About Me:

A Narrative Analysis of Self-Presentation in Women’s Online Dating Profiles

by

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ABOUT ME:
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN WOMEN’S ONLINE DATING PROFILES

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This thesis investigated women’s self-presentation when seeking a romantic partner on an online dating site. Fifteen online dating profiles written by women, ages 25 to 29, seeking a male partner were collected and analyzed. Narrative analysis was used to study the profiles’ thematic content and structural form. From the thematic analysis, two stories emerged: the Single Woman Story and the Relationship Story. Within the Single Woman Story, there were four themes: Poetic and Philosophical, Idealistic, Independent, and Active. Within the Relationship Story, there were two main themes: Adventures of a New Life Stage, and Sharing a Life with Someone. From the structural analysis, a continuum was evident: at one end, women focused primarily on themselves (Who I Am) and at the other end, women primarily focused on a potential partner (Who You Are). The strengths and limitations of the study, along with implications of the results are discussed.
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Chapter One: Introduction

When people describe themselves, they may include a list of their favourite activities or describe their physical attributes. They may also mention the people in their life or express their personal values and opinions. Depending on the context in which these descriptions are made, the content or the way it is described may be changed to please or present a certain aspect of oneself to a particular audience. Furthermore, when people have a specific intention, such as to attract a potential partner, the content and structure of the description may change again. This study was based on the understanding that the intention and context of an interaction can influence the way people present their ‘selves’ (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1956). The study itself specifically explored self-presentation in the context of online dating.

In this age of technology, the phenomenon of online dating is growing rapidly in popularity (Brym & Lenton, 2003). Researchers have explored the intention and context of online dating and how these aspects influence the content and management of online dating profiles, which are personalized self-descriptions of one’s self posted on a dating website. Researchers have studied these influences in various ways including content analysis of online dating profiles (Morgan, Richards & VanNess, 2010), thematic analyses of interviews with participants on creating their online dating profiles (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Whitty, 2008) and laboratory experiments on online self-presentation (Bargh, McKenna, Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002). The current study considered the content and structure of online dating profiles utilizing narrative analysis in order to enrich and deepen the current understanding of the construction and management of self-presentation in the context of online dating.
Theories and Current Research on Online Dating Self-Presentation

**Symbolic interactionism.** Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a theory developed to understand human interaction by examining the meaning that people make in their everyday interactions. Over the years, many scholars have contributed to the foundation and growth of this theory. From these contributions, it is understood that individuals will interact with different people, objects, behaviours, and events, and in turn will develop meaning from these interactions (Schlenker, 1980). One of the major contributors to this theory, Blumer (1969), elaborated on this process of human interaction and established three main principles. First, people ascribe meaning to other people, objects, behaviours, and events in their environment. Second, this meaning can *only* come from interacting with others and society. Third, and most importantly, people use this meaning to guide their behaviours. Blumer described this last principle as a two-step interpretive process. The first step involves an internal reflection about the ascribed meanings to decide what meaning would fit best for the particular interaction, which is typically based on social acceptability. The second step is a process of using this meaning to manage external behaviour by selecting an established behaviour or constructing a new behaviour in order to interact with the social world (Lauer & Handel, 1977).

In addition to human interaction, the theory of SI also highlights the construction the self, which is comprised of four main characteristics (Lauer & Handel, 1977). First, the self is continuously evolving and never permanent. People have the ability to change the aspects that comprise their selves at any time depending on the context. Second, the self is reflexive. This means that people interact not only with other people in their environment, but also internally with themselves. This reflexive interaction with the self facilitates the construction of meaning related to what people think of themselves in particular situations. For example, a student may...
answer more questions in English class than in math class because she believes that she is more knowledgeable in English studies. Third, the self is comprised of cognitive attitudes and thoughts rather than mindless, habitual reactions. In addition, these attitudes and meanings are shared among social community members who hold similar attitudes. This is related to the fourth characteristic, specifically that the concept of self is closely intertwined with the concept of self-control. Self-control allows people to determine what behaviours are appropriate for certain social communities. In summary, SI views the self as arising out of interaction whether it is internal to the individual or with other people in the community. Based on the context of the interaction, different selves may emerge. Higgins (1987) discussed the concept of various selves; actual self is how one and others perceive one to be, ought self represents a view of how one should be based on societal norms, and ideal self is how one would like to be. These different selves may be presented in different contexts and based on different intentions. For example, with a group of familiar friends, people may feel more comfortable expressing their actual self, but when meeting someone for the first time, people may present an ought or ideal self with the intention of making a good impression. These three aspects of self emphasize how context and intention will affect the particular way the self is presented in social situations.

Self-presentation is a concept in the symbolic interactionism literature that describes the socially perceptible aspects of self (Goffman, 1956). Using theatre metaphors, Goffman suggested that behaviour or presentation in social situations is considered a performance. This performance can be adapted depending on the context of the situation and/or who the audience is. The audience is composed of everyone in the social situation and the audience assesses and responds accordingly to the adequacy of the performance. This social assessment may influence how people fit their self-presentation in with the specific social situation and/or audience. For
example, in the context of the restaurant, a waiter will present a ‘polite’ self-presentation or performance to his paying patrons or audience. The patrons will then make meaning from the waiter’s polite demeanour and may want to show their appreciation by tipping him, which was probably his original intention. However, when the waiter goes to the kitchen, the context and his audience changes, and therefore his self-presentation can change as well. Instead of being polite, the waiter may present a more ‘commanding’ self by yelling at the cook to make his order more quickly. The adjustment of self-presentation is often “intentional, controlled, [and] non-spontaneous” (Lauer & Handel, 1977, p. 432). However, the more credible and believable self-presentations are those that are seemingly unintentional and natural as determined by the audience (Lauer & Handel, 1977). For example, the patrons may not tip the waiter as much if they believe he was not genuinely polite, but rather just pretending in order to make more money. Essentially, people seem to prefer when others are genuine in their presentation of their self.

In summary, SI theorizes that self-presentation is based on the meaning ascribed to the interactions people have with other people, objects, and events in a particular context. This self-presentation is made in response to these meanings, and can change and adapt based on the context of the interaction. The context can also influence whether self-presentation is composed of what a person believes is their true or actual self or what a person believes the audience is expecting in terms of an ideal or ought self. These theoretical ideas underscore the degree to which presentation of a particular self is dependent on the intention and the context in which the self is being presented. Of particular interest in this study were the ways in which intention and context influence self-presentation in the beginning stages of a romantic relationship.
**Relationship initiation.** SI concepts suggest that people meeting a potential romantic partner for the first time will want to construct and manage an attractive self-presentation. For example, a heterosexual woman who is interested in finding a dating partner and who meets a man for the first time may assess his availability and attractiveness based on his appearance, the absence of a wedding ring, and their initial interaction. Based on internal reflection and interaction with this man, the woman will subsequently decide how to present herself according to her interpretation of the situation and her intentions.

Davis (1973) suggested that there are six core stages for initiating a romantic relationship: 1) determining if a particular person has the *qualifiers* one is looking for in a romantic partner; 2) determining if he or she is *cleared* (i.e. available or interested) for a relationship; 3) finding an *opener* or a way to begin an interaction with this person; 4) finding a common or *integrating topic* that interests both persons; 5) presenting oneself in a manner, known as *come-on self*, so that the other will want to have further interactions; and 6) scheduling the *second encounter*. According to Davis’ theory, this process cannot occur unless a person finds another person attractive based on their qualifiers. Without this first stage, people will not engage in further interaction with someone for the purposes of initiating a romantic relationship and only through further interaction can meaning be created to inform people’s attitudes and behaviours towards others. The need to present an attractive self is also emphasized in the fifth stage when presenting a come-on self in order to have future interactions with the potential partner, such as a second or third date. This staged model of relationship initiation requires constructing and maintaining an attractive self-presentation for the promotion of further interaction and, in turn, the formation of a romantic relationship.
In their review comparing face-to-face relationships with the recent emergence of computer-mediated relationships, Merkle and Richardson (2000) highlighted the importance of attractiveness during the initial stages of face-to-face relationship formation. Specifically, they found support for spatial interaction, physical attraction, and having similar attitudes and values as important features that people consider when developing an initial interaction into a possible romantic relationship. Sprecher (1989) conducted a study on the importance of physical attraction in initial interactions. Men and women were given written descriptions of potential partners and were asked to rate how interested they were in them based on various characteristics, including physical attractiveness. The study found that both men and women were more interested in a partner who was physically attractive. In addition, Langlois et al. (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that investigated the importance of physical attractiveness in everyday life. From this, they determined that people tend to assume that those who are considered beautiful or attractive also have desirable traits such as kindness, sociability, and successfulness. This generalization of positive attributes could contribute to assessing a physically attractive person as having a wide range of qualifying criteria to be a potential romantic partner.

Once two people establish that they are physically attracted to each other, they will begin to interact more and gain a sense of each other’s attitudes, values and personalities, influencing their decisions to interact even further. Further interaction provides the opportunity for more intimate self-disclosure (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). As physical attractiveness facilitates initiation of romantic relationships, self-disclosure serves to facilitate further relationship development. As self-disclosure between two people increases over time, the level of intimacy in their relationship also increases, thus making the relationship stronger (Altman &
Taylor, 1973). Overall, physical attraction and self-disclosure are two important determinants of initiating a romantic relationship, which can influence the presentation of self. For example, people may be more conscious of their physical appearance and therefore will wear particular clothes or style their hair in a particular way so as to appear more attractive. Also, people may be more selective of the information they disclose about themselves to a potential partner by emphasizing their positive qualities and downplaying their negative qualities (Brehm et al., 2002).

In summary, the formation of face-to-face relationships starts with an initial physical attraction and is strengthened by subsequent interactions and sharing personal information. However, today, face-to-face interactions are not the only means by which people can initiate a romantic relationship. Popular mediated services and technologies, such as online dating sites, are changing the ways people meet their romantic partners. This suggests the value of understanding the formation processes of relationships initiated in such contexts and how these compare to face-to-face interactions.

The most obvious difference between face-to-face meetings and online dating is that self-presentation is more controllable in the context of online dating. While in face-to-face meetings people have an opportunity to adjust their presentation based on cues from the other person or the situations, in an online context they have the ability and time to fine-tune their self-presentation by carefully selecting particular words to represent who they are. This raises questions regarding how this key difference might influence self-presentation in the context of initiating a relationship, and what correlates of physical attractiveness and disclosure might be evidenced in this text-based presentation.
Mediated relationship initiation. Mediated relationships are relationships that are intentionally initiated with the help of a third-party service, such as newspaper ads, videotapes or the Internet. Initiating and maintaining a relationship through these various services can shift the intention and context that is typically present in traditional dating. With face-to-face relationship initiation, others’ intentions for a relationship are not always clear and people may behave or present themselves in a certain way to find out if a particular person is available or interested (Davis, 1973). However, in the context of mediated relationship initiation, all of the participants engaged in a particular forum are presumed to have the same intention, to meet a romantic partner. Based on these shared intentions, participants will not have to first ascertain availability or interest and can focus specifically on constructing their self-presentation for the purpose of attracting a romantic partner.

Research suggests that self-presentation is affected by the intention and context of mediated relationship initiation services, including speed dating, video dating, and personal ads in newspapers. Speed dating is a dating service that allows people to have several face-to-face dates with different people for about 3-8 minutes each. Due to the unique structure of speed dating, researchers have suggested that this form of dating is a valuable apparatus for studying relationship initiation because it simulates actual face-to-face interaction better than other mediated relationship initiation tactics (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007). Not surprisingly, since speed dating is most similar to traditional dating settings, current research findings emphasize the importance of visual cues such as physical appearance when constructing self-presentation (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2006; Houser, Horan, & Fuler, 2008; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). Kurzban and Weeden conducted a survey with 2,650 speed dating participants and found that most speed dating interactions were driven by
“physically observable” attributes including attractiveness and less driven by “harder-to-observe” attributes such as personality and values. It may be that people are more concerned about their physical appearance when constructing their self-presentation in this context than about what they disclose about themselves in such a short period of time. Although speed dating mimics traditional dating better than other mediated relationship initiation services, it does not provide the same level of control and selectivity in the construction of self-presentation that other services, such as video-dating and personal ads, provide.

Video dating is a type of dating service that allows people to video record themselves describing who they are, their personal interests, and what they are looking for in a romantic partner and relationship. This video recorded personal ad is then accessible for other members of the dating service to view. Subsequently, members can decide if they would like to contact a particular person based on this self-presentation. Woll and Young (1989) interviewed participants of a video dating service about how they constructed their video self-presentation. Participants, both men and women, reported that they took a great deal of thought and consideration regarding their statements and physical appearance because they wanted to attract a particular type of romantic partner rather than a variety of people. Although people are easily able to adjust their self-presentation in this context, the majority (67%) reported that they were satisfied with their initial presentation and did not change it. The strategies most participants reported using included being forthright and simple with their descriptions and portraying a realistic image of themselves in order to find “Mr. or Ms. Right.” Lastly, participants reported that the element of video dating they liked the most was their ability to be selective and pre-screen any potential partners. The context of video dating and other mediated relationship services allows members to select a partner from a large number and variety of people, which
may increase how choosy people are when it comes to selecting a partner. Knowledge of this increased selectivity may affect an individual’s construction of self-presentation in order to seem more unique or attractive among alternative partners.

