is collected via Plenty of Fish (www.pof.com) and its community forum.

First, a pilot study of values addressed by Plenty of Fish community was conducted. A sample of the forum such as "Love Stuff Section" was picked and threads within the section were examined for keywords related to values mentioned in the literature (See Appendix S). The results from the pilot study indicated that this site is relevant and extensive data are available for this research study.

Thus, after completing the pilot study, a more extensive data collection was executed regarding values addressed by Plenty of Fish community. The data collection covered postings within a six months period, from (11/2017) to (4/2018).

First, within the selected forum topic, relevant subforum topics were selected. For example, subforum "Relationship Issues" within the main forum “Love Stuff Section” was selected. There exist a large number of postings and threads, postings related to relationship values were downloaded for further data analysis, such as the topic “How to know if a man is truly interested or not?” from

Data analysis on downloaded threads was next conducted by analyzing the content of the postings, to look for keywords that linked to values as well as further examination was employed to ensure relevancy of the context of postings.

The downloaded postings were reviewed again, then identified and classified under relevant values subheadings such as "Humor" or "Reciprocity Rate." Each posting was assessed concerning the thread title, content, and replies and comments by the other members.

Based on the data (relevant postings) collected, ten values (Humor, Similarity, Kindness, Seriousness, Reciprocity Rate, Individuality, Intimacy, Geography, Honesty, Family) were identified as most relevant to the current research object. These values are found with high frequencies within forum postings. An illustration of how the analysis was conducted for the value ‘Humor’ from the related data set (postings downloaded) was presented below.

The following data (one posting) is from subforum Relationship “Attractive Qualities.”


One of the posters stated the following.

**Poster: Ladyinred0407**
I greatly admire a person who can laugh at themselves.

A few former patients, who by anyone else's standards should have been extremely depressed, were not in the least.
I administered breathing treatments to 2 women who were in the later stages of MS. One in her 40's the other in her 60's. They never had a pity party and most often had a comedic comeback to something I had said. They made me laugh!

A person who can find humor, where others can only find fault, is very "attractive" to me.

It is noted that, firstly, keyword "laugh" is identified as a keyword associated with "Humor" value. Secondly, the context of posting is examined to ensure relevancy. This poster associates Humor with positivity, Specifically in this case: self-deprecating humor. Thus, it was one of the postings classified under the value ‘Humor’.

Next, all postings related to the value ‘Humor’ and classified as such were reviewed again to view various dimensions such as self-deprecating humor, and humor relating to positive traits.

Existing literature that connected to the Humor value were also revised. For example, articulated rhetoric by Manning (2014) was also revisited and reflected on the connection with thesis findings.

Finally, the meaning of the postings of Humor value within online and offline context was reflected. For example, it was noted that Humor’s effect is immediate; thus, its value can be appreciated fairly early in the relationship. It was also noted that Humor while not mentioned directly in literature but Manning’s (2014) paper exhibited similar meanings under the construct of Articulated Rhetoric.
Similar steps of data analysis were undertaken for the other values such as Similarity, Seriousness among others.

Please see Appendix T for two illustrations of value data analysis.
4. Research Findings

This section details the findings of this study and its applications. A visual representation is used to present the theoretical model created for this study. This section will then detail findings based on the eleven values found as relevant in this study.

4.1 Introduction

In this study, the nature of relationship for couples have been separated into three phases: Initial Signaling Phase, Interactive Phase and Long-Term Phase. Within these phases, several values have been identified as important to online dating site users based on data collected from https://forums.plentyoffish.com: Humor, Similarity, Kindness, Seriousness, Intimacy, Individuality, Reciprocity Rate, Geography, Family, Honesty. Each value listed affects the relationship stability of couples in some ways, the magnitude of the effect differs from phase to phase. Data collected thus far from plentyoffish.com community forum shows that listed values are the most frequently mentioned qualities with regards to community members’ relationship experience or outlook.

The values are categorized into three different categories: ‘Signaling’, ‘Interactive’, and ‘Long Term’, based on their importance in different phases of an online relationship. Signaling category includes values that are important at the start of an online relationship, what’s more easily recognized and immediately apparent to potential partners. Interactive category includes values that are important during the transitional period of relationship
when couple move their relationship offline. Interactive values gain importance as the parameter of the existing relationship changes due to moving offline. Long term category includes values that gain prominence after the relationship moves offline. Long term values hold little to no importance at online phase of relationship and only becomes important during the offline phase.

*Figure 4.1* visually demonstrates the three phases of online to offline relationship. While *Figure 4.1* separates values into three slots, values in one phase will still have effect in other phases only in either diminished manner or largely remain the same.

*Figure 4.1 Conceptual Model Representation*

The following sub sections will explain each categories of values in detail.
4.2 Initial Signaling Values

Early phase in an online relationship where users interact with one another purely through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), they aren’t familiar with each other enough and by nature carry many uncertainties about one another. Users have relatively limited information about their potential partners, this prompt people to advertise themselves through channels such as profile page and online text chat. Signaling Values stem from these channels of communication; they are unique in the fact that they are easily identifiable and after the relationship formed base on identified signaling values, they maintain a positive yet passive effect across all phases of a relationship with no further demand for change. “Humor”, “Similarity” and “Kindness” are values belong to this category.

4.2.1 Humor

This study found ‘Humor’ as one of the relevant values at the signaling phase. Humor can be seen as the ability to make others laugh, and members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website perceives ‘Humor’ as a relevant value for them.
The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Humor’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship “Attractive Qualities.”

**julystorm7**

A sense of humour that matches your own is a big turn on.

Source: [https://forums.plentyoffish.com/datingPosts16699898.aspx](https://forums.plentyoffish.com/datingPosts16699898.aspx)

Humor was also identified in the existing literature as one of the "articulated values" (Manning, 2014). Manning (2014) perceived Humor also as a gateway value to other positive traits such as being good with children.

4.2.2 Similarity

This study found ‘Similarity’ as one of the relevant values at the signaling phase. Similarity is the degree of homogeneity between couples, and members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website perceives ‘Similarity’ as a relevant value for them.

The following examples posted by members of the PoF dating website indicate the need to recognize and accept the differences between partners. This post indirectly indicates
that this acknowledgment is helpful when the desire for the value ‘Similarity’ between partners exists. Following examples were posted in the subforum Relationship: "We moved in, and now I am all alone in his house" and “Any expectations of who would be attracted to you?”

**NewYorker58:**

Mustang, seems some guys don't want to recognize women are different from men. If a man can't acknowledge this simple fact, because it may mean doing something for their partner, they will remain alone.


**SiennaBear2**

A wide range of guys I guess but I notice that I think the 'alternative' guys chose to message me specifically because of gaming in my interests. So guys that like gaming and some that also play card games and do cosplay and stuff like that. Men only have a certain number of messages they can send I heard. My boyfriend told me that and told me he chose to message me because I was close and had similar interests and that's really rare.


Similarity increases attraction according to the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, 1974) as the need for Similarity leads people into transforming themselves to match their partners. This action reduces uncertainty. Even though Similarity increases attraction, the self-projection can lead to misinformation and false assumptions which can result in
problems at later phases. In addition,Similarity is sometimes viewed as unobtainable due to gender differences; however, the desire to have commonalities is an essential value for dating partners.

4.2.3 Kindness

This study found ‘Kindness’ as one of the relevant values at the Signaling phase. Kindness is the value that reflects how a person treats others and some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website perceives ‘Kindness’ as a relevant value for them.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Kindness.’ This example was posted in the subforum Relationship "Attractive Qualities."

five-marie

Nice. I like nice people. People who think about others, care about their comfort/feelings. Funny how everyone thinks they're nice but truly nice people, who aren't always benefiting in some way from being nice to others are few and far between.

Source: https://forums.plentyoffish.com/datingPosts16699898.aspx
Kindness is a value derived from the data collected in this study. However, it is to be noted that Kindness in this study shares many traits of Manning's "Articulated Rhetoric," in other words, Kindness is an articulation of belief, and is often spoken by users of a high moral ground (Manning, 2014).

4.3 Interactive Values

The previous section offers the values relevant to the initial signaling phase where online dating site users find their partner through positive presentations of themselves. This section offers the values relevant to the interactive phase, the phase of an online relationship where couples transition from a purely online relationship to an offline one. The nuance of interactive values stems from the shift in nature of a couple's relationship. Moving the relationship offline is generally viewed as a solidification of the couple and with it comes increased demand in certain areas of relationship dynamic as well. Relevant values in this interactive phase are the values that linked to the shifting aspects of a relationship during the transitional period. This study found the following values: 'Seriousness,' 'Intimacy,' 'Individuality,' 'Reciprocity' and 'Geography' as relevant for dating partners.
4.3.1 Seriousness

This study found “Seriousness” as one of the relevant values at the Interactive phase. Seriousness is the value that indicates couple's commitment to their relationship and members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website perceives 'Seriousness' as relevant value for them.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value "Seriousness." This example was posted in the subforum Relationship “Why Won’t He Introduce Me to His Family and Friends?”

Norwegianguy456:

In response to the quote [He's happy the way things are. He wants to keep these things separate to remain happy].

Exactly. He doesn't have to be married, hiding his spouse, 5 kids, and the hot secretary he's also cheating on his wife with. Doesn't require this fantasy at all. Why do people get into this? Because it prevents themselves from facing the facts: He's not THAT into you. He wants to just-date.


Seriousness was introduced as a "Presentational Rhetoric" by Manning (2014). Seriousness mainly functions as an indication to others that they wish to have a long and stable relationship and is prepared to settle down. This study found ‘Seriousness’ as a key value during the transitional relationship period. In a way, this value represents the
couple’s perception of their progression as a couple. Based on data collected thus far, the stability of an online relationship that is going offline depends on whether both parties see eye to eye, regarding how serious they want their new relationship to be. Problems arise when one party wants to be more serious while the other party does not.

4.3.2 Intimacy

This study found ‘Intimacy’ as one of the relevant values at the Interactive phase. Intimacy is defined as the closeness of a couple, their willingness to communicate and share information by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website. They perceive ‘Intimacy’ as a relevant value for them.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Intimacy’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship "How to know if a man is truly interested or not?"

Omgherecomesb:

Another thing.. i tell women sometimes.. look at your initial interactions-- he talk to you, and insisted you talk over the phone.. in other words, he coerced you to give him the attention he wanted... now that he might not want it.. and he got you liking him.. its a problem..
Where is YOUR skill, to coerce him to give you the attention you want now that you like him? If you don't have it, don't blame him for looking elsewhere.


Intimacy represents how close the couple feels they are towards each other, and how comfortable they are with sharing their stories with each other (Berger, 1974). Berger (1974) indicates that a high level of uncertainty would reduce the couple’s Intimacy while the low level of uncertainty would increase the couple’s Intimacy. This study also found that Intimacy value is closely linked with Seriousness as, during the process of raising commitment towards one another, couples tend to become more intimate as well. Data collected thus far shows that users sometimes perceive time spent together as a measurement for the level of Intimacy, while commitment which is closely linked to Seriousness is dismissed as a concrete measure for Intimacy.

4.3.3 Individuality

This study found ‘Individuality’ as one of the relevant values in the Interactive phase. As implied by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website, Individuality is the value that indicates a person unwillingness to allow the relationship to change him or her.
The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Individuality.’ This example was posted in the subforum Relationship “she says she is not always online.”

**Saintclara:**

Well it might be logged in all time but that's not the point the point is if she wishes to go on it all day everyday it's her prerogative and it's not for you to bully her or decided whether she is telling you the truth or not!


Individuality is the value of not letting the relationship imposes changes to oneself (Debnam, et al., 2014). It can be perceived as related to the value ‘Seriousness’, as the value is about what people choose not to change. Data shows while Individuality may appear to be something negative as a greater level of change in behavior is expected during the interactive phase. Some people in actuality also tend to view Individuality as a positive trait.

4.3.4 Reciprocity Rate

This study found ‘Reciprocity Rate’ as one of the relevant values during the Interactive phase. As implied by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website,
Reciprocity Rate is the rate of communication between couples, and they indicate this value as an essential value to them.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Reciprocity Rate’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship "How to know if a man is truly interested or not?"

Canelas19:

I'm trying to learn about this cyber dating world. So far I stopped talking to this guys. Now he just text me silly faces, probably expecting me to reply, but I haven't. Now, I think I did right by calling out his lack of attention, but I really liked this guy, but he obviously didn't like me much :(


Reciprocity Rate is the rate of communication between a couple (Berger, 1974). For a stable relationship to occur, the rate of communication should be maintained at a level that’s satisfactory to both. Similar to many other values in the interactive phase, when couples move to an offline relationship, their expectation of frequency in communication may change, and the discrepancy of communication rate between partners can destabilize the relationship. Based on data collected, it seems dating members tend to take lower Reciprocity Rate as a sign of losing interest or less attraction to their partners.
4.3.5 Geography

This study found ‘Geography’ as one of the relevant values during the interactive phase. As implied by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website, Geography is defined as the real-life distance between couples.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Geography’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship "Help - My (ex) boyfriend blocked me from all his social media after a fight"

norwegianguy456

In response to the quote [So hi guys me and my boyfriend (ex) had a fight on Friday over something he did (he pulled on a disappearing act for 8 hours without picking up my calls)]

the distance thing is difficult, and you realize that a tried & true BF/GF relationship can’t work, as it won’t for almost all people... and that you want to keep in contact, and have the peace of mind that you two can, but you want to have your emotions come back to reality and stability and start Feeling the world as it should be, which will take a little time. You love him, but at the same time, it’s silly to grasp for something that’s not feasible.

Source: https://forums.plentyoffish.com/datingPosts16663073.aspx

Geography is the value of one’s proximity with his or her partner (Donn et al. 2002). Unlike other values mentioned so far, some perceive it as not necessarily an important factor during the interactive phase of the relationship. However, for those who are affected by it, it seems they perceive this value as incredibly important. Geography can be a negative
physical distance between couples if they cannot regularly meet and can result in not keeping up with the desired intimacy level. However, while in the context of online dating, the nature of this context enables people across the globe to communicate and form a relationship with one another. Thus, many are still willing to ignore the potential problem physical distance may bring to them.

4.4 Long-Term (Offline) Values

Long-term (offline) values are values important to couples who have finished transitioning from online relationship to offline context. The nature of offline values shares some similarities with values from the interactive phase as they all affect relationship building. For offline values, they do not hold much relevancy during the online phase of relationship due to the impact of different contexts. This study found two values belonging to this offline category as ‘Family’ and ‘Honesty.’
4.4.1 Family

This study found ‘Family’ as one of the relevant values in the long-term phase. As implied by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website, Family value is defined as the factor of family and friends within a relationship, how family and friend changes relationship dynamic.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Family’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship "Why Won’t He Introduce Me to His Family and Friends?"