Personal ads are textual self-presentations printed in newspapers created with the intention to meet a potential romantic partner in person. In such a context, language serves as a tool of self-presentation through which people would strive to present a somewhat accurate and attractive self. In addition, since the newspaper is accessible to the general public, unlike video dating which is only accessible to members, people may feel that they have to protect themselves from people who do not have similar intentions, including sexual exploiters. Montini and Ovrebro (1990) found through grounded theory analysis of 1,169 personal ads that the unique contextual factors related to personal ads, such as the use of only written language and the increased accessibility of the ads, influenced the content represented in personal ad self-presentation. They found that people constructing personal ads tended to use various techniques, such as being more up front, claiming sincerity, and wanting to be unique to balance their desire for a romantic partner and to protect themselves from potential risk or rejection in their self-presentation.

In sum, the environment of mediated relationship initiation services provides participants with the knowledge that, for the most part, the others to whom they are presenting themselves share similar intentions related to meeting a romantic partner. With this knowledge and increased control and selectiveness, people are able to construct a self-presentation in these mediated contexts for the specific purposes of finding a romantic partner. An exploration of computer-mediated relationship initiation or online dating furthers the current understanding of self-
presentation in the absence of unedited interactive visual and verbal cues and with attendant enhanced control and selectiveness.

**Computer-mediated relationship initiation.** For the purposes of the current study, online dating or computer-mediated relationship initiation services are defined as a method of meeting people online with the intent to start a romantic relationship that will eventually move offline. Online dating has become increasingly popular in Canada since it was introduced in 1996 (Brym & Lenton, 2003). For example, a recent report stated that the online dating site, Plenty of Fish, is currently managing about 105 million logins a month, 1.5 million daily visits, and 380,000 messages between members per hour (Oliveira, 2010). Factors that contribute to this rapid increase include: the rising proportion of single people in Canada, technology enhancements making the internet more accessible, and time restrictions on face-to-face meeting opportunities due to busy work schedules (Brym & Lenton, 2003). As the phenomenon of online dating gains more and more popularity, research and understanding regarding the process people use to find and select a romantic partner in an online context will continue to shift and evolve. The purpose of the current study was to consider self-presentation at the point of relationship initiation with a specific focus on the online dating profile.

**Management of self-presentation in online dating profiles.** An online dating profile is primarily a textual presentation of a person. Members of online dating sites see and read these profiles to determine if they want to contact a particular member. A profile typically includes photographs, a description of physical attributes (hair colour, height, body type), age, ethnicity, religion, marital status and other general facts about the person. On the site Plenty of Fish, there is a section of the profile called the ‘About Me’ section, which gives members the freedom to include anything they would like regarding who they are. Naturally, there is pressure on new
members to create a profile that accurately represents who they are while balancing the desire to appear attractive to a potential partner. An online dating profile is a form of self-presentation. The construction and management of an online profile is the only way people can present to their audience the particular qualifiers in which others will be interested, and which in turn will prompt the initial stages of a possible future relationship (Davis, 1973; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001).

Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006) interviewed online dating members about how they managed their online self-presentation with the intention of finding a romantic partner. Using grounded theory methods, they analyzed these interviews and found the following characteristics of an online dating context were particularly salient to users: (a) the presence of fewer cues; (b) a higher degree of control and flexibility in managing text; and (c) the potential for untruthful presentations. Given that context influences self-presentation, these three contextual characteristics of online dating are important considerations in understanding the influences on the construction and management of self-presentation in the form of online dating profiles.

**Fewer cues.** In online dating, there are fewer cues available to determine if a particular individual is attractive or has particular qualifiers (Davis, 1973) for the initiation of a romantic relationship. As a result, the few cues that are available carry greater meaning in the context of online dating than they would in a traditional dating context. Ellison et al. (2006) found that participants were more attuned to the few cues that were available, such as spelling and overall writing style. For example, the participants spoke about the misspelling of words as an indication that a person was uneducated. In the context of face-to-face interactions, people are provided with more cues and information to create more informed meanings and explanations for people’s behaviour. In these interactions, people would be less likely to make assumptions about others.
based one aspect of them because they have more information and are able to evaluate if that assumption or meaning fits for the person. In the context of online dating, limited textual cues may result in people discrediting the attractiveness of someone based on lack of information rather than cues that demonstrate evidence of unattractiveness. In addition to spelling, participants also discussed their sensitivity to selecting the words used in their own profiles in order to convey an attractive self-presentation, such as to seem smart or sexy.

People also have fewer visual cues in the context of online dating to decide if they would like to initiate a relationship with someone. While physical appearance plays a critical role in the formation of offline relationships (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005; Merkle & Richardson, 2000), this is not necessarily the case with relationships that start online. Levine (2000) stated, “the beauty of the virtual medium is based on words, charm, and seduction, not physical attraction and cues” (Levine, 2000, p. 565). Although most online dating sites allow members to include photographs of themselves, these photographs, like the words in a profile, can be controlled and manipulated to seem more attractive. Whitty (2008) demonstrated that physical appearance is an important component to the construction of online profiles, especially for women, who tend to include enhanced or ‘glamour’ photos of themselves in order to attract a partner. This increased control over the few cues that are available allows members to put their best face forward, which is not always possible in the traditional face-to-face dating world.

**Balance accuracy and desirability.** The second characteristic that the participants in Ellison et al.’s (2006) study were aware of was their ability to have greater control over the construction and management of their self-presentation. With this greater control, participants attempted to construct a self-presentation that balanced their true or actual self and a desirable self that would attract a partner. The researchers suggested that participants were able to create
this balance in their profiles by presenting their ideal self. As previously mentioned, the ideal self is a presentation of who a person would like to be or what they would like to do in the future (Higgins, 1987). For example, people may present in their profile that they are interested in certain activities such as hiking or camping because they believe that being interested in these activities will seem attractive. However, people may not include in their profile that, while they are interested in trying it, they have never been camping before. By not including all the details, the persons presenting profiles provide others with the opportunity to interpret their interest in camping to mean that they enjoy the outdoors, which for some is an attractive quality. The balance in the presentation of ideal self allows people to construct a more attractive and desirable self while remaining somewhat consistent with their actual self.

Similar to the findings of Ellison et al. (2006), Whitty (2008) demonstrated that people were aware of the importance of having an attractive profile while remaining true to themselves and that this affected how they constructed their profile or self-presentation. Participants shared that “constructing a profile was a dynamic process” (Whitty, 2008, p. 1715). This dynamic process involved the balance that Ellison et al. described between accuracy and desirability as well as constant maintenance. The participants said that they were more successful in attracting a partner when they continued to edit and refine their self-presentation over time to help attract a specific partner.

Online daters reported that there was a tension between wanting to present a relatively accurate photograph to avoid deception in face-to-face interactions and wanting to appear physically attractive. This tension was minimized by the online daters’ ability to carefully control and construct a balanced or selective self-presentation (Walther, 1992) that allowed them to make small enhancements that would go unnoticed in a face-to-face interaction, but would make
them more attractive for the purposes of initiating online interaction. The context of online
dating allows for easy maintenance and refinement of self-presentation, which is very different
than in the context of the traditional dating world. Having greater control over the construction
and management of self-presentation allows people to construct an *ideal* presentation of their self
through words and photographs, which can be refined over time to fit with what they believe a
potential romantic partner would find attractive.

*Credibility and self-disclosure.* Since people have fewer cues to rely on when assessing
potential partners online, and knowing that individuals online can be selective in their self-
presentations, it is challenging for prospective online daters to trust what is presented in online
dating profiles. According to previous research findings, people may have reason to not trust
others’ online dating profiles. Rowatt, Cunningham, and Druen (1999) had participants rate their
willingness to lie in their profile based on the facial attractiveness of a potential romantic partner.
They found that people were willing to lie in their profile to seem more desirable depending on
the attractiveness of the potential partner. In other words, the more attractive the partner was, the
more they were willing to lie. However, recent findings suggest that there is little benefit to
presenting an inaccurate self, especially if people plan on continuing their relationship offline
(Ellison et al., 2006; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008; Whitty, 2008). Participants reported they
do not present an inaccurate self, but rather make small adjustments to their self-presentation by
augmenting descriptions about their height or weight that would not be noticeable if they were to
meet in person (Toma et al., 2008). In addition to making small adjustments, people also
reported that disclosing more about themselves increased the credibility of their self-presentation
(Ellison et. al, 2006), increased the likelihood of finding a more compatible partner (Whitty,
2008), and formed a closer relationship (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002).
In Ellison et al.’s (2006) study, the participants expressed a need to establish credibility by providing more description in their profiles. Participants reported that instead of listing traits, they tend to disclose more detail about their traits in the form of stories in order to provide sufficient evidence that these traits are indeed factual.

Whitty (2008) also discussed the benefit of accurate self-disclosure in order to find the most appropriate partner. Research has indicated that people tend to look for a romantic partner who shares similar interests and characteristics (Fiore & Donath, 2005; Morgan, Richards & VanNess, 2010). This may be because an early stage in relationship initiation is to determine if there are any common interests between two people before moving to the next stage of relationship formation (Davis, 1973; Merkle & Richardson, 2000). This suggests that the more people honestly disclose information about themselves, the more likely it is that they will find someone with similar interests, which is required to move the relationship forward. Based on a grounded theory analysis of interviews with men and women about their online dating experiences, Whitty (2008) found that people tended to present more depth and breadth of information about themselves in their online dating profiles than they would in the traditional dating world. From this research, Whitty inferred that people might increase the amount of self-disclosure for two reasons. First, due to the context of online dating and the structure of online dating profiles, people tend to present more of themselves at one time, rather than in face-to-face relationship initiation where self-disclosure could occur over a longer period of time. Second, the more people self-disclosure in their profiles, the more likely they will find the most appropriate partner.

In addition to proving credibility and finding the most appropriate partner, McKenna et al. (2002) demonstrated that increased self-disclosure in online dating profiles was also
beneficial for forming a closer relationship. In a laboratory setting, they found that participants who interacted with the opposite sex online first before meeting in person reported liking each other more than the participants who only interacted face-to-face. These online interactions allowed the participants to disclose more about themselves than they would in a face-to-face interaction, which resulted in them feeling more close and intimate with their partner. These researchers believed that this increase in disclosure was due to the anonymity afforded by being online. Furthermore, the more people were able to disclose in their self-presentation, the closer the relationship they were able to form, in comparison to relationships that were initiated in person.

In summary, the construction and management of self-presentation in online dating profiles is affected by three contextual characteristics of online dating; fewer cues, increased control and flexibility over construction and management of profile, and the need to prove credibility through descriptive self-disclosure. These contextual characteristics provide people with restricted parameters in which they are able to interact with each other to construct meaning from which a particular self-presentation is formed.

**Demographic-specific content of online dating profiles.** Most of the research conducted to date on the construction and management of online dating profiles is based on interviews with online dating participants rather than an actual examination of the profiles in detail (Ellison et al., 2006; Toma et al., 2008; Whitty, 2008). Textual language is the medium by which self is presented in the context of online dating. Furthermore, textual language is strategically and intentionally utilized when forming an online dating profile (Ellison et al., 2006; Walther, 2007). As previously mentioned, online dating members consider the contextual characteristics of online dating when constructing their profiles, such as fewer cues, more control
and flexibility, and the need to prove credibility (Ellison et al., 2006). The content of the profiles represents the final product of what and how contextual characteristics were considered when online dating members constructed their self-presentation through their profile.

In order to determine how the profile content was influenced by the gender, sexual orientation, age and desired relationship type of the person constructing the profile, Morgan et al. (2010) conducted a content analysis of 294 personal ads placed by men and women, either identifying as straight, gay, or lesbian, from the ages of 18-34. Through this content analysis, the researchers found three overarching content categories - physical, lifestyle, and personality characteristics. The presentation of these categories depended on a person’s demographic characteristics. For example, older participants tended to include more information about their lifestyle compared to younger participants who tended to describe their physical attributes more.