**Jcon321:**

Could it be to protect me? Could it be fear? My partner is extremely moody and disappears for days at a time without any contact with me. Then reappears as if nothing happened. No pictures together on social media but he is very active with pictures of his family and friends on his own social media accounts. He uses the word "I" and not "We". Unfortunately, I have marked my territory on all 3 of his social media accounts. Any women who viewed his accounts would pick up straight away I am associated with him in some way.....

Source: https://forums.plentyoffish.com/datingPosts16675061.aspx

Family value as its name implies the effect of existing family members on couples. Family value is significant in an offline context is because family members rarely play a role during the online phase of the relationship. Data collected thus far suggests people tend to associate the value ‘Family' with the value ‘Seriousness,’ as meeting family members can cement the relationship.
4.4.2 Honesty

This study found ‘Honesty’ as one of the relevant values in the long-term phase. As implied by some members of the Plenty of Fish (PoF) dating website, Honesty is the value that indicates a person’s willingness to disclose the truth and communicate with his or her partner without deception.

The following example posted by one of the members of the PoF dating website indicates the relevancy of the value ‘Honesty’. This example was posted in the subforum Relationship “How to know if a man is truly interested or not?”

**LiliMarleen:**

He's not into you for anything other than an occasional lay. You're either one of a string of several women or he's in a relationship. He feeds you pretty words to keep you interested enough and then he comes to see you right before you're breaking it off to keep you on that string.

If a man is into you, you won't be able to beat him off with sticks.


Honesty is the value that establishes trust between partners, where no lies are being told between the couple (Debnam et al. 2014). While Honesty value does have some presence during online dating, it is relatively diminished during the offline phase. The
reason for Honesty’s diminutive importance during the online phase is because the nature of the internet itself creates a default state of distrust in people. People assume some level of dishonesty from their partners during the online phase and as stated earlier signaling values are not necessarily truthful. Since dishonesty is assumed, the online dishonesty does not have a significant impact on people’s trust, however, this context changes during offline phase. Once relationship moved past transitional period and expectation for commitment increases, couples tend to form a deeper level of trust. Thus, dishonesty at this phase of the relationship can be very detrimental. Data collected thus far also links Honesty to Seriousness as people online often assume being dishonest as a sign of low commitment to the relationship.
5. Summary

The primary goal of this paper is to identify values important to online dating site users at the three relationship phases, Initial Signaling Phase, Interactive Phase, and Long-term Phase. The existing literature was reviewed with three purposes: firstly, to determine the differences between industry and consumer perspectives; secondly, to review the unique aspects of online dating; and finally, to search for values important to online dating site users.

When reviewing the literature concerning values important to the service industry and retail industry, little similarities between the businesses and consumers perspectives were noticed. It is possible that service industry values were being portrayed too broadly, thus not catering to the specific area of online dating consumers. The literature on online communication theories and modality switches, for example, Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Antheunis et al., 2010) which existed in non-internet form (Berger et al., 1974) takes on new meanings in the context of internet dating as the uncertainty of a potential match is much higher in a Computer-Mediated Environment. This review of online communication literature provided a foundation for the basis of relationship phases applied in this study. Finally, value literature concerning dating in general and specifically to online dating was reviewed. While not all values discussed in the literature appeared much in the data collected via the Plenty of Fish community forum, some values, however, appeared in high intensity. Through the examination of values as reviewed in the data collected for this study, new insights not touched upon by previous literature were also
discovered, and these findings contributed to a better understanding of values relevant in the online relationship context.

5.1 Discussion on Relationship Phases

This study employs an online dating relationship model that consists of three relationship phases: Initial Signaling Phase, Interactive Phase, and Long-term Phase. Initial Signaling Phase marks the earliest phase of an online relationship. The Initial Signaling Phase encompasses the period when a user meets a potential match for the first time until a couple's first face to face meeting. Interactive Phase is the transitional period of an online relationship where couples shift their relationship from a purely online relationship to an offline relationship. The Interactive Phase also marks the shift in the relationship; this study has found that expectation for the couple where demand for some of the values such as Seriousness or Reciprocity Rate seems to increase to match the new level of commitment. Long-term Phase is the period of the relationship that marks the end of the interactive period where values that seem to be important during the Interactive Phase tend to stabilize. The relationship values for the Long-term Phase are values previously unimportant and only become relevant during this phase.
The three-phase model stems from the communication literature such as Ramirez’s paper on expectation violation theory (Ramirez et al., 2008) and McEwan’s paper on the relationship between time spent online and the effect of modality switch (McEwan et al., 2013). Ramirez introduced the idea of a grace period between online dating and face to face meetings, stating that the nature of internet anonymity causes people to be generally more forgiving when it comes to misinformation, however, if dishonesty persists after the grace period then the information discourse will increase uncertainty in a relationship, thus reduce attraction (McEwan et al., 2013). McEwan's modality switch communication model helped form the concept of the transitional period for online dating site users, and this paper derived the three phases model from McEwan’s modality switch model.

5.2 Value Summary & Discussion

Ten values were identified as most relevant to consumers using online dating services: Humor, Kindness, Similarity, Seriousness, Reciprocity Rate, Intimacy, Geography, Individuality, Honesty, and Family. Out of the ten values, eight were identified in the existing literature, and two were discovered after an analysis of the collected data. After data analysis, new insights were gained regarding literature for existing values, such as Seriousness's departure from Manning's (2014) definition of Presentational Rhetoric. The two new values (Family and Kindness) were discovered during data analysis. Kindness
while not mentioned in previous literature, does share some similarities with existing values. For example, Kindness shares many characteristics described by Manning (2014) in his paper: "Construction of values in online and offline dating discourses: Comparing presentational and articulated rhetoric of relationship-seeking." Family, on the other hand, was quite different from Kindness, exhibiting no characteristics of a "Presentation Rhetoric" from Manning’s (2014) paper. Family was unique in the fact that this value had an adverse effect on a couples’ intimacy if mentioned too early in the relationship; it can be seen as an over-commitment should Family be mentioned during Initial Signaling Phase or Interactive Phase. In addition, some links connecting one value to another have been discovered, hinting at some degree of connectivity between values.

5.2.1 Existing Values

Several values analyzed by this paper originated from existing literature: Humor, Similarity, Seriousness, Intimacy, Individuality, Reciprocity Rate, Geography, and Honesty.

Humor was listed as one of the "Articulated Values" from Manning’s 2014 article (Manning, 2014). Comment Manning organized online communication values into "Presentational" and "Articulated." Articulated Values are direct articulations of attitudes. People often articulate these values by pointing out their moral high grounds; Manning described
Humor as such a value. Interviewees in Manning’s study were quoted stating that they associate Humor with other positive traits such as being good with kids (Manning, 2014).

In our study using netnography, we found Humor was listed when a question in a thread directly asked for attractive qualities but was rarely mentioned in more common threads that often came with questions regarding relationship trouble. Humor mentioned in threads dealing with relationship troubles often consisted of a remark describing the initial state of the poster’s relationship prior to current difficulties. The high frequency of Humor’s appearance in threads asking about attractive qualities for people agrees with Manning’s assertion that Humor is an articulated value as it does not normally show up unless someone purposefully asks for it.

Manning’s (2014) paper included Seriousness as one of the key values, and unlike Humor, Seriousness is a "Presentational Rhetoric." "Presentational Rhetoric" is rhetoric people engage in with others to advertise themselves; they are not necessarily people’s true beliefs, but they are what people assume others find attractive (Manning, 2014). According to Manning’s research, interviewees often bring up the fact that online dating lacks commitment and he or she, unlike others, are looking for a serious relationship. In our current study, Seriousness is the value with the most frequent appearance, often mentioned when people discuss ongoing relationship issues. This diverges significantly from Manning’s findings, as Seriousness found in the online dating community tends to be about later phases of relationships where couples have either started to or have finished moving their relationship offline. Forum posters in the collected data would either
criticize others for being overly committed while still early in the relationship or point out that given the extensive length of the relationship, problems posted could be explained by lack of Seriousness. Seriousness in our study increases in its importance as the relationship moves forward and if the pace of commitment does not match the perceived Seriousness of the relationship, it causes problems for the couple.

Similarity was first listed by Berger in his paper titled “Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication,” (Berger et al. 1974). Berger’s paper was about interpersonal relationships and attraction towards one another; it was written without the internet as a factor. Berger’s paper introduced The Uncertainty Reduction Model of the interpersonal relationships that was later used by other researchers studying the effects of online dating (Berger et al., 1974). Similarity was a significant part of that model, being considered by Berger to be the antecedent of attraction. In Berger’s work, Similarity is linked to Agreement, and Agreement’s positive effect increases attraction. In our study using netnography, we found the community's attitude towards Similarity is something that is unobtainable. Upon closer examination, some posts mentioning the dissimilarity between men and women also display the attitude that if men cannot accept differences, they would remain alone. Indirectly, this attitude confirmed Berger's theory on Similarity's link to Attraction since if men refuse to settle for partners who are different from them, then they must find Similarity attractive (Berger et al., 1974).
Intimacy, like Similarity, came from Berger’s literature on the Uncertainty Reduction model. In Berger’s paper, he explained the relationship between Intimacy and the reduction of uncertainty as follows, “High levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the Intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of Intimacy” (Berger et al., pg.103, 1974). Our data proved Berger’s assertion since many messages regarding Intimacy displayed a high level of uncertainty. Questions which address problems with Intimacy will state a certain lack of information; this lack of information can range from unexplained behaviors to absences. This mode of questioning fits Berger’s model perfectly.

Individuality was mentioned in Debnam’s paper, "If you do not have honesty in a relationship, then there is no relationship" (Debnam et al., 2014). Debnam explained Individuality value as the opposite of compromise. Individuality is about maintaining one’s personality and not allowing one’s partner to pressure them into changing. In our study, Individuality displayed a similar role as the community often advises others not to be too controlling in their relationship. Interestingly, the data collected showed that the community often takes the perspective opposite of Debnam’s paper, which was written from the perspective of people who requested their partner to change, wherein people advise others to stand up for themselves and stop letting the relationship run their lives.

Reciprocity Rate is among the values first mentioned by Berger’s uncertainty reduction model (Berger et al., 1974). In the paper, Berger states that a similar rate of information
exchange will facilitate more uncertainty reduction thus increase attraction. In addition, Berger hypothesized that high levels of uncertainty produce high levels of reciprocity, while low levels of uncertainty produce low levels of reciprocity (Berger et al., 1974). In the data collected by our study, there are many relationship postings regarding Reciprocity Rate, but the topics usually discuss relationships in later phases such as Interactive and Long-term. According to Uncertainty Reduction Theory as the relationship progresses, uncertainty between the couple decreases; therefore, based on Berger's theory which states “High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low reciprocity rates.” (Berger, 1974, p 105) the rate of reciprocity should be lowered as time goes on, however many posts regarding Reciprocity Rates complain about the lack of returning communication despite being in Interactive or Long-term phase. The Geography value was proposed by Donn and colleagues in their paper titled, “Attitudes and Practices Regarding the Formation of Romantic Relationships on the Internet” (Donn et al., 2002). The study validates the fact that technology-enabled computer-mediated communication reduces the importance of physical proximity but still acknowledges that CMC cannot replace physical interaction completely, noting that physical attraction requires face to face communication. In our study, we found that physical attraction is not the primary issue when it comes to Geography. According to data collected from the online community, the problem caused by long distance is the lack of intimacy. CMC cannot entirely shoulder a couple's need for intimacy, thus causing issues. Another aspect of Geography is that long distance can cause people to doubt the seriousness of the relationship as people who move away for whatever reason can be seen as choosing something over his or her relationship.
Honesty was mentioned in Debnam's paper, similar to Individuality (Debnam et al., 2014). Honesty was the centerpiece of Debnam's paper as the element that maintains trust between the couple, and Debnam associated Honesty with Seriousness as well as stated that being honest is a sign of being committed to the relationship. In our study, we did find some examples associating Honesty with Seriousness. However, the majority of the data collected have people associating Honesty more with Trust. Often posters will take strange or unexplained behavior as signs of dishonesty, and this often leads to the conclusion that the person in question is unfaithful.

In summary, while our study captured many of the values such as Humor, Similarity, Seriousness, Intimacy, Individuality, and Honesty as offered in the existing literature, we also found some values such as Reciprocity Rates and Geography as being perceived differently by the online community.

5.2.2 New Values

Two new values, Family, and Kindness, were discovered in our study. These values were not mentioned previously in the literature but do show up as relevant values in the Plenty of Fish community forum.
Family value is about the element of family within a relationship and how family relations affect online dating. Data collected thus far shows Family as a relevant value during a later phase. This value only gains relevancy when the relationship becomes fairly well established. Traditionally, meeting the family is considered a significant step towards commitment and should the person be barred from meeting his or her partner's family, concerns are raised about the seriousness of the relationship. Values linked to Seriousness often have heavy influence during the Interactive Phase and Long-term Phase of a relationship, and Family is no exception.

Kindness shares many similarities with Manning's "Articulated Rhetoric." (Manning et al., 2014). In the data collected, Kindness frequently appears in threads stating relationship qualities but is largely absent in threads seeking help for relationship problems. People stating Kindness as a value would often speak from the moral high ground. Also, Kindness is often not a trait people state they possess; instead it is a trait they deem others should have.

The new values identified can have a polarizing impact on dating couples. Family value is identified as value relevant at a very late phase but can have an adverse effect on new relationships as well. In addition, Kindness being an "Articulated Rhetoric" is most relevant during the Initial Signaling Phase. Both values are shown to be pivotal to a healthy relationship and should be addressed carefully by online dating couples.
5.3 Contribution

The contributions of this study are twofold. In term of conceptual contribution, this paper established new insights for the existing literature and added two new values associated with online dating users. This study also categorized all the values by their importance in each phase of the relationship phase which is a departure from previous literature that assumed a static effect for all values across the board. In terms of marketing, the values analyzed in this paper can be a useful tool in helping online dating websites understand some of the potential difficulties users may face. Online dating websites can also benefit from the relationship phase model by extending services to users who are past the Initial Signaling Phase; this can potentially create new services for users and extend user subscriptions.