There are many individual differences between people who use online dating sites to initiate romantic relationships. These differences may include characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, age, education, ethnicity and/or the type of relationship people seek to initiate. These differences influence the construction of one’s online dating profile or self-presentation. The primary characteristics that have been examined in the literature include gender, gender of potential partner, life stage, and desired relationship type. The following sections will provide a review of these findings

**Gender and Sexual Orientation.** Researchers have examined the role of gender in self-presentation in mediated relationship initiation and have found that gender alone does not influence self-presentation characteristics (Morgan et al., 2010). However, there is evidence indicating that one’s gender does influence self-presentation characteristics when the gender of a potential partner one is seeking is also factored in (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Koestner &
Wheeler, 1988; Morgan et. al., 2010; Smith & Stillman, 2002). People seeking partners of the opposite sex tended to reflect gender stereotypes in the content of one’s self-presentation. Particularly, the personal ads of men and women seeking a partner of the opposite sex tended to complement each other (Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). Women presented traits that they believed men wanted in a partner and men presented traits they believed women wanted in a partner. For example, women’s personal ads described their instrumental qualities and physically attractiveness because they believe that this is what men typically want in a female partner. In addition, women seeking a male partner tended to include more description about their physical attractiveness compared to women seeking a female partner because they believed that men wanted a physically attractive partner (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). Smith and Stillman (2002) found that women seeking a male or female partner include the most physical attributes in their personal ads compared to women seeking only women or only men. They concluded that what women offer in their personal ads or self-presentation is influenced by their partner choice.

**Type of relationship.** The audience or partner choice also influences the type of relationship one is looking to initiate (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Morgan et al., 2010). Heterosexual couples are typically more likely to seek a more long-term, stable relationship than same-sex couples in the context of mediated relationship initiation (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). When women are seeking a long-term relationship with a man, they tend to include less description in their online dating profiles about physical and erotic attractiveness and more about security, sincerity (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993), personal competence, active lifestyle, kindness and honesty (Morgan et al., 2010).
Life stage. Another characteristic that has been found to affect the type of relationship people seek and in turn, their self-presentation is age or life stage. In the context of face-to-face romantic relationships, most research on young adults (mid-to-late twenties) in the United States focuses on co-habitation, which for most couples eventually leads to marriage (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). However, there has been little research conducted on how these long-term relationships at this age are initiated (Sassler, 2010). In the context of mediated relationship initiation, researchers have found that age does influence self-presentation (Jagger, 2005; Morgan et al., 2010). Researchers found that people in their thirties tend to incorporate more description about their lifestyle into their self-presentation than their younger counterparts (Morgan et al., 2010).

Self-presentation as narratives. Online dating profiles are typically presented in a narrative format. Individuals present a ‘story’ about themselves that generally has a coherent and structured presentation designed to elicit interest from others. Personal or autobiographical narratives are created and shared through the use of language and are typically about lived experiences (Banker, Kaestle, & Allen, 2010). Through these narratives, people are constantly composing themselves and defining who they are through social interactions and language (Riessman, 1990). Researchers have found that the construction of narratives helps people create and maintain their sense of self (McAdams, 1993; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Narratives also involve choice in that the narrator is able to decide what to include and how they want to position themselves based on their audience and how they want to be perceived by them (Daly, 2007; Goffman, 1956; Riessman, 2008). White and Epston (1990) discussed that the structure of narratives is a result of a selective process directed at presenting a narrative that not only fits with a particular audience, but also with what is considered socially acceptable in the dominant
culture. The construction of a narrative is also affected by its specific purpose, whether it is to convey a particular message or to mobilize social change, and may involve a level of persuasion because the narrator wants to convince their audience that their story is “true” (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative analysis is used to find multiple meanings based on the content and structure of stories (Riessman, 2008). A narrative is typically described as having an evident beginning, middle, and end structure and is about past events that are unknown to the audience (Georgakopoulou, 2006a; Labov, 1972). These stories are told from a retrospective perspective and tend to be lengthy. There has been research on the narratives of people’s experiences with life-changing experiences such as illness (Prussing et al., 2005; Riessman, 1990), partner abuse (Migliaccio, 2002), and war and violence (Berman, Girón, & Marroquin, 2006). Utilizing narrative analysis, researchers are able to identify multiple meanings of the stories to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences and human experiences as a whole. In the context of online dating, members are asked to construct profiles about themselves, which are different from the typical autobiographical narrative form because they are shorter commentaries of ongoing, daily events. Georgakopoulou (2006b) argued that “small” stories or “narratives-in-interaction” about current or future events provide valuable data for narrative analysis to further understand human experience and presentation of self. Although these online dating profiles may be seen as “small stories” about daily life, they still fit the description of a narrative including that they are based on lived experiences (Banker, Kaestle, & Allen, 2010), they help people create and maintain their sense of self (McAdams, 1993; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007), and they involve choice in constructing and positioning based on the audience (Daly, 2007; Goffman, 1956; Riessman, 2008). In the context of online dating, self-presentation emerges through the content and structure of the narrative told through words of the online dating profiles. To date,
there has been no research analyzing the self-presentation in online dating profiles as narrative constructions.

Rationale for Current Study

Through the use of various methodological approaches, such as content analysis, interviews, and laboratory experiments, researchers have considered self-presentation in the context of online dating. The findings suggested that people’s awareness of the context of online dating, such as fewer cues creating an emphasis on language, greater control to fine-tune self-presentation, and increased self-disclosure compared to face-to-face relationship initiations (Ellison et al., 2006; Whitty, 2008), and their demographic and personal characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, life stage, relationship interests) (Morgan et al., 2010) impact what is included in their profile. However, few studies have looked at the profiles themselves, specifically looking at the content and how it is organized. In addition, because many of the characteristics of the online dating context are connected to the written word, it would be beneficial to study the profiles in a way that would deepen the meaning of the words, such as through narrative analysis.

Online dating profiles are typically presented in a narrative format. Researchers have found that the construction of narratives helps people create and maintain their sense of self (McAdams, 1993; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Riessman wrote, “narrative analysts interrogate intention and language – how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which language refers.” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). By specifically looking at online dating profiles as autobiographical narratives, researchers are able to use a narrative analysis methodology to enrich current research by “think[ing] beyond the surface of the text” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). This means that a narrative approach to studying online dating profiles would illuminate the deeper meaning behind the words by considering the context and intention in which the words
were written. These further considerations, in addition to earlier findings regarding what and how text is presented in an online context, provide a richness that cannot be captured from other methodological approaches.

Emerging adults (between the ages 18 and 25) are at a critical junction in their lives with regard to relationship formation. Arnett (2000) studied emerging adulthood and found that at this life stage people are more likely to seek a deeper level of intimacy, longer relationships, and possibly, cohabitation, compared to adolescence. From what is known about this age group, it can be assumed that people in their mid-to-late twenties would want also want a long-term relationship, possibly with even more commitment, such as marriage (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). However, more research is needed about the ways in which people in their mid-to-late twenties form long-term relationships.

As of 2000, the majority (37% more) of Canadian online dating members were men compared to women (Brym & Lenton, 2001). The prevalence of women on online dating sites is growing; there are more than 1 million women on Plenty of Fish alone (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011). Morgan et al. (2010) have found that the gender of the author and that of the potential partner influence the content of the author’s self-presentation. The majority of research on self-presentations of women seeking men in mediated relationship initiations indicates that women tend to predominately include descriptions about physical appearance, followed by instrumental qualities (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988; Smith & Stillman, 2002). Nevertheless, this was in the context of personal advertisements, which lacked photographs and images that can represent one’s physical attractiveness. There has been limited research conducted on women’s written profiles that contain photographs, where a textual description of one’s outward appearance would not be needed.
Objectives. The purpose of this study was to investigate the construction and management of self-presentation in online profiles of women in their mid-to-late twenties seeking to attract men for a long-term relationship. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What does narrative analysis of the content of these profiles reflect about women’s self-presentation in an online context and during relationship initiation?

2. What does the narrative structure of women’s online dating profiles indicate about self-presentation in the context of online dating and relationship initiation?

Chapter Two: Methods

The data analyzed in this study was comprised of online dating profiles in the open-ended ‘About Me’ section of Plenty of Fish, an online dating site. The collected data was analyzed using narrative analysis of thematic and structural aspects to gain a more complete understanding of the construction and management of self-presentation in the context of online dating.

Participants

The sample for the current study consisted of 15 online dating profiles of women between the ages of 25 and 29 seeking a male partner for a long-term relationship. Originally, the researcher had intended to collect 30 profiles. However, after analyzing narratives contained in the first 15 profiles that were collected, it was apparent that there was ample information and description within these profiles to support the research questions using narrative thematic and structural analysis. This decision to limit analysis to fewer profiles was made in consultation with the research advisory committee. The rationale for these decisions and process for data selection was recorded. All data collection procedures and data collected were approved by the
Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Guelph to ensure confidentiality and security of data.

**Data selection criteria.** A purposive sampling method (Daly, 2007) was used to select profiles based on the following specific criteria. First, the authors of the profiles identified themselves as females between the ages of 25 and 29. Second, these women were seeking a male partner for the purposes of establishing a long-term relationship. Third, the women lived in Canada. Lastly, to ensure a rich, descriptive data set and sufficient narrative development, the ‘About Me’ section of the selected profiles were written in a narrative style. This meant the profiles had to be written in English, using full sentences, and exceeded 150 words. The first 15 profiles to meet these criteria were included in this study.

**Procedure**

The online dating profiles were collected from the free online dating website, Plenty of Fish. Given that Plenty of Fish was a free service, the website could be treated as public domain (S. Auld, Research Ethics Board University of Guelph, personal communication, August 9, 2010). However, since the profiles contained sensitive information, the privacy of the participants was considered and all collected profiles and related information were stored securely and electronic versions were password protected. (Please see Appendix A for Plenty of Fish’s privacy policy and terms of use agreement).

All of the data was collected on the same day and time (Tuesday November 2, 2010 at 8:00 pm) for consistency purposes. The search engine on Plenty of Fish displayed profiles of persons who were most recently on the site. Using the search engine on Plenty of Fish, the researcher searched as a man seeking a woman for a long-term relationship between the ages of
25-29 in Canada. The search engine generated all the online dating profiles that fit these specific profile criteria.

In addition to the selection criteria outlined above, a profile was rejected if there was any indication that the researcher knew the participant. A record of the number of profiles rejected and the reasons for rejection were retained. Initially, 30 profiles that met the criteria were selected out of the 92 profiles that were considered, which was approximately 33% of total viewed profiles – of this, 15 profiles were analyzed. The main reason for rejecting a profile was that the profile did not contain enough words (44 profiles; average number of words was 80), followed by the profile not including a main photograph (12 profiles) – an initial selection criteria that was later discarded - and lastly, the profile was not written in full sentences (6 profiles).

For the profiles that met the data selection criteria, the “About Me” section of the profile was copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document and given a 4-digit code. The first two digits in the code represented the order in which the profile was collected. The last two digits were the age of the woman who wrote that profile. All other identifying information (e.g. names, city, workplace, etc.) was removed. After the analysis and discussion were completed, each profile was given a female name to make it easier for the reader to distinguish between profiles.

Data Analysis

The current study utilized Reissman’s narrative approaches (1993, 2008) for thematic and structural narrative analysis to understand what the content and structure of the profiles reflected about women’s self-presentation in the context of seeking a romantic partner online. The researcher also used the Listening Guide approach (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) to guide multiple readings. The following three sections
will describe the process of the initial readings, and the two methods of narrative analysis, thematic and structural.

**Initial readings and organization.** First the researcher read each profile once and noted general reflections about the profiles. Next, each profile was read and re-read several times, each time focusing on a different component of the data (see The Listening Guide, Gilligan, 1982). After the first five profiles were read, the researcher was able to draw comparisons between the profiles. The Listening Guide is based on the concept that there are silenced voices that exist beneath expressed voices when people communicate with others (Gilligan et al., 2003). This means that when people communicate through verbal or non-verbal expressions, including the written word, there are both dominant figurative voices and subordinate figurative voices contained within these expressions. In the context of a written online profile, the words themselves may be considered the dominant voice, but with further analysis, the underlying, subordinate voices can be found and provide enriched meanings and understanding to a person’s experiences. The Listening Guide was developed to provide a means to discover these deeper subordinate voices and the many voices that exist within a person’s expressed story (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008).

Following the Listening Guide, attention was directed to four different components across the multiple readings: ‘themes’ and ‘contrapuntal voices’ were the basis of the thematic analysis and ‘structure’ and ‘I/You Poems’ were the basis of the structural analysis. This gave the researcher a means for focusing on one aspect of the narrative within the profile exclusively in a single reading. The profiles were read in the same order that they were collected as way to keep track of the order in which the profiles were read and analyzed, acknowledging that previous profile readings could have impacted the way the researcher interpreted future readings.
of the profiles. The following sections will describe these components in the context of the two analyses.