5.3.1 Conceptual Contribution

First and foremost, the findings of this study identified two values that are important to people in an online relationship that were not found in the previous literature. Family Value and Kindness Value were identified as important to the Plenty of Fish community forum members; these values can be further studied to refine how exactly they function in each phase of a relationship.
Secondly, many existing values such as "Similarity" "Seriousness" and "Reciprocity Rate" have taken on new meanings through the data collected in this study. Similarity in Berger’s model plays the role of a confirmation boost. Couples who find each other similar have their traits validated. Similarity also reduces uncertainty as finding similarities would naturally mean discovering something new about others, thus increase attraction. Our study has expanded from Berger’s original model via the negative connotation associated with this value as something unobtainable despite being so sought after; this gives complexity to the uncertainty reduction model since complete similarity is impossible, the element of differences is something that needs further exploration. Seriousness Value diverted greatly from Manning's initial observation. In Manning's paper, Seriousness was merely identified as a "Presentational Rhetoric" where it serves as an advertisement to attract people during the early phase of an online relationship. In our paper, Seriousness was found to be pivotal to the later phases of a relationship as commitment was a crucial point in relationship stability. Reciprocity Rate went in a different direction from Berger's model as the prediction that low uncertainty leads to a lower rate of reciprocity seems false according to the data collected. However, in our study, Reciprocity Rate issues were found to arise in couples during the Interactive Phase of their relationship or even the Long-Term Phase. Later phases of the relationship would comparatively have a lower amount of uncertainty, thus according to Berger’s model, would lead to a lower Reciprocity Rate. However, the data collected suggested that Reciprocity Rate is not directly correlated to the level of uncertainty in relationships. Overall our study has
expanded upon existing literature’s definition of the values and discovered new possibilities within those values for further study.

Lastly, through our study, a clear outline of an online relationship is formed from the early phase of an online relationship where people tend to advertise themselves using Presentational Rhetoric to the intermediate phase where couples switch from purely online relationship to offline with the option for continual online interaction. Finally, the discovery of an offline phase was established where a couple move passes the transitional period and into a stable offline relationship. Manning's paper has hinted the three phases of online to offline relationships as the introduction of Presentational Rhetoric, and Articulated Rhetoric present the outline of early phase online dating. This paper expanded upon Manning's work further and separated it into three phases, with the Three Phases Model, values gained complexity as each value can now be examined within the separate phases of the relationship. This created a more dynamic model, rather than studying the relationship as a whole.

5.3.2 Managerial Contribution

Based on the values found from the literature and findings from the study discussing the managerial side of online dating, we reflect on whether current service industry and more specifically online dating service providers are doing well. We found that the business
side of online dating did not connect to the actual users' value, while this is regrettable, it
does present a gap in the services currently provided for online dating site users.

Online dating service providers primarily focused on the initial phase of online dating
where they generally provide a wide variety of channels for users to advertise themselves.
Comment However, as this study has shown, only two out of all the values are truly
presentational rhetoric while the rest are either pivotal during the transitional period or
long-term period thereafter. Our study has opened new possibilities for online dating
service providers to further enhance their ability to match people, in addition, services
that are linked to long-term relationship values may also constitute as after sale services
which may lead to more profit down the line.

5.4 Limitation & Future Research Direction

Netnography as a method to study values in online dating proved to be very interesting.
The unobtrusive nature of netnography method comment makes netnography an
excellent method of data collection for any study related to online communities. However,
etnography is not without its limitations. The online community selected may not be a
good fit for the online dating value study. The absence of data from dating site users who
do not frequent the forum or do not actively voice opinions on the forum can lead to
information gaps. Nevertheless, netnography eliminates misinformation caused by the research method itself, and that is a critical advantage.

5.4.1 Limitation

One of the limitations of this study is the fact that data collected from the community consists primarily of problems users have with their relationship. Since community forums are the platform for people to ask questions regarding their relationship issues, the responses found in the forums often mirror the question in its negativity. This problem is exacerbated considering many prominent forum members are users comment yet to experience long-term relationships, increasing the chance of answers being more failure oriented and defeatist. While negative responses help us identify values essential to the users, the lack of positive responses in threads can result in the study overlooking the perspectives of people who have a positive outlook on relationships.

The other limitation of the study concerns the different phases of relationships mentioned within the community. While generally, users tend to give some hints here or there about the phase of relationship he or she was in, the estimation of someone’s relationship phase is not infallible. In addition, there are couples who after the physical meet up continue using online chat as the primary communication method; this makes it harder to pinpoint the phase of a relationship.
5.4.2 Future Research Direction

Future research can focus more on the effect of all values listed in different phases of relationships, such as the effect of Humor during the Interactive Phase of the Relationship or the effect of Family during the Initial Signaling Phase. While this paper identified the primary relationship phases for each value, for example, Seriousness is more critical during Interactive Phase, and Family is more important during the Long-Term Phase, it does not imply that said values have no impact during other phases of a relationship. Some values such as Family may even have an adverse effect when mentioned during other phases of the relationship. A person who wants their partner to meet their parents during the Online Phase of the relationship can be seen as overly eager with a high demand on Seriousness, and this may scare off a partner who is not ready to commit in such an early phase of the relationship.

The netnography method used in the current study can also be employed to discover other community values. Using netnography, new studies can be performed in a non-intrusive manner to ensure unbiased results. For example, values essential to the online community of environmentally conscious shoppers can be studied using this method, thus allowing stores to better cater to their needs.
References

All Things Online Dating (November 09, 2017). Retrieved from http://allthingsonlinedating.blogspot.ca/2012/05/few-tips-tricks-for-you-fishersplenty.html


Appendices

Appendix A: Registration for Plenty of Fish

Over 70,000 New People Join Every Day!

Millions of people use Plentyoffish because they want to find their soulmate!

Username: [input field]
Password: [input field]
Confirm Password: [input field]
Email Address: [input field]
Confirm Email: [input field]
Gender: Man ▼
Birth Date: [input field]
Country: Select ▼
Ethnicity: Caucasian ▼

Enter LETTERS displayed under Circles from below:

tpbte8t a9$

By clicking Continue I agree to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy

Continue!
Appendix B: Registration Questionnaire

Complete this questionnaire to meet your soulmate!

State/Province

Postal code/City

Gender

Age

Height

Hair Color

Body Type

Do you have pets?

Religion

Education

Eye color

Second Language

What is the longest relationship you have been in?

Select

Is your first name set as it is on your profile?

Select

Is your last name set as it is on your profile?

Select

Family

Would you date someone who has kids?

Select

Would you date someone who smokes?

Select

Would you date someone that has 50% or a few extra pounds selected as a body type?

Select

What are you looking for?

Description

Prefer no smoke, no drugs, no alcohol, no pets, etc. Please explain.

Your interests (separate interests with commas)

Conversation starters (optional): Any relationship starts with a conversation. Tell us what you want to talk about.

If your profile contains sexual language or any, your account will be deleted.

If you want to be successful on Couplify this:

Talk about your hobbies.

Talk about your goals and ambitions.

Talk about your past in negative.

If you and your soulmate are interested, your profiles will be matched and you will be notified.

Create My Profile Now!
Appendix C: Personality Quiz Sample
Appendix D: My Profile Samples
Appendix E: Mail Setting:

Adjust Your Mail Settings

You can limit who is allowed to contact you by setting these options. (Ex. By selecting 'Female', you are allowing only women to contact you, etc.)

Gender: Anyone
Country: Any
First contact messages must be: Any Size

Age Between: Any Age to Any Age
Within: Any

Allow a user to see that I viewed their profile: Yes
To see the list of users you've blocked, Click here.

Your Time Zone:
DST= Start of Daylight Savings Time

Send me an email when I have mail at POF:
Send me an email when someone says yes to me on meet me:
Send me weekly matches:
Send me an email when someone adds me to their favorites:
Allow emails from Local Singles Events:
Send me emails about upgrades and billing:
Send me other emails from POF (other than those listed above):
Allow emails (first contact) from users without images on their profile:
Allow emails (first contact) from only upgraded users:

Update Mail Settings
Appendix G: Inbox (Messages):

You have no messages at the moment.
Inbox messages are deleted every 30 days.

Try messaging one of your Matches and get a conversation started
Use Meet Me and express interest without sending a message
More Messaging Tips
Send the right kind of message
Improve your Profile

Appendix H: Search (Advanced Search):

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!

I am a Male
Seeking Female
Age 19 to 56
From Canada
City or Postal Code / Miles 200
Province Ontario
Minimum Height Anything
Maximum Height Anything
Religion Anything
Ethnicity Anything
Pets Anything
Search Type Anything
Education Anything
Family Orientation Anything
Self-Confidence Anything
Profession Anything
Marital Status Anything
Second Language Anything
Ambition Anything
Sort By Last Visit
User Wants children? Anything
Smokes? Anything
Does drugs? Anything
Display Type Detailed
Drink Anything
Users With Children Anything
Hair Color Anything
Sign Anything
Eye color Anything
Body Type Anything
Income Anything
Easygoingness Anything
Openness/People Dependent Anything
Intert Anything
Personality Anything
Do You Own A Car? Anything
Longest Relationship Anything

Clear Go Fishing!
Appendix I: Chemistry (Needs Assessment):

**TLCBonaparte, Your Assessment is below**

**Interdependence**

Interdependence refers to how much you need dependency or a “couple identity” with your partner. You are moderately interdependent in a relationship. This means that you desire a good degree of physical and emotional connection with a partner. And you absolutely are drawn to someone whom you can respect and even emulate to some degree. In fact, it is quite common for a person in this score range to consider how your romantic partner would reflect on your family and friends. This all does not mean that you do not need personal space now and then; nearly everyone values being unique and different from others in some respects. However, people in this range draw strength, comfort and a strong sense of identity from their close relationships. Thus, when you feel close to someone this person becomes an extremely important part of who you are on the inside and outside. You probably prefer that you and your partner’s recreational activities be shared together since you like having your partner physically close and you desire showing off your “couplehood” in public. **Bottom line:** you need someone who likes frequent physical and emotional connection like you do, but who helps keep dependency in check in the relationship so that you two do not lose your identities as individuals.

Next, PlentyOfFish presents some customized probing questions to use “as is” or as inspiration to develop your own to help you explore your *interdependency* needs with potential partners:

“Do you think couples can ever get to the point when they spend too much time together? — and if so, how do you know when that point is?”

“How much time away from a lover do you think you need in a given week? — And what kinds of things do you like to do for yourself during your free time?”

“What really makes a date or any time with a partner truly special for you?”

**Food for Thought!** PlentyOfFish wants you to know about some idiosyncrasies the assessment identified in you. These are issues for you to contemplate on your own or explore with a professional relationship/dating coach.

**Issues you seem to Under-value**

When I feel close to someone, this person becomes an important part of who I am. Possible reasons you responded this way include negative motivations and positive motivations. On the negative side, it could mean that you put up rigid boundaries with romantic partners, that you value privacy and personal space at the expense of being insensitive to a partner that you do not form deep attachments to loved ones or a romantic partner or that you are overly protective and secretive about the details of your relationships. On the positive side, it could mean that you are neither a possessive nor dependent person, that you have a firm sense of self and a stable self-esteem and that you are a consistently positive thinker.

It does not bother me when my partner has his/her own set of friends. Possible reasons you responded this way include negative motivations and positive motivations. On the negative side, it could mean that you are a jealous, insecure or possessive person, that you do not appreciate time spent away from your lover or that you worry because you distrust your partner’s judgment and taste in friends. On the positive side, it could mean that you want to be in tune with all current aspects your partner’s life and personal interests, that you are not overly trusting of others, that you do not put up rigid boundaries with romantic partners or that you take time and have the motivation to connect with your partner and learn about his/her history.
Appendix J: Sent Msg (Inbox):

Appendix K: Favorites (My Favorites):
Appendix L: Favorites (Who Fav’d Me):

Appendix M: Forum Menu:
Appendix N: Love Stuff Section:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORUM</th>
<th>THREADS</th>
<th>POSTS</th>
<th>LAST POST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Issues</td>
<td>25971</td>
<td>212054</td>
<td>2/6/2018 8:40 PM by halcyon_skyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Experiences</td>
<td>12315</td>
<td>921060</td>
<td>Today @12:49 AM by norwegianangry556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Over 30</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>221314</td>
<td>2/6/2018 5:37 AM by Temporal_Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parents</td>
<td>7416</td>
<td>316245</td>
<td>12/22/2018 8:33 PM by GeneralSpecs123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile Reviews</td>
<td>67143</td>
<td>597623</td>
<td>2/5/2019 9:36 PM by Strawberry_jello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Over 45</td>
<td>2233</td>
<td>408802</td>
<td>2/5/2018 3:49 PM by whoisnow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask A Guy</td>
<td>17001</td>
<td>585285</td>
<td>2/26/2018 9:21 AM by ThePopOfYourDreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask A Girl</td>
<td>23767</td>
<td>765023</td>
<td>2/6/2018 1:27 PM by halcyon_skyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating &amp; Love Advice</td>
<td>16313</td>
<td>617464</td>
<td>2/5/2019 5:36 PM by Newrucker54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken Hearts</td>
<td>11290</td>
<td>407383</td>
<td>2/5/2019 5:26 PM by Call_me_Handy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix O: Fun Stuff:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plentyoffish Fun Stuff</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recipes &amp; Cooking</td>
<td>5770</td>
<td>109964</td>
<td>1/31/2016 1:21 PM by Shawn1120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories/creative writing</td>
<td>4477</td>
<td>41798</td>
<td>1/26/2016 3:41 PM by lev121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>9192</td>
<td>111264</td>
<td>1/27/2018 4:16 PM by Sakt3943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>23405</td>
<td>12/28/2017 5:10 AM by pineapple_symphony</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P: World Wide:

| Plentyoffish Worldwide  | 578 | 13686 | 2/28/2018 7:16 AM by Stillwaiting34
|-------------------------|-----|-------|----------------------------------|
| Ireland                 | 5   | 47    | 12/30/2014 9:30 PM by Theblackarchangel
| France                  | 4   | 8     | 1/4/2015 2:11 AM by awesome50manysyndrome
| Brazil                  | 8142| 68371 | 1/23/2016 11:52 PM by Newyorker58
| Testimonials            |     |       | 2/8/2018 1:48 PM by billybones
| Uk Forums               | 20376| 1150660| 2/9/2018 1:11 AM by nickonpartner
| Australia               | 3451| 152872| 2/8/2018 11:31 AM by nickonpartner

Appendix Q: General Discussion:

| General Discussion Plentyoffish Forums  | 2337| 102694| 2/8/2018 5:24 PM by Newyorker58
|-----------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------------------------------|
| Science/Philosophy                      | 2296| 15477 | 1/23/2016 5:13 AM by stormy892
| Plentyoffish Get Togethers              | 3083| 130429| 2/8/2018 9:34 PM by Newyorker58
| Sports                                  | 2822| 114740| 1/30/2016 4:18 PM by st_oon
| Art/Music                               | 3827| 96671 | 1/25/2016 3:59 AM by Cynderella
| Health & Fitness                        | 15426| 618408| Today @12:40 AM by norwegianpyg56
| Off Topic                               |     |       |                                   |