**Thematic analysis.** In narrative thematic analysis, the content is the exclusive focus and the data is kept intact as an entire narrative entity (Riessman, 2008). This is in contrast, for example, to a grounded theory approach to thematic analysis, when analysis is conducted on a line-by-line basis, with assignment of codes to segments of data (Riessman, 2008). The thematic analysis for the current study involved conducting multiple readings of the online dating profiles and focusing on two main components: ‘themes’ and ‘contrapuntal voices’.

Analysis for ‘themes’ was based on the methods used in thematic narrative analysis. During the initial stages of narrative thematic analysis, the researcher highlighted words and phrases that stood out or were repetitive (Reissman, 2008). For example, descriptions in the profiles that included similar descriptive qualities, such as athletic ability or physical appearance, were noted for further analysis. The researcher read the profiles again, with these words and phrases in mind, to look for additional statements across all the profiles that may further support the beginnings of a theme.

The other focus for the thematic analysis was ‘contrapuntal voices’. Contrapuntal voices represent what is implied by the person’s words and how they are connected to different aspects of the story and research questions (Gilligan et al., 2003). For example, a profile may contain a description about the woman’s interest in doing outdoor activities as well as staying inside and reading. The first layer of this narrative reveals the woman’s interest, but the contrapuntal voices, beneath the initial layer, may represent the woman’s sense of balance by having interests both outdoors and indoors. During these readings, the researcher highlighted statements that could imply further meaning beyond the words and would require further analysis and reflection.
Riessman (2008) discussed that researchers should consider the specific context in which the data was written when finding themes within narratives. Coding for both contrapuntal voices and themes invited the researcher to further explore the contextual meaning behind the words. For example, recurring words or phrases that were present in many of the profiles were based around a theme about humour, such as “smile”, “laughter is the most important medicine”, or “I’m funny.” With the potential theme of ‘humour’ in mind, the researcher then considered some of the following questions to explore the contrapuntal voices within the specific context: what does it mean to be humourous in the context of dating, what attractive qualities are associated with humour, and how is humour connected to the research questions?

After reading the profiles several times with the focus on ‘themes’ and ‘contrapuntal voices’, the next step was to review, define and name the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After multiple reviews, various definitions, and consultations with the research committee, the researcher identified themes within the profiles that referenced composed stories.

**Structural analysis.** Structural analysis shifts the focus of the analysis from the “narrator’s experience to the narrative itself” (Riessman, 2008, p. 77). Riessman is implying that there is not only meaning in the content, but there is also a great deal of meaning in the way the content is structured. When conducting the structural narrative analysis, the following questions were used to guide the analysis – how was the profile structured, why did the woman choose to structure her profile in that particular way, and how did the intended audience influence the structure, and subsequent meaning, of the profile (Riessman, 1993)? These questions were considered through multiple readings of the profiles with a narrative structural focus in mind.

The other focus for the structural analysis readings were the ‘I/You Poems’ as identified by the Listening Guide approach. When developing ‘I’ poems, the researcher is focusing on how
the person talks or writes about him or herself (Gilligan et al., 2003). This fits well with Reissman’s approach to narrative structure (1993, 2008) because the ‘I’ poems illuminate the woman’s position in relation to ‘I’, herself, and ‘you’, the audience. To make an ‘I’ poem, researcher would underline or highlight where ‘I’ is used in the data, along with one or two words that follow the ‘I’. Then, all the highlighted ‘I’s and the subsequently words are lined up like the lines in a poem. For example:

I thought
I loved
I couldn’t sleep
I kept thinking

The poem draws attention to how the person sees him or herself fitting into their narrative, or who they believe they are, and adds another layer to understanding the narrative as a whole (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan et al., 2003). Following this procedure, the researcher in the current study highlighted all the ‘I’s and ‘my’s and the two or three words that followed. Once all of these were highlighted in all 15 profiles, the researcher went back to the first profile and began to highlight the use of ‘you’, ‘someone’, ‘the guy’, ‘the one’, ‘the relationship’, ‘us’, and ‘our’ in different colours. Once all the profiles were highlighted in different colours, it created a visual representation of the various voices, positions, and structures among the profiles. The ‘I/You Poems’ provided a perspective on how the woman positions herself in the narrative and how the woman sees her potential partner, ‘you’ or ‘someone’, also positioned in the narrative.

After reading the profiles several times with the focus on ‘structure’ and ‘I/You Poems’, the main structural analysis results emerged from the visual representations from the ‘I/You Poems’ and were further supported by the findings from the ‘structure’-focused readings. Using the colourful representations of the ‘I/You Poems’, the researcher could visually identify the
positioning of the profiles, I-focused or You-focused, from which the researcher constructed a continuum. The researcher then mapped all 15 profiles on the continuum, from I-focused to You-focused, to demonstrate the shift in positioning in the structure of the profiles.

The information gathered through multiple readings using Reissman’s (1993, 2008) narrative structure questions and the Listening Guide’s ‘I/You Poems’ formed the basis of the structural analysis results and addressed the research question about what the narrative structure of the profiles reflected about women’s self-presentation in the context of finding a romantic partner online.

**Trustworthiness, Rigor and Quality**

Throughout the entire research process, the researcher remained attentive to the trustworthiness, rigor and quality of the research she was analyzing, interpreting, and formulating. With respect to narrative analysis, the researcher ensured these qualities were present throughout the study by remaining aware of situated truths, persuasiveness/plausibility and coherence of interpretations and findings (Riessman, 2008).

Situated truths refer to ensuring that the results are contextualized based on the time, space, and social meanings in which the data was located (Daly, 2007; Riessman, 2008). In the current study, the results were situated in a greater context of human interaction and North American societal values, which were considered when analyzing and formulating the results of the current study as seen in the discussion.

Persuasiveness and/or plausibility are important attributes of the analytic findings, referring to the presentation of these in a manner that makes them believable to the reader. Persuasiveness is strengthened by the inclusion of supporting evidence from previous research, research that is challenged by the current findings, and opportunities for future research and
alternative perspectives (Riessman, 2008). In the current study, the researcher made strong connections between the theoretical and empirically-based literature and the interpreted data. The results supported and challenged this literature as well as offered several ideas for future research.

Lastly, coherence is related to the researcher’s ability to keep the participants’ narratives and her interpretations of them consistent with each other (Riessman, 2008). The researcher, in the current study, was able to provide evidence for these considerations through reflexive writing and tracking all decisions and interpretations that were made during the analysis. In addition, coherence was evident in the descriptions of the results and discussion sections of this thesis document.

Reflexivity. Lynch (2000) outlined three reasons why reflexivity is important for qualitative research. First, reflexivity and memo writing allow the researcher to keep track of and control for personal biases. Second, reflexivity allows the researcher to be transparent about her values and opinions to facilitate to the audience the interpretations of the analytic findings. Lastly, by being self-reflective the researcher is able to minimize distortion between the data itself and the interpretation of it. Reflexivity was a valuable tool for the current study that allowed the researcher to keep track of her personal biases and subjectivities since she had her own experiences with constructing an online dating profile. The researcher engaged in reflexivity by writing memos about her general thoughts, experiences, and further inquiries as well as about methodological and analytic decisions. A record of these thoughts and reflections holds the researcher accountable for the decisions she made throughout the process of research and analysis (Daly, 2007) and in turn, strengthened the trustworthiness, rigor and quality of the research.
Chapter Three: Results

Women’s self-presentation in the context of seeking a relationship partner online was explored by analyzing the narratives of online dating profiles. These narratives were examined by looking at ‘what’ was included in the profiles through narrative thematic analysis and ‘how’ the profiles were structured through narrative structural analysis.

When considering ‘what’ was included in the profiles, several themes were identified from which two main stories emerged, one about single women and the other about relationships. Each story was comprised of several themes. In the case of the Single Woman Story, there were four themes: poetic and philosophical, idealistic, independent, and active. The Relationship Story contained two themes: the adventure of a new life stage and sharing a life with someone. Some profiles contained both stories with more than one theme, and others contained one story and only one theme. All 15 profiles contained the single woman story and 9 of these 15 contained only one of the themes present in this narrative (see Table 1). Unlike the single woman story, the relationship story was only present in 7 of the 15 profiles and the majority of these profiles presented only one theme within this narrative. To restate, 7 profiles’ narratives contained themes for both narratives (single woman and relationship) and 8 profiles contained one or two theme(s) associated with the single woman story only (see Table 2).
Table 1.

**Thematic Analysis Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile #</th>
<th>Single Woman Story</th>
<th>Relationship Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetic</td>
<td>Idealistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0129 – Sarah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0227 – Melanie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0328 – Jessica</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0427 – Tanya</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0526 – Amy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0625 – Bethany</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0725 – Kate</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0826 – Laura</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0925 – Nancy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1025 – Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1126 - Christina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1227 – Holly</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1326 – Patricia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1429 – Willow</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1529 - Yvonne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘X’ indicates a profile that contains one theme within a story  
‘x’ indicates a profile that contains two themes within a story  

Table 2.

**Number of Profiles that Contained Each Theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative title</th>
<th>Number of profiles containing narrative</th>
<th>Number of profiles with one theme (within same narrative)</th>
<th>Number of profiles with two themes (within same narrative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Woman Story</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Story</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From examining ‘how’ the narratives were constructed or the structure of the same 15 profiles that were used for the thematic analysis, it was clear that there was an additional aspect of women’s self-presentation that did not emerge from solely examining the content. Structural analysis of the narratives provided evidence that the women who wrote these profiles positioned themselves along a continuum ranging from a presentation primarily focused on “who I am” to a
presentation more focused on “who you are.” The following sections will describe the results from the thematic analysis and structural analysis. All quotes are presented in the same way in which they appeared online, with caps, punctuation and spelling unchanged, unless otherwise indicated.

**Thematic Analysis**

Using narrative analysis to examine the themes in women’s online dating profiles provided evidence to support two main stories these women constructed as their self-presentation in the context of seeking a relationship partner online, the *Single Woman Story* and the *Relationship Story*. The presentation of the thematic analysis results will include a summary and exemplars of the two stories with a detailed description of the themes associated with each story (see Table 2).

**Single woman story.** The *Single Woman Story* depicted the characteristics of a woman, without a romantic partner, in the context of seeking a relationship partner on an online dating site. Four themes presented the story in four different ways, each highlighting different characteristics of a single woman. The analysis of the profiles’ narratives provided evidence to differentiate the themes from each other based on overall tone and use of particular words or phrases. The following sections will describe these four themes: the “poetic and philosophical” woman, the “idealistic” woman, the “independent” woman, and the “active” woman.

**The “poetic and philosophical” woman.** The “poetic and philosophical” theme was defined by two main features: one was rich descriptions of the woman’s interests, values and beliefs about life as opposed to utilizing a list format as seen in other profiles. The second feature was a focus on the woman herself rather than what she was looking for in a partner or a relationship. These features were present in five profiles. The following profile (Holly) and
excerpts provide examples of the “poetic and philosophical” theme as it was contained in the
dating profiles.

Profile 1227 – “Holly”, age 27:

1  I want to grow grapes and be a winemaker when I grow up. If that
2  ever happens. The growing up part. I am leaving to study to
3  become a winemaker and am soaking up every inkling of
4  knowledge on [location] wine that I can whilst I'm here. This is my
5  home, I'm happiest running around barefoot with the [same
6  location] soil between my toes.
7
8  Turns out I'm a bit of a hippie and love laidback, easygoing and
9  loving people. I love digging in the dirt, working with the sun on
10  my shoulders and the soft [same location] wind in my face. I love it
11  here, and if I have to explain it to you, you might not understand.
12
13  I have a debilitating soft spot for animals, children, old people and
14  families. No joke.
15
16  I love to surround myself with positive, smart and inspiring people.
17
18  I love athletic challenges and exploring. Physical expression is an
19  amazing manifestation of life, and I feel like I'm really living when
20  I'm in a meditative, physically demanding state. Sport is beautiful.
21
22  My doggie is my baby boy, he's an [age] old [type of dog], he's my
23  sunshine, my training partner and will probably love you instantly!
24
25  I heard some good advice from an elder woman celebrating her
26  50th wedding anniversary, she said just find someone you really
27  like to talk to.

This narrative included rich detail to describe Holly’s interests. For example, Holly
described her interest for physical exercise using poetic language (Lines 18-20). This was
different compared to other narratives that referred to an interest in sports, going to the gym, and
other physical activities, but presented it in a list format, with very little description (“I love to be
active with basketball running and weight lifting.” – Amy, Lines 7-8).
Poetic language referring to the woman’s values and beliefs was also evident in the following ways. In the profile above, Holly discussed theme of growth when describing her interests in growing grapes and farming (“I want to grow grapes…” - Line 1; “I love digging in the dirt…” – Line 9) as well as her life philosophy about personal growth, knowledge, and what she hoped for herself in the future (“I am leaving to study to become a winemaker and am soaking up every inkling of knowledge on [location] wine…” – Line 2-4). The reference to ‘growth’ connected Holly’s interests and her values and beliefs for her life and supported the poetic and philosophical theme of the single woman story. Similarly, another woman poetically described her perspective on her values and beliefs, (“I want to make ripples with my life, good ripples. Take the knowledge and love of nature that I have and educate others, spread that appreciation and respect and hope, that like a stone dropped in a pond, my ripples will spread.” – Bethany, Lines 22-26). Profiles that did not contain this theme incorporated simple statements without further explanation, (“…who believes balance in life is what keeps us all going.” – Christina, Line 2; “I believe you must respect others to be respected…” – Jessica, Line 9).

The second feature of this theme was that the woman described herself more than a potential partner or relationship. For example, in the profile presented above, Holly made little reference to a potential partner or relationship. At the end of her profile, she briefly mentioned advice she had received about relationships, but she did not describe what she hoped for in a partner or a relationship. Instead, the majority of the profile contained descriptions about her interests and values.

Overall, the “poetic and philosophical” theme within the Single Woman Story was evidenced by the presence of poetic language, including metaphors and detailed descriptions, as
well as a principal focus on who the author was, rather than sharing the focus with a description about her potential partner.

**The “idealistic” woman.** The “idealistic” theme included in the single woman story was defined by two main features: the concept of “The One”; and an acknowledgement of traditional gender roles through descriptions that adopted and rejected them. The first feature included words or phrases about wanting to meet “The One”, “Mr. Right”, or “the perfect guy” in a manner that was determined by fate. The second feature included descriptions that acknowledged traditional gender roles, including references that adopted these roles (i.e., the woman’s physically attractiveness) and references that rejected these roles (i.e., not wanting to participate in female-stereotyped activities). These features were present in five profiles. The following profile (Sarah) and excerpts provide examples of the “idealistic” theme as it was presented in the online dating profiles.

Profile 0129 – “Sarah”, age 29:

1. I don't know how many times I have filled this thing out just to delete it a few weeks later. Hoping this version sticks or I get that "big catch" that everyone is on here looking for.
2. Who am I??
3. I am a bubbly; giggling girl who wears my emotions on my sleeve.
4. I have been travelling on quite a bumpy backroad for awhile, I am ready to turn onto a smooth highway ...
5. My old roommate says that I am a great houseb!@#h, she never wanted to leave me.LOL I cook and clean but HATE doing the dishes; cleaning the toilet and folding laundry.
6. What am I looking for??
7. Someone to do my dishes; clean my toilet and fold my laundry!;)haa
8. I would love to spend my time with someone who can make me laugh with corney jokes and silly stunts. Someone who will let me
cry during girlie movies and hold my hand walking down the
street. I am looking for a guy who can carry a great conversation
and teach me new things or enjoys going for long drives and can be
content with not saying anything at all. I am looking for a man's
man . someone who likes to get dirty and go camping or 4 wheelin
and who can fix things. But also a guy who can clean up and go out
dancing.

I love to go out dancing and spending time with my friends but also
love to stay in at home and cuddle.

But most important is the way a guy is going to respond and
interact with my [child], [he/she] is my world and we're a package
deal. I have no time for someone who will try and compete with
[him/her], they won't win. Or someone who wants to turn [him/her]
away. I am looking for someone to join our team.

Updated January 1, 2009

"Find the guy, who calls you beautiful instead of hot. Who calls
you back when you hang up on him. Who will stay awake just to
watch you sleep. Wait for the guy who kisses your forehead. Who
wants to show you off to the world when you are in your sweats.
Who holds your hand in front of his friends. Wait for the one who
is constantly reminding you of how much he cares about you and
how lucky he is to have you. Wait for the one who turns to his
friends and says, "...that's her."

This profile provides evidence of the “idealistic” theme in that the author described a
search for “the one” and wrote about her role in future relationships utilizing descriptions of
more stereotypical heterosexual couple dynamics and female traits. Sarah began the narrative of
her profile with her hopes of finding “the one” or “the big catch” (“Hoping this version sticks or
I get that ‘big catch’ that everyone is on here looking for.” – Lines 2-3). Not only did Sarah
describe her search for “the one”, but she presented an assumption that everyone else is doing so
as well. Further in the profile, she painted a picture of how she imagined herself with “the one”,
and included imagery that might be typically seen in romantic movies or stories (“Someone who
will let me cry during girlie movies and hold my hand walking down the street.” – Lines 20-22).

Although Sarah started her profile expressing some frustration about not being able to find the one, she ended the profile with a quote from an unnamed third party on how to find “the one” or who to wait for, (“Find the guy, who calls you beautiful instead of hot” – Line 41; “Wait for the guy who kisses your forehead.” – Line 43, emphasis added). These descriptions of “the one” and romantic ideals were evidenced in other profiles: “Everyone says there is a someone out there for you.” (Kate, Line 1); and, “…I’m looking for someone who’ll hold my hand and make me smile when I’m going through the rough patches…” (Willow, Lines 31-33).

The “idealistic” theme was also evidenced in descriptions or interests that would fit with women’s traditional gender roles in the context of heterosexual relationships. In Sarah’s profile, she included a description about herself as a “bubbly girl who wears my emotions on my sleeve” (Line 7). She also included her interests in cooking and cleaning with an acknowledgement of her limitations. (“I cook and clean but HATE doing the dishes; cleaning the toilet and folding laundry” – Lines 11-12). The descriptions included in Kate’s profile about the woman’s physical appearance also fit with this “idealistic” theme and inclusion of stereotyped gender roles that men seeking a female partner consider physical appearance: “…Height : [height] :( „, (though I wear high heels)…” (Lines 10-11); and, “…my gym (which I sometimes skip, still go frequently enough to keep in shape)…” (Lines 14-15). This use of explicit detail about the woman’s physical appearance was rare among the other profiles, but demonstrated the influence of gender roles and idealistic theme within the single woman story.

The idealistic theme was also evident in profiles that challenged the traditional gender roles, specifically by the woman showing interest in traditional male dominated roles, including high contact activities. For example, Kate wrote, “Winter time : Well we are all busy with the
Hockey season!!!” (Line 18, emphasis added). Through the use of “we”, this suggested that Kate assumed that the reader was also interested in or played hockey, depicting herself not only as an attractive woman in high heels, but also as someone who has an interest in male-dominant activities, such as hockey.

Overall, the “idealistic” theme within the Single Woman Story was evident from the inclusion of words and phrases that that depicted single women idealizing the idea of “the one” and making use of gender stereotypes.

The “independent” woman. The “independent” theme characterized a single woman through two main features: one, the woman’s strength and independence exhibited through a strong tone of voice and lack of apology for this strong stance; two, the women’s demonstration through their descriptions that they know what want in life, a partner and a relationship. These features were present in three profiles. The following profile (Patricia) and excerpts will further support the “independent” theme that emerged from the profiles.

Profile 1326 – “Patricia”, age 26:

1 Im not one for sending the first message, so feel free ;). A little
2 about me, I live on my own, raise my [child] on my own and work
3 full time. I Have my own unique appeal. I'm energetic, and very
4 social. I absolutely Hate to be alone. I'm generous, Very loving,
5 beautiful and can be very Flirtatious at times. I'm not a gold digger
6 girl like most I don't need your money I make my own and I
7 already have everything I want, just looking for a partner to take on
8 the world with me ;). I like to play pool and sports, and go out
9 clubbing occasionally. I have 2 tattoos. 4 piercings. I don't put up
10 with peoples b.s. and drama (so if u have alot of this, plz spare me).
11 I'm a very outspoken individual and I say it how it is. I'm very
12 assertive and EXTREMELY independent. Not interested in long
13 distance relationships, so if you live in [city] please don't waste
14 your time Also not interested in one night stands or casual flings or
15 if your an army boi for various other reasons.
16
17 A little on what I'm looking for, someone who can make me laugh
18 and smile and also realize that its the little things in life that count
the most. also someone who is independent and can handle his own
like me!!! looks aren't everything to a person but I'm a sucker for a
gorgeous smile. :) I'm looking to meet new people, and maybe
meet someone who actually appreciates and can respect a good
woman who has a good head on her shoulders. I guess time takes
and runs its course.. but anyhow that's just a little about me, if you
wish to know more just drop me a line :0) GL FISHING

The theme of “independent” woman is evidenced in this profile in the following ways.
Firstly, the words “my own” were prominent in Patricia’s description about herself, signifying
her sense of independence and that she can do things on her own: “A little about me, I live on my
own, raise my [child] on my own and work full time. I have my own unique appeal.” – (Lines 1-3, emphasis added); “I don't need your money I make my own” (Line 6). Patricia also made
direct references to her independence, including, “I'm very assertive and EXTREMELY
independent.” (Lines 11-12), and “…someone who is independent and can handle his own like me!!!” (Line 19-20). This sense of independence and self-assurance was also seen in Melanie’s
profile, “I love who I am and I consider myself confident and self-assured. I'm not conceded, but
I don't waste time wanting to be someone else.” (Line 4-6)

Patricia, in the profile above, also implied a strong sense of what she does and does not
want in a romantic partner (“I don't put up with peoples b.s. and drama (so if u have alot of this,
plz spare me)” – Lines 9-10; “…someone who actually appreciates and can respect a good
woman” – Lines 22-23). Similarly, Georgia stated, “If you kno you're jerk pls just dont bother
messageing me. I'm lookin for a guy who has a good head on his shoulders and is down too
earth” (Lines 3-5), and Melanie included the following footnote:

“** If you're someone who has photos of youself shirtless from every angle I doubt
there's an angle of you I want to get to know, so don't bother. Don't send me a
vulgar message and not expect to get blocked, you wanna send a distasteful/cheap message? Find a distasteful/cheap chick - I'm not it. *" (Lines 21-25)

These women were clearly stating what they do not want in a relationship, which further implied what they do want or hope for in a future relationship. This serves to emphasize in the narrative what these women were willing to tolerate in their relationships.

The “independent” theme within the Single Woman Story was supported by the references to the single woman’s strength, self-sufficiency, and tenacity. In addition, these profiles included strong-worded references to attributes that the women did and did not want in a partner or a relationship.

The “active” woman. The “active” woman described herself as busy and in constant motion. Profiles fitting the “active” woman theme were distinguished by two features: one, the use of language that implied activeness; in particular words that ended in “ing” and the word “go”; two, descriptions that suggested that the busy, active woman was not going to slow down for a partner, but instead, the partner would have to keep up with her lifestyle. These features were present within eight profiles. The following profile (Christina) and excerpts will further support the “active” theme that emerged from the online dating profiles.

Profile 1126 – “Christina”, age 26:

1 Hey there, I'd say that I am an outgoing, fun-loving and caring chick who believes balance in life is what keeps us all going. I have a great social life which includes great friends and I keep myself busy between socializing, working, working out and walking my two rescue dogs [name] and [name]. I am a HUGE animal lover and would need a man who respects my love for animals and hopefully enjoys them as well. I am happiest during all of the activities mentioned above in addition to listening to great music, dancing (usually while listening to the great music) and watching great movies.
2
3 I have always had a passion for helping people and animals, which
is why I probably work in health care, and would love to find a
man who respects health and animals as well. I would also love to
find a man who is hardworking and educated like I am and would
love to join me traveling as I love to travel. I love to exercise and
be outdoors; I enjoy biking, playing tennis and softball and
swimming, so if you enjoy any of those activities as well that is a
bonus for me. No pressure boys :)

This profile provides evidence of the “active” theme within the single woman story. This
woman started her profile by using several “ing” words to describe herself, “…outgoing, fun-
loving and caring chick…” (Lines 1-2, emphasis added). This was followed by several activities
that she enjoys doing, “I keep myself busy between socializing, working, working out and
walking my two rescue dogs” (Lines 3-5, emphasis added). Similarly, Yvonne used the word
“go” to signify her busy lifestyle (“For fun, I like to watch movies and hang out with friends, see
family, travel, and go out for drinks/coffee and go away for a weekend.” – Lines 3-5, emphasis
added).

Christina and Yvonne’s profiles also consisted of listed activities the women were
currently doing and that nothing seemed to slow her down, not even a relationship. For example,
Christina wrote, “I enjoy biking, playing tennis and softball and swimming, so if you enjoy any
of those activities as well that is a bonus for me. No pressure boys :)” (Lines 17-19). This
implied that she would continue to do these activities even if her partner was not interested in
them. In addition, the last comment (“No pressure boys :)” – Line 19) sounded like a playful
invitation to the reader to attempt to keep up with her.

The “active” theme within the *Single Woman Story* was supported by the use of listed
activities and interests as well as made use of words ending in “ing”, which depicted single
women as leading active and busy lifestyles, and a potential partner will not slow them down.
**Relationship story.** The *Relationship Story*, consisting of two themes, depicted a woman’s hopes and perceptions of her future romantic relationship. The following sections will describe the two themes of the *Relationship Story* that were identified within the analysis: “adventures of a new life stage” and “sharing a life with someone.”

**The adventure of a new life stage.** The “adventure of a new life stage” theme described the purpose of a romantic relationship as the next step or a part of the next step of the author’s life and contained three main features: one, descriptions about a recent change in the woman’s life such as moving or travelling; two, the use of language such as “adventure”, “discovery”, and “new” to describe the new life stage; and lastly, the inclusion of activities that one would consider adventurous, including being outside, camping, and traveling. Note that while there are elements of the “active” single woman here, a theme described earlier within *The Single Woman* story, the positioning and emphasis of this theme within *The Relationship Story* is not on the single woman but rather the type of relationship she is looking for. These themes were evident in four profiles. The following profile (Tanya) and excerpts will further support the “adventures of a new life stage” theme that emerged from the profiles.

Profile 0427 – “Tanya”, age 27:

1. Hello you,
2. What I am looking for (really simple!) : A funny, outgoing and open-minded guy. All I want is to share great moments with you.
3. Here I am, back in [city] after living la vida loca in [city] and traveling around Europe/Africa for a few years.
4. A little bit about myself:
5. I love sharing a smile and great conversations.
6. I enjoy travelling, discovering new cultures and meeting new people.
7. I am really open-minded and it's always a real pleasure for me to discover a new rythm of life (food, music, culture, people, etc.)
I am a [ethnicity/nationality] and I also speak Spanish and trying to learn Kreyol, Igbo and Arabic.

I enjoy dancing Kompa, Zouk and some African moves!

I have the opportunity to work in the field of [field of study] and I love it.

What I am looking for (really simple!) : A funny, outgoing and open-minded guy.

Everything happens for a reason.

All I want is to share great moments and little pleasures of life with you. Let's start from there and see how/where it goes!

All the rest can be discussed :)

So, if you think you might be the great guy, let me know :)

In this profile, Tanya described her passion for travel, culture and discovery (“I enjoy travelling, discovering new cultures and meeting new people.” – Lines 11-12). She also included the fact that she had recently returned home after traveling for a few years. This suggested that this was the beginning of a new stage in her life, which could include finding a partner and starting a relationship. She described her openness to new experiences, including meeting new people, “I am really open-minded and it's always a real pleasure for me to discover a new rhythm of life (food, music, culture, people, etc.)” (Lines 13-14, emphasis added). This implied that she potentially viewed meeting a romantic partner as a new, and possibly unexpected, addition to her life.

Similarly, Nancy shared that she had recently moved to a new city and that this was the beginning of a new stage in her life. However, the way in which she described these experiences provided evidence that she had a different perspective about this change in her life. She started her profile with describing her doubts about online dating while still experiencing a desire to meet someone (“I don't really enjoy these dating sites but I guess I will give it another try, since
I've got nothing much to lose.” – Lines 2-3). She then stated, “I'm here to try to meet new people and see where it goes.” (Line 6). Although this woman described starting a relationship as a part of a new stage in her life, her presentation suggested more hesitation than that expressed by Tanya.

In Amy’s profile, she used words and phrases that also suggested this theme of a relationship being an “adventure.” She wrote:

“I am open to where ever my life takes me, rarely turning down an opportunity for adventure. If a door opens, you better believe I am walking through it. Not afraid of what is to come, only excited for it, although it would be nice to have someone special to experience all these new adventures with!” (Lines 14-18, emphasis added).

Amy described a potential relationship as an opportunity to experience life’s adventures with someone special as well as her openness to new experiences, similar to Tanya’s profile. The word “adventure” in conjunction with other activities implied that the woman was an adventurous person. For example, Jessica wrote, “I also really enjoy being outside, camping, taking walks, going to the gym and I'm always looking for the next "adventure" (Lines 27-28, emphasis added).

The “adventure of a new life stage” theme within the Relationship Story was evident in the profiles from descriptions about adventures and being adventurous as well as descriptions about starting a new life stage, all of which depicted a potential relationship as an exciting new beginning in a woman’s life.

**Sharing a life with someone.** The “sharing a life with someone” theme within the Relationship Story described a potential relationship as an opportunity for the woman to share
her life with someone. This theme contained three main features: one, the concept that a woman’s life was not complete until she was in a relationship; two, the inclusion of words and phrases such as “share”, “with”, “last piece of the puzzle”; and lastly, comparing the woman’s and her potential partner’s interests. These features were present within five profiles. The following profiles (Willow and Jessica) and excerpts will further support the “sharing a life with someone” theme that emerged from the online dating profiles.

Profile 1429 – “Willow”, age 29:

I’m an extremely laid back, down to earth girl. I love life and don’t take anything for granted. I try not to take things too seriously, I love to laugh and at times that means laughing at myself. I’m not a prissy girl, I’m happiest in jeans, t-shirt and flip flops.

I’m a very social person, I love spending time with my friends. As much as I love my friends, I also like getting some down time so I can relax watching movies, reading and gardening. I absolutely love playing slo pitch, I play year round. During the summer when I’m not playing ball I like to sneak in a round of golf or head off to the lake for some R&R in my hammock. During the winter, I’m really busy with work, but I’m going to give curling a shot this year. I also like ice fishing, but it’s a rare moment that I drop my line in the water, I’d rather sit there sipping a drink or five and enjoy the outdoors.

I love animals and feel like I’m one of the luckiest people alive because my career involves working with animals. I’m a [profession], working in the field of [field of study].

I have a great career, I don’t think it’s possible to have a better group of friends, I’m just looking for the last piece of the puzzle in my life, someone to share it with. I don’t want to get married right away, but I am ready to settle down.

What am I looking? Quite simply, I’m looking for my partner in life. I’m looking for someone to enjoy life together. I want someone to laugh and smile with me during the good times. I want someone who wants to go for a round of golf, watch a hockey game, or sit at home and cuddle on the couch and watch a movie, football game or hockey game. Life isn’t always perfect, so I’m looking for someone who’ll hold my hand and make me smile
when I'm going through the rough patches that creep up from time to time. I want someone who can carry on an intelligent conversation but loves to laugh and have a good time.

In this profile, Willow described a relationship as the “last piece of the puzzle” (Line 22) in her life, thereby suggesting that sharing her life with someone would give her a sense of completion in her life. In the beginning of her profile, she described herself as a busy woman who is social and has a great career (Line 6-19). This description suggests that she is satisfied with what she has established for herself including her friends, interests and career. However, the woman then shifted her perspective of her life in Lines 21-24. Willow shifted her perspective from speaking highly about her current life, including her career and friends, to describing that her current life would be better if she had someone to share it with. In addition, she mentioned that she did not want to get married right away, but would like to settle down. “Settling down” implied she would like to slow down with someone, which was different from her current busy life. Overall, Willow was hoping a relationship would complete her life and possibly change the pace of it.

Within this theme, to be with someone or share a life with someone implied that the couple would participate in the same activities. This concept was evident in Willow’s profile because she depicted her future relationship as spending time together and doing the same activities together (Lines 27-31). While not referencing “a missing piece”, the following profile (Jessica) provides evidence of the author comparing interests and activities between herself and her potential partner.

Profile 0328 – “Jessica”, age 28:

1 Please to meet you....
2
3 I have an outgoing and friendly personality and yet I cherish my privacy. I love to laugh and I've been known to be sarcastic since I
love to make the people laugh. I love to spend time with friends &
family and would love to find someone who has the same values
and morals.

I believe that you must respect others to be respected and nothing is
given in life but the harder you work, the bigger the reward. I
would like to find someone who doesn't settle but can also simply
go with the flow.

I’m looking for my best friend, someone to connect with and enjoy
similar activities and yet maintain our status as two separate human
beings and who can appreciate our individuality. Someone who can
appreciate that honesty and faithfulness are the foundation of true
friendship.

I’m looking for someone who appreciates me for who I am. I’m
always striving to live a balance life and would like to find
someone who works hard and plays even harder. I’m always up for
a challenge and trying new things. I love to travel\roadtrips and
recently I've "picked up" golfing and skiing. However, I appreciate
my quiet time and watching movies yet my love for music inspires
me to be one of those fearless ladies that sign with the tunes in the
car lol. I also really enjoy being outside, camping, taking walks,
going to the gym and I'm always looking for the next "adventure".

If you share the same interests, I would love to chat so drop me a
line! Don't be shy.

In this profile, Jessica told the story of her ideal relationship of sharing her life with
someone making comparisons between her attributes and the attributes of her potential partner.

For example, she wrote, “I love to spend time with friends & family and would love to find
someone who has the same values and morals.” (Line 5-7) and “I’m always striving to live a
balance life and would like to find someone who works hard and plays even harder.” (Line 20-
22). This implied that Jessica viewed relationships as being with someone who was similar to her
in many ways including interests, values, and personality traits. In addition, she wrote, “If you
share the same interests, I would love to chat so drop me a line!” (Line 30-31), which meant that
being similar to someone is a way of determining if two people should begin a romantic relationship with each other.

The “sharing a life with someone” theme within the Relationship Story involved the inclusion of shared activities that the woman was interested in and the activities the woman hoped her potential partner was interested in as well as the perspective that the woman’s life was not complete.

**Summary.** By examining the content of women’s online dating profiles through narrative analysis, it was revealed that two stories, the Single Woman Story and the Relationship Story, with multiple themes each, were present in the profiles. The Single Woman Story contained four themes: poetic and philosophical, idealistic, independent, and active. The Relationship Story contained two themes: adventure of a new life stage and sharing a life with someone. Overall, some profiles that contained one theme, whereas others contained more than one theme, even more than one story.

**Structural Analysis**

Narrative structural analysis provided insight into ‘how’ the women structured the self-presentations. This analysis demonstrated varying degrees of focus on the ‘I’ voice and the presence of potential partner and/or relationship. The profiles ranged from “Who I Am” to “Who You Are” along a continuum (see Figure 1). The following section includes a description of these various profile structures: a more exclusive focus on “Who I Am”; a consideration of “Who I Am with You”; and a more exclusive focus on “Who You Are.”

In this analysis, four components were identified and highlighted in different ways. The bold words below indicate when the woman is speaking about herself, the underlined words indicate when the woman is addressing the reader (“you”), italicized words indicate when the
woman is referring to a potential partner or “someone,” and double underlined words indicate when the woman is referring to the relationship or the use of the words “us” or “our.” These indicators are present throughout the exemplars of this section.

**Who I am.** There were three main characteristics of the profiles that were structured so as to emphasize the presentation of “Who I am.” One was that the descriptions within the profiles focused primarily on the author’s voice, but not in the context of romantic relationships. These narratives are structured to present the “I” voice of the authors primarily: (I believe, I try, I am, I love – “Bethany”). This is in line with the context of completing a component of their profile that required them to describe themselves. Secondly, these narratives addressed the reader with a generic “you” rather than more specifically referring to a potential partner. This implied that the women were aware of the context that *someone* (referred to as “you”) was reading their profile, but not necessarily a potential romantic partner. Lastly, these women wrote about themselves using poetic descriptions, metaphors, and philosophical life perspectives more so than the women’s profiles that reflected the “Who You Are” end of the continuum. The following two profiles and additional excerpts will support the “Who I Am” features.

**Profile 0625 – “Bethany”, age 25:**

```
1 I believe that a general curiosity about the universe leads to a fuller
2 and better life. I try to take joy in the little things, since the big
3 things don’t always happen. I am in many ways a romantic, but I
4 also have a strong cynical streak. I love animals, from the standard
5 soft and cuddly, down to insects and amphibians. I am working
6 towards a degree in [field of study], planning on specializing into
7 [field of study] or [field of study].
8
9 I am far from squeamish, and as such you are just as likely to find
10 me knee deep in a swamp catching frogs as in the kitchen cooking
11 or baking (things I also enjoy). I have also taken two years of
12 studio arts, studying painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking and
13 ceramics. Currently I am taking a year off school and working, I
14 plan to return to school in the fall. I am working part time at a
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53

I am a caring and sensitive person with a great sense of humor. I love the outdoors and the sense of beauty and wonder that they can impart. I spend a decent chunk of my time outside, mostly gardening these days. I value intelligence and integrity highly. I believe that trust is the backbone of any relationship, and that laughter actually is pretty damned good medicine. I want to make ripples with my life, good ripples. Take the knowledge and love of nature that I have and educate others, spread that appreciation and respect and hope, that like a stone dropped in a pond, my ripples will spread.

This profile contained predominately “I” statements as indicated by the bold words. All of the “I” statements present Bethany’s interests and values directly. The only instance in which she references the reader is more casual and generic (“…and as such you are just as likely to find…” – Line 9). Bethany also used metaphors and poetic descriptions to present herself as seen in lines 22-26. This profile contained all the characteristics of the “Who I Am” profiles, in particular that this woman presented primarily her own voice and without the reference to “Who I Am With You” or “Who You Are” (as potential partner).

Profile 0826 – “Laura”, age 26:

I wake up smiling. Almost every morning.
I believe in being responsible, but also in enjoying life. I laugh all the time.
I'm passionate about my work. I work with youth, and I love it! In fact it brought me back from living in [a country], where I was quite happy in the sun, sand and surf.
I'm very social. I like to host, visit, meet up, whatever. Usually I'm of the mind set: the more the merrier.
I'm a double leo with an aries moon. If you know what that means, great. If you don't, no matter.
I'm caring, kind, loving, attentive, fun, adventurous, and well balanced.
I love heading out of the city on weekends, even if it's just a little ways. I like to be in the woods, the water or cozied up in a tent. I grew up all over the place, and enjoy a change of scenery sometimes. Although I like [city] and am settled here for now, I will eventually be looking for a smaller community to live in and contribute to.

I'm the kind of person friends come to with their problems, and I'm very trustworthy.

As far as music goes, I'm a lover. Hip-hop (old school, Chali 2na, Roots), dubstep, folk, reggae, dance hall, electronica (bassnectar, bonobo, shpongle), a man and his guitar, some oldies, and once in a while something on the top fortes list.

Laura’s profile was very similar to Bethany’s in that both women predominately included “I” statements and made little reference to a romantic partner and/or relationship. Although Laura’s presentation of her “I” voice did not utilize poetic descriptions or metaphors as the previous author, she did indicate her knowledge of a reader when using a generic “you” (“I'm a double leo with an aries moon. If you know what that means, great. If you don't, no matter.” – Line 13-14).

Holly’s profile was also similar to the previous two profiles, including using a generic “you”. However, there was one slight change that made this profile different from the others. At the end of the profile, Holly’s text presents a potential “someone” (“…just find someone you really like to talk to.” – Line 26-27). This indicated that this profile’s structure reflected the other end of the continuum, where the women are more interested in describing, “Who I am with You” rather than just “Who I Am”, compared to the previous two profiles (Bethany and Laura).

Based on the structural analysis, in these profiles, the women focused mainly on themselves and made little to no reference to a reader or a potential partner or relationship. This
was different compared to the profiles that reflected a more “Who I Am with You” or “Who You Are” structure, which will be described in the following sections.

**Who I am with you.** Most of the profiles structured in a way that highlighted “Who I Am with You” included three main characteristics. First, these profiles included structural sequencing, such as greetings at the beginning (“hello gentlemen,” – Georgia, Line 1; “Hey guys, how’s it going?” – Nancy, Line 1) and/or invitations to contact at the end (“Look forward to chatting soon gents!” – Georgia, Line 15; “Good luck to all of you! [name] :):)” – Nancy, Line 26-27). Secondly, these profiles incorporated a laundry list structure to talk about their interests and personal characteristics (“I love snowboarding, camping, the quad, driving without a destination, and talks about completely random things…” – Melanie, Line 13-14; “I like to play pool and sports, and go out clubbing occasionally. I have 2 tattoos. 4 piercings.” – Patricia, Line 8-9). Lastly, the main difference between these profiles and the “Who I Am” profiles was the emergence of “someone”, possibly as a potential partner, rather than a generic “you”, such as “be nice to have someone special” (Amy, Line 17). The following two profiles (Yvonne and Christina) and additional excerpts will further support the “Who I am With You” position in the continuum.

Profile 1529 – “Yvonne”, age 29:

1. **I want** to take it easy, get to know someone and see where things go. **I am** a chatty person and can hold a conversation about pretty much anything. For fun, **I like** to watch movies and hang out with friends, see family, travel, and go out for drinks/coffee and go away for a weekend. Not looking for any games - well **I do** enjoy a good boardgame, but no head games! ;)
2. **I am** open and honest and will tell it like it is and expect the same from you. **My friends** would describe me as fun-loving and easy to get along with, not afraid to try new things, and always with an ear to lend.
I love to smile, so a great sense of humour is a must. If you can make me laugh, you are half way there...

Wanna know more, just send me a message! (en francais aussi!).

The structure of this narrative places it about midway along the continuum. Although the profile mainly focused on a presentation of Yvonne’s voice, as seen by the number of “I” statements, the use of “you” and “someone” were more directed at a potential partner than it was in “Who I Am” profiles. For example, “If you can make me laugh, you are half way there” (Lines 13-14). This is presents a more formalized “you,” explicitly incorporating the person who might be reading the profile.

Other profiles positioned midway in the continuum contained this explicit reference to “you”, the potential partner. For example, Georgia wrote:

“If you know you're jerk pls just dont bother messaging me. I'm lookin for a guy who has a good head on his shoulders and is down to earth, smone who likes too have fun and enjoy chilled days aswell.” (Line 3-6)

Here, Georgia was presenting a “you” who would be rejected as a potential partner (“If you know you're jerk pls just dont bother messaging me”). Further along the continuum, the profiles were structured in a way that placed more emphasis on the potential partner.

Profile 1126 – “Christina”, age 26:

Hey there, I'd say that I am an outgoing, fun-loving and caring chick who believes balance in life is what keeps us all going. I have a great social life which includes great friends and I keep myself busy between socializing, working, working out and walking my two rescue dogs [name] and [name]. I am a HUGE animal lover and would need a man who respects my love for animals and hopefully enjoys them as well. I am happiest during all of the activities mentioned above in addition to listening to great music, dancing (usually while listening to the great music) and watching great movies.
I have always had a passion for helping people and animals, which is why I probably work in health care, and would love to find a man who respects health and animals as well. I would also love to find a man who is hardworking and educated like I am and would love to join me traveling as I love to travel. I love to exercise and be outdoors; I enjoy biking, playing tennis and softball and swimming, so if you enjoy any of those activities as well that is a bonus for me. No pressure boys :) 

This profile was structured in a way that included more description of a potential partner (e.g., “…would need a man who respects my love for animals” – Line 6; “…love to find a man who is hardworking and educated like I am” – Line 14-15). In addition, all the descriptions about the potential partner were integrated with descriptions about Christina herself (“I enjoy biking, playing tennis and softball and swimming, so if you enjoy any of those activities as well that is a bonus for me.” – Line 17-19). In this example, Christina was still presenting her voice, but introducing the qualities of a potential partner in relation to her interests.

Based on the structural analysis, the profiles at this point in the continuum, “Who I Am with You”, were structured in a manner that presents the woman’s voice in relation to a potential partner. However, the closer the profiles were positioned to the “Who You Are” end of the continuum, the fuller descriptions of the potential partner were and the less integration between the woman’s interests and those of her potential partner.

Who you are. The “Who You Are” profiles were similar in some ways to the “Who I am With You” profiles; however the main characteristic of these profiles were more emphasis and description about the potential partner. In the structural categories described to this point, the potential partner was simply referred to as “someone” with little description. In the following two profiles (Willow and Jessica), alongside their own voices, the text presents a more vivid presence of the potential partner.
Profile 1429 – “Willow”, age 29:

I’m an extremely laid back, down to earth girl. I love life and don’t take anything for granted. I try not to take things too seriously, I love to laugh and at times that means laughing at myself. I’m not a prissy girl, I’m happiest in jeans, t-shirt and flip flops.

I’m a very social person, I love spending time with my friends. As much as I love my friends, I also like getting some down time so I can relax watching movies, reading and gardening. I absolutely love playing slo pitch, I play year round. During the summer when I’m not playing ball I like to sneak in a round of golf or head off to the lake for some R&R in my hammock. During the winter, I’m really busy with work, but I’m going to give curling a shot this year. I also like ice fishing, but it’s a rare moment that I drop my line in the water, I’d rather sit there sipping a drink or five and enjoy the outdoors.

I love animals and feel like I’m one of the luckiest people alive because my career involves working with animals. I’m a [profession], working in the field of [field of study].

I have a great career, I don’t think it’s possible to have a better group of friends, I’m just looking for the last piece of the puzzle in my life, someone to share it with. I don’t want to get married right away, but I am ready to settle down.

What am I looking? Quite simply, I’m looking for my partner in life. I’m looking for someone to enjoy life together. I want someone to laugh and smile with me during the good times. I want someone who wants to go for a round of golf, watch a hockey game, or sit at home and cuddle on the couch and watch a movie, football game or hockey game. Life isn’t always perfect, so I’m looking for someone who’ll hold my hand and make me smile when I’m going through the rough patches that creep up from time to time. I want someone who can carry on an intelligent conversation but loves to laugh and have a good time.

In this profile, the shift from Willow’s presentation of her own voice in the beginning to presenting her potential partner at the end was more segregated and defined compared to profiles in the “Who I am With You” position on the continuum. This profile structure was typical for the profiles closer to the “Who You Are” end of the continuum in that the women presented their
“I” voice more prominently at the beginning, followed by inclusion of their potential partner.

Profiles that were positioned closer to the “You” end of the continuum contained more exclusive focus on the potential partner, as seen in the profile below.

Profile 0328 – “Jessica”, age 28:

1 Please to meet you....
2
3 I have an outgoing and friendly personality and yet I cherish my 
4 privacy. I love to laugh and I've been known to be sarcastic since I 
5 love to make the people laugh. I love to spend time with friends & 
6 family and would love to find someone who has the same values 
7 and morals.
8
9 I believe that you must respect others to be respected and nothing 
10 is given in life but the harder you work, the bigger the reward. I 
11 would like to find someone who doesn't settle but can also simply 
12 go with the flow.
13
14 I’m looking for my best friend, someone to connect with and enjoy 
15 similar activities and yet maintain our status as two separate human 
16 beings and who can appreciate our individuality. Someone who can 
17 appreciate that honesty and faithfulness are the foundation of true 
18 friendship.
19
20 I’m looking for someone who appreciates me for who I am. I’m 
21 always striving to live a balance life and would like to find 
22 someone who works hard and plays even harder. I’m always up for 
23 a challenge and trying new things. I love to travel\roadtrips and 
24 recently I've "picked up" golfing and skiing. However, I 
25 appreciate my quiet time and watching movies yet my love for 
26 music inspires me to be one of those fearless ladies that sign with 
27 the tunes in the car lol. I also really enjoy being outside, camping, 
28 taking walks, going to the gym and I'm always looking for the next 
29 "adventure".
30
31 If you share the same interests, I would love to chat so drop me a 
line! Don't be shy.

In this profile there was a balance between Jessica’s description of herself and the description of her potential partner and relationship. At a glance, this profile looks similar to the others in that it includes a greater focus on the woman’s voice than her potential partner.
However, close analysis demonstrated that most of the “I” statements were made with “someone” in mind (“I’m looking” – Jessica, lines 14, 20). For example, the author wrote, “I love to spend time with friends & family and would love to find someone who has the same values and morals.” (Line 5-7). Jessica started by describing herself and her values, but then connected it to something she is looking for in a potential partner. In another example, the author wrote, “I’m always striving to live a balance life and would like to find someone who works hard and plays even harder.” (Line 20-22). Similar to the previous statement, Jessica started the statement by presenting her own voice and then later included her potential partner.

Based on these integrative descriptions and other statements (“I’m looking for my best friend, someone to connect with and enjoy similar activities” – Line 14-15), Jessica was looking for a potential partner (“You”) that was similar or the same to herself (“I”).

Based on the narrative analysis, it was apparent that profiles, including Willow and Jessica’s, supported the position of “Who You Are”, which placed more emphasis on including their potential partner. Inclusion of the potential partner was more prominent the closer the profile was positioned to the “Who You Are” end of the continuum.

Summary. Examining the narrative structure of the women’s online dating profile demonstrated that a profile’s structure could place varying degrees of emphasis on the woman’s “I” voice and the inclusion of her potential partner. On one end of the continuum, the profiles were structured in a manner that emphasized the woman herself, or “I.” On the other end of this continuum, the profiles were structured to place more emphasis on the potential partner, or “You.” This emergence of this continuum demonstrated the various degrees in which these women presented their own voices in relation to their self-presentation (“Who I Am”), in the
context of initiating a relationship (“Who I Am With You”), and relative to a potential partner (“Who You Are”).

Chapter Four: Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the construction of self-presentation in 15 online dating profiles of women in their mid-to-late twenties seeking a long-term relationship with a male partner. From the narrative thematic analysis, two stories emerged with several themes in each. Within the Single Woman Story, there were four themes: Poetic and Philosophical, Idealistic, Independent, and Active; and within the Relationship Story, there were two main themes: Adventures of a New Life Stage, and Sharing a Life with Someone. From the narrative structural analysis, a continuum was evident: at one end, women focused primarily on themselves (Who I Am) and at the other end, women primarily focused on a potential partner (Who You Are). These results supported previous research on online dating and demonstrated elements of the theory of symbolic interactionism. In addition, the results build upon the literature on self-presentation in an online context, as well as interactional and meaning-making aspects of online relationship initiation. The following sections will discuss the results in the context of previous research and novel contributions.

Self-presentation in the context of mediated relationship initiation

The story of how a person meets his or her romantic partner is changing. Davis (1973) found that relationships began with meeting someone face-to-face and having an initial attraction or seeing particular qualifiers in him or her, which were typically based on the person’s physical attractiveness (Merkle and Richardson, 2000; Sprecher, 1989). Physical attractiveness was viewed as facilitating the initiation of a romantic relationship and self-disclosure as serving to
further relationship development. However, it is this process of relationship initiation that is changing due to the growing popularity of meeting romantic partners online.

Online initiations tend to be different from the face-to-face world because textual self-disclosure with accompanying photographs take the place of physical proximity during the initial attraction phase. In this context, it is easier for someone to continue to edit, manage, and fine-tune their presentation of self in order to please their audience (Ellison et al., 2006). However, unlike in face-to-face interactions where someone can adjust their presentation in response to the audience’s reaction through verbal and nonverbal cues, online dating provides little information about or feedback from the audience.

In the current study, there was evidence that the authors of online dating profiles could take varying positions from which to address their audience (members of an online dating site). Structural analysis suggested that these women varied in terms of the degree to which each woman emphasized or focused on herself in the profile versus the degree to which she focused on her potential or ideal partner. The placement and emphasis of comments about the self versus the partner can be considered on a continuum. At one end of the continuum, the structure emphasized a “Who I Am” position. At the other end of the continuum, the profile structure emphasized a “Who You Are” position.

The continuum and the various positions along the continuum are interesting given the instructions the online dating site provided for members in the “About Me” section. Specifically, they were asked to freely describe *themselves*. Members were not asked to include a description about what they would like in a relationship or partner. Based on these instructions, the majority of the profiles should have been structured in way that emphasized the “Who I Am” position, providing little description or acknowledgment of the audience. Although a few profiles were
structured in this way, the majority of the profiles were structured so as to include and even emphasize “Who You Are” by addressing the audience or reader as the potential partner.

The following sections will review the various positions of the continuum derived from the structural analysis incorporating the results of the thematic analysis while making links to theory and previous research. In addition, the implications of these results for enhancing understanding of the phenomenon of online dating, relationship initiation, and human social interaction through the construction of self-presentations will be discussed.

**Who I Am.** Considering the process of relationship initiation in an online dating context, the profiles’ structures that emphasized “Who I Am” were closely aligned with self. These profiles included rich, detailed, poetic language and referred to the reader with a generic “you.” Profiles that contained the “poetic and philosophical” theme also contained poetic descriptions of self focused exclusively on the woman herself, did not include descriptions about the audience, and more specifically a potential partner or relationship. A simplistic reason for an emphasis on “Who I Am” is that the instructions on the online dating website requested that members describe *themselves* in the “About Me” section. However, simply following these instructions does not explain the use of poetic language and acknowledging a generic “you.”

An exclusive focus on one’s self could be a reflection of the social norms within the face-to-face dating world. Davis (1973) suggested that people look for qualifiers in potential partners when initiating a relationship. Online dating profiles that were positioned with a “Who I Am” perspective included poetic descriptions or anticipated qualifiers about one’s self for the reader to evaluate, just as they would in a face-to-face situation. The qualifiers may have been constructed using poetic language for several reasons. First, because there are fewer cues available online, women may have strategically decided to emphasize on the written word
(Ellison et al., 2006). Second, these women may have used qualifiers presented in poetic language to increase their credibility and to disclose more about themselves (Ellison et al., 2006; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Whitty, 2008). Essentially, the women’s profiles that included more poetic descriptions, as seen in the “Who I Am” positioning and “poetic and philosophical” theme, took advantage of this unique text-based context by using their words to created fuller descriptions of themselves.

Another aspect of these profiles was the inclusion of a generic “you” that addressed the reader and acknowledged the presence of an audience, to a lesser degree compared to the other positions on the continuum, “Who I Am with You” and “Who You Are”. Goffman (1956) maintains that self-presentation is adapted to the context and an audience. This suggests that the authors of these dating profiles were presenting themselves with attention to both the online context and the anticipated audience. Use of a generic “you” suggests the acknowledgement of an audience without defining who is included in the audience, as seen in other profiles. This raises the question about how much the variation in audience acknowledgement can impact one’s self-presentation. For instance, the use of a generic “you” may be seen as less audience acknowledgment or awareness than a description of who the audience may be or the use of “someone.” Overall, it is known that audience impacts self-presentation, but it is not known how much women take into account their audience when drafting their profiles. It is likely that women vary in this regard.

**Who I Am with You.** Most of the profiles within the current study were structured in a way that highlighted “Who I Am with You.” The main characteristic of this profile structure was the emergence of “someone,” possibly as a potential partner, rather than a generic “you.” This created a balancing act between descriptions of one’s self and someone. Perhaps having a
balanced” self-presentation would provide the opportunity to meet more people online because the presentation would appeal to a greater audience. This balance could also exist due to the context of being online. In a face-to-face interaction, a woman would be able to share information about herself as well as learn more about her potential partner through reciprocated conversation. Since these conversations do not initially occur in the context of online dating, perhaps they are mimicked by the multiple discourses within the woman’s profile. This balance or dance between these discourses was also present in the “independent” and “active” themes in the Single Woman stories, and the “adventure of a new life stage” theme in the Relationship stories.

The “independent” theme presented competing discourses. Women who authored the profiles analysed for this study described themselves as independent, strong, and self-sufficient as well as wanting to be in a relationship. Descriptions of self as independent and self-sufficient were juxtaposed with descriptions of what was undesirable in potential partners, implying negative experiences with previous partners. Despite being proud of their independence and having negative experiences with previous partners, these women were still engaging in preparing a dating profile to initiate new relationships.

Similar to the “independent” theme, the “active” theme also presented two discourses: one, a woman who is busy and in constant motion; and two, a woman who wants a relationship that would be hard to fit into her busy schedule. The inclusion of activities and a busy schedule is supported by the finding that women tend to present traits that they believe men want in a partner, such as instrumental qualities, including taking action and initiative (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). The emphasis here appears to be on quantity – presenting in list format may provide a means to appeal to a greater audience in hopes that
someone will be interested in at least one of the listed activities and/or characteristics. These results raise questions of the potential benefits of a self-presentation that emphasizes a busy lifestyle with possible connections to contemporary face-paced North American society and/or an increased emphasis on what people do, rather than who they are.

The “adventure of a new life stage” also presents two discourses about adventure; one about the adventure of a woman travelling the world on her own, and another about the adventure of settling down and finding a partner. These two discourses could be a reflection of the woman shifting from emerging adulthood into adulthood. Emerging adulthood is the development period from the ages of 18-25 in which people are no longer adolescents, but do not consider themselves adults (Arnett, 2000). Since people in this age range do not have clearly defined roles or responsibilities, this gives them the freedom and opportunity to explore their life in the areas of love, work, and worldviews as well as fully develop their identity (Arnett, 2000).

In the current study, the women shared their experiences of exploration, adventure, and travel during their previous life stage. The definition of adventure changes in the women’s adult life stage from travelling the world and having little responsibility to settling down and starting a long-term relationship. Previous research on young adults (mid-to-late twenties) suggests many of these individuals are interested in cohabitating with their partner and eventually getting married (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008).

There is little known about how women at this stage in their lives view being in a long-term relationship or the origin of this view (i.e. the woman herself, family, religion, and/or societal pressures). It would be useful to study women’s views on relationships at this life stage because it is a transitional time in a woman’s life. This transition was evident in the profiles
containing two competing discourses; being independently adventurous with little responsibility and shifting into being in a partnership with more responsibilities.

**Who You Are.** The profiles that were structured to emphasize a “Who You Are” position were similar to the “Who I am with You” structure, but added more detailed descriptions about the potential partner and/or relationship. This raises the question as to why the profiles would contain details about the partner or relationship considering the profiles are supposed to be about the person themselves. Further, face-to-face relationship initiation does not involve someone describing oneself and the person one wishes to date. The context of initiating a relationship online, compared to face-to-face, could explain this new behaviour in relationship initiation. The online dating world is vast and there are many possibilities for someone to be one’s future romantic partner. For that reason, people may want to include a description of a potential partner and/or relationship in order to narrow down the search. Whitty (2008) found that people include more detail in their profiles to find the best-suited partner for them. However, it is unknown if the benefit of more detail also applies to descriptions about the potential partner. Perhaps it is even more beneficial to include both a detailed description of one’s self as well as one’s potential partner in contrast to just a detailed description of one’s self. By providing detailed descriptions of both, it may remove some of the guesswork from the reader as to whether or not he would be an appropriate partner. Further research could examine the effects of a more detailed description of one’s self and a potential partner.

Women may also include descriptions about the partner and/or relationship to take advantage of the increased level of control online compared to the face-to-face dating world. Ellison et al.’s (2006) study found that participants of online dating sites were aware of their ability to have greater control over the construction and management of their self-presentation. In
the online context of having more control and having more potential partners to select from compared to face-to-face interactions, women can be more particular and detailed about their potential partner as well as take more control and initiative in their love life. Some women authors of the dating profiles examined in this study included descriptions about their potential partner and/or relationship intertwined with descriptions of themselves. Morgan et al. (2010) found that people include the same characteristics within their self-descriptions and the descriptions of their preferred partner. For example, a woman would say that she likes to camp and would hope that her partner also likes to camp. This implies that people are interested in dating people who have similar interests as them (Morgan et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2004).

Several of these women included in their profile that they did not know what to write about themselves or that it was an uncomfortable activity. These women may have not known what to say about themselves and found it easier to describe a fictional potential partner that they would be interested in meeting. Research about the woman’s experience in developing her profile and having to describe herself would need to be conducted to support this hypothesis. In these profiles in which “Who You Are” was emphasized the women described their potential partner and/or relationship using popular romanticized concepts as seen in the “idealistic” and “sharing a life with someone” themes. A theory of relationship development provides a guide for interpreting these themes. Knee (1998) discussed two perspectives about relationship development: one, that relationships are fixed and destined, and two, that relationships are developed over time through growth. This “destined relationship” perspective is represented in the “idealistic” theme through the use of idealistic phrases such as, “the one”, “Mr. Right”, “the perfect guy” and “the big catch” and the “sharing a life with someone” theme
because the woman sees the relationship as a means of connecting with someone and completing her life. In addition, the “destined relationship” perspective invites one to search for the “perfect mate” and discard those that are “less-than-perfect” (Knee, 1998). The online dating environment allows for this process of elimination because one has access to thousands of potential partners and can be very particular about who they want and do not want to interact with in order to find their “perfect mate.” Perhaps the women who included these idealistic terms in their profile were aware of the potential to find the “perfect mate” based on the unique environment of online dating and the vast number of potential partners, and therefore, were not willing to settle for “less-than-perfect.”

The use of idealistic terms and the concept of sharing a life with someone may also be based on where and how these women learned about romantic relationships. Bachen and Illouz (1996) found that young people’s (aged 8-17) concepts of romance were based on visual schemas from movies, television and advertisements. Before these young people had a relationship of their own, they had already formed ideas for what was socially acceptable or expected in a romantic relationship based on what they had witnessed in the media. Many of these romantic schemas included idealized ideas, such as “love at first sight” in Disney movies (Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund, 2003), and women finding “the right one” in popular films targeted for young adults (Signorielli, 1997). Furthermore, Wray and Steele (2002) found that Seventeen, a popular magazine for adolescents and young adults, gave stories about finding the “ideal guy” primary placement on the cover and within magazine. These concepts and language about romantic relationships are available in the media to people of all ages. These concepts have now permeated some women’s online dating profiles in their search for “the one” online.
Strengths and Limitations

**Strengths.** The current study was the first to use both thematic and structural narrative analysis to study online dating profiles. This particular dual approach resulted in new findings about self-presentation in online dating through analytic treatment of these profiles as narratives and the inclusion of rigorous multiple readings and reflexivity. Utilizing two methods of analysis determined that structure, or how the story was told, has a significant influence on how the content and themes are understood. This illuminated a continuum of self-presentations demonstrating that the online profiles reflect both the author’s intentions and varying considerations of audience (their presence alone and/or who comprises the audience).

Studying the profiles themselves was important to furthering knowledge about the phenomenon of online dating as well as self-presentation in a naturalistic setting. Researchers who studied online dating typically interviewed members of online dating sites (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Whitty, 2008) or conducted simulated online dating scenarios in a lab (Bargh, McKenna, Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002). These studies provided knowledge about people’s experiences, tendencies, assumptions and understandings about the online dating world. However, the profiles themselves represent these reflections in practice. The profiles are naturalistic data, meaning that the data was not elicited or impacted by the researcher. In addition, the current study demonstrated