Appendix R: Help Section:

| Plentyoffish Help Section              | 6332| 64186| 2/2/2018 7:18 AM by Stillwaiting34
|----------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------------------------------|
| Technology and computers               | 24122| 254437| 2/8/2018 9:14 PM by
| Plentyoffish Site/Suggestions/Help     | 1550| 8538 | 3/27/2017 9:11 PM by Parrot_mom
| Volunteer Moderators Only              | 466 | 6403 | 12/15/2017 1:05 PM by benj777
| Event Hosts forum                      |     |       |                                   |
Appendix S: Pilot Study

https://forums.plentyoffish.com/

**Plentyoffish Love Stuff Section (Thread Count 185322)**

As of 1:43 pm 1/25/2018

Relationship Issues have 25966 threads and 2101795 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 07-04-2004

Dating Experiences have 12313 threads and 920754 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 11-09-2004

Dating Over 30 have 1894 threads and 221242 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 12-8-2004

Single Parents have 7418 threads and 316246 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 12-19-2004

Profile Reviews have 67133 threads and 597524 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 5-21-2005

Dating Over 45 have 2233 threads and 406619 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 1-31-2006

Ask A Guy have 17001 threads and 588291 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 7-4-2006

Ask A Girl have 23764 threads and 765585 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 7-2-2006
Dating & Love Advice have 16311 threads and 617390 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 4-20-2004

Broken Hearts have 11289 threads and 407964 posts on its sub forum
Earliest posting on subforum: 5-1-2004

The number displayed are the amount of thread and posts currently exist on each sub forum and updated real time.

Sample topic selected postings with initial coding:

Topic from subforum Relationship “Why did he ghost me? Cowards way out?”

Transcript:

Sarahlouise2412:
I met someone in September and within a few weeks we were a couple.
He told me he never felt this way so early etc and I was a keeper etc. (“Finding the one”)
Had great dates,loads of laughs. (“Humor”)
Fast forward a week before Christmas he stopped texting as much and within 3 days he was gone. (“Good Communication”)
Wouldn't reply to texts or calls, but kept me on Facebook and snapchat and viewing my snapchat posts. (“Good Communication”, “Recipatory rate”)
No merry Christmas or HNY but I sent him a message that he read and ignored.
A few days after new year I messaged asking what I did? He replied saying nothing, it was him he had things going on, I said take care.. no reply.
Still kept viewing my snapchats.
Two days ago he removed me off snapchat and I quickly deleted him from Facebook. Within 24 hours I clicked his profile and he is in a relationship with a girl who lives from his area.
I Live a hour away. ("Geography")
That's the reason I was dumped.
Red flags -history of short term relationships then quickly moves on.
Told me he cheated on mother of his child 8 years ago but regretted it. ("Relationship history", "Presence of children")
I don't understand what I did wrong? he went in a space of days from walking round Christmas markets holding hands/talking about NYE to cutting me off and starting with someone else. ("Intimacy level")
She must of been on his radar ...
Why?
Why did he treat me so poor?

Sarahlouise2412:
Up until the 12th December he text and rang daily, sweet morning messages and snapchats. ("Recipatory rate")
Even 3 days before he was saying I was quiet and was I ok ..I asked him if he wanted to continue this when he started being distant and he said of course and did I think if he wasn't into it he would still be contacting me.

IReallyShouldnt:
Dear OP, I read your post very carefully. I used to ask myself questions like that about the scumbags I had feelings for, who treated me like crap. Why? What did I do? Until I met an actual gentleman and a man of his word. Our acquaintance actually went nowhere because he was from across the country (and there were no promises and not much physically) ("Length of contact and postponing of physical intimacy") but I got to compare a real man to the scumbags. A real man treats women with respect and kindness and takes responsibility, scumbags don't, end of story. ("Respect")
I couldn't and still can't figure out how his feelings pretty much changed over night. He had no respect for much which was very disappointing.
I think it was very sneaky

_hemingway234:_
Sorry to hear he left you. Well, it was only about three months that he dated you. While I know it was serious - you really don't know if it's going to last until you've been together a year or two. ("Seriousness")

He was either crazy or just not that into you. Him having a series of short term relationships suggests the later.

As far as cutting contact with you, that's the smart thing to do - although it's painful. Why stick around when you know it's over? Also, hanging around only invites strife and further rejection. ("No Drama")

It's best to move on and find another. Plenty of fish in the sea.

_Sarahlouise2412:_
I think the most confusing thing for me was that he seemed into me. Texting all the time, seemed happy around me, holding my hands, seeming interested. ("Intimacy level", "Recipatory rate")
It was probably only since December he started being a bit distant .. around the same time he was liking her pictures on Facebook.
I'm wondering how it happened .. did he start messaging her or her him. What she has that I don't etc etc

_FullMoonGuy:_
[quote]Plenty of fish in the sea.[/quote]

But the rising mercury level does present a problem.
**IReallyShouldnt:**

[quote]What she has that I don't etc etc[/quote]

She has him... for now. You probably will never know the "why". What's healthy is to move on.

**Walts:**

[quote]I couldn't and still can't figure out how his feelings pretty much changed over night.[/quote]

Perceived and/or assumed feelings.

People, can, and will use all kinds of ways to get things that they want. It seems, that nowadays, we should be not only expecting it, but, also "practising" such tactics. It works if you are the one "getting" but, it doesn't work if you are on the other side of the equation. Again, you don't have to look far to see that's the way things are going to be nowadays. ("Honesty")

You seem to be looking for "reasons" or an "explanation", though, from your experiences with this guy, do you really need to hear "stuff" from him???? You have his actions alone to understand that it doesn't really matter in the big picture of things.

We, over here, have no idea what was in his head while he did what he did, or what he does. It was him doing it, for whatever reasons/excuses only he can come up with.

**Hemingway234:**
He was probably into you in the beginning but then as he got to know you, he fell out of love with you because you two were not a match. Only when love hits rock bottom do you see the signs, and at that point, they are ready to move on soon.

She does not have anything you don't have. Just because you are not desirable to him does not mean you're not desirable. You'll find your match.

**Ladyinred0407:**
saralouise,
First things first.
We don't know why.
We can only guess, just like you.

Last, but not least.
No explanation in the world will change the outcome, of this romance.
Any failed relationship, gives one opportunities to learn, grow, and sets you free.
Let it go, let him go, tomorrow is another day. Move forward.

**Butterchickenchuck:**
What you need to focus on now is how he ended it with a complete lack of class.

I don't care how "good" things used to be, the bottom line is he revealed himself in the end and THAT is what should matter most to you.

Is this the kind of guy you want to be with?

If your self esteem is healthy, the answer should be:

NO!

**Maleman999:**
OP: What could the guy say to you that would make you say: "I fully understand now why you are dumping me and choosing her instead. Good luck with your new relationship." I got a feeling the answer is there's nothing he could say that would make you feel better. So what's the point of wanting to contact him or him contacting you? Is it just to get revenge by telling him off and saying he's making a big mistake? (“No Drama”)

**Sarahlouise2412:**
I would of preferred him to actually end it rather than just disappearing.
He left me confused and blaming myself, yes if he had told me he didn't want to be with me anymore i won't lie I would of been hurt but for him to just disappear after 4 months of talking daily and 3 months seeing each other I found it to be very heartless, especially a few days before my birthday/Christmas.
I'm the type of person even after a date I will send them a message. (“Recipatory rate”)
He isn't the person I thought he was, which is a shame.
I would never send him a message now asking why etc, I wouldn't lower myself.
No he isn't the type of person I want a relationship with, I'm upset that he wasn't who I thought he was.

**PollyR107:**
OP, give yourself time to feel upset and move on. A lot of folks do this, men or women.

I've stopped wondering why some people behave the way they do. Accept that this is what he chose to do. He's not relationship material and now some woman's problem.

You've dodged a bullet. I agree that you should cut all contacts. He's not worth your time and energy. Best of luck next time round.

**FullMoonGuy:**
[quote]Red flags -history of short term relationships then quickly moves on.[/quote]
[quote]Told me he cheated on mother of his child 8 years ago but regreted it. [/quote]

So, he told you he had a history of short term relationships and moving on quickly, as well as cheating? (“Honesty”, “Relationship history”, “Presence of children”)

And still you forged ahead fearlessly?

Thinking things would be different with you?

[quote]I don't understand what I did wrong?[/quote]

Dismissing the red flags waving prominently?

[quote]Why did he treat me so poor?[/quote]

See “red flags” above.

IReallyShouldnt:

[quote]I would of preferred him to actually end it rather than just disappearing. [/quote]

No, the hurt would still be there for you if he fessed up and ended it.

I lived with my "soul mate" for 18 years. He literally gave me no notice that he was leaving me. Didn't find out for a few months that is was because of someone else. So, yeah, it can and will hurt for a while.
You know what I did after shaking off the hurt? I dated. A lot. It helped.

Now, you are young and there is a big world out there! Go chase your dreams. We here on this forum don't know you - ask your besties to listen to you and maybe lend a shoulder to cry on.

Good luck!

**Sarahlouise2412:**
He told me about the cheating and said it was a massive mistake and I only found out about the short relationships after I was looking at his Facebook. (“Honesty”, “Relationship history”)
I did from the start have a niggling gut feeling that maybe something about him was off but talked myself out of it.

**Walts:**
[quote]You know what I did after shaking off the hurt? I dated. A lot.[/quote]

Hmmmmm.

Maybe I should tried that one.

I went fishing.

15 years later, starting to date again, entered my head.

No wonder I'm phucked now.

Not really(at all) but, ya know what I mean.
Nestaron:
OP what you just found out is he is what the real meaning of "player" is that is what they do. They get their interests to invest time, effort, emotions and move on when they feel it will do most damage to the victim. That is all he was a real player in every meaning of the word not the one who claims to be but one who is. Do not mistake that person as being a coward they are not what he did was done with intent and purpose was thought out and executed effectively to damage you which obviously it did. Let it go and move on dont ever dwell think about or feel anything about these type of people or you allow them to win and continue damaging you.

IgorFrankenstein:
I think Nestaron is close to it.

Not a coward. That term only rarely applies to anyone.

What your recitation of events reminds me of, are a kind of person I have been unfortunate to have run across several times, fortunately only falling in love with one of them. These people are not "players" in the most common sense of that word, that is, they are not craftily setting out to deceive you from the start. They are instead, "players" in a more direct sense: they are true ACTORS; only in this case, they are acting out their own entire lives.

The people who do this, are very good at fooling everyone, because there is no real person behind the acting. One hundred percent of everything they do, is an act. ("Honesty")

It is an actual personality disorder, though I don't know the name for it. It might be related to Borderline Personality Disorder.

The person who I had the misfortune to be involved with, just as your fellow did, appeared to be as totally in love with me, as I actually was with her....until suddenly over a short
period of time, she suddenly "switched scripts." It took me decades to completely understand, but in looking back, what happened, was that she stumbled across a new and more involving "story line" for her to play the leading role in.

In my case, she tried at first to fit me into her new "series" by rewriting my character, but that was a disaster all around. Finally I was rewritten as a long-lost tragic lover, she married some poor slob on the West Coast, had at least one child, divorced, and then I lost track of her.

It would do you no good at all to try to force such a person to explain themselves, or to tell you "what you did wrong," because they won't know. They are NEVER involved in the real world to begin with.

You did NOTHING wrong, save to have been unaware that you were playing a part in a drama that you thought was real life. ("No Drama")

Just be grateful that your mess didn't go any further.

Explanation: The topic is posted by a female user who recount the abrupt end of her relationship. She wants explanation for the sudden termination of her relationship. The offline dating went well and according to user, the partner in question exhibit positive attraction, but communication ended suddenly right before Christmas and the relationship quietly fizzled out. It is important to note that after FtF meeting, the couple remained in touch via social media which is something not considered by previous studies.
Appendix T: Illustrations

1. Humor Analysis Illustration

Topic from subforum Relationship “Attractive Qualities”

Posting Sample:

MachIMustangII
its interesting that humor is attractive to people....since there’s different types of humor. Some might confuse sarcasm for humor, until its turned on them. But it makes sense that the person we wish to spend our spare time with....contributes to the fun we wish to have in our down time.

perhaps that gets us back to the differences....what makes us want to tear someone’s clothes off and procreate, may not be the same thing that makes us want to go to sunday brunch with them and fall in love with spending time with them. there’s that wonderful grey area between "JUST a friend" and girl/boyfriend.

Researcher Note on Value Relation: Poster links Humor with Similarity; stating there are different types of humors, and it takes a couple who enjoy each other’s brand of humor to truly gain attraction from it.

Topic from subforum Relationship “Attractive Qualities”

Posting Sample:

julystorm7
A sense of humour that matches your own is a big turn on. Kindness turns me on big time too. A guy who I see making time for an elderly person or giving nice attention to a kid gets 10 times more attractive in my books.
**Researcher Note on Value Relation:** Poster associates Humor with other positive traits such as good with kids or nice to elderly. This resonates with Manning’s original concept of “Articulated Rhetoric” (*Manning, Jimmie, 2014*).

**Researcher Final Note on Overall Online/Offline Value Analysis:** Humor’s effect is immediate thus its value can be appreciated fairly early on in relationship. Humor while not mentioned by Manning’s paper exhibit signs of “Articulated Rhetoric”

**Researcher Final Note on Overall Value Summary:** Association- Similarity, Investment- Emotion, Short Time Frame.

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2. **Similarity Analysis Illustration**

Topic from subforum Relationship “Any expectations of who would be attracted to you?”


**Posting Sample:**

**SiennaBear2**

A wide range of guys I guess but I notice that I think the 'alternative' guys chose to message me specifically because of gaming in my interests. So guys that like gaming and some that also play card games and do cosplay and stuff like that.

Men only have a certain number of messages they can send I heard.

My boyfriend told me that and told me he chose to message me because I was close and had similar interests and that's really rare

**Researcher Note on Value Relation:** Plain and simple confirmation that Similarity induces Attraction. And even the simplest online message can induce the effect. The
scenario described by poster also highlights Similarity as a “Presentational Rhetoric” (*Manning, Jimmie, 2014*)

**Researcher Final Note on Online/Offline Value Analysis:** Generally, the samples collected thus far place Similarity as a quality important for immediate attraction and early phase of relationships. This would mean this value is more online oriented for couples who met online since internet is the point of relationship entry.

**Researcher Final Note on Value Summary:** short time frame, ideal value (view as unobtainable by some), goal- oriented (similar goal), attribute- oriented (similar qualities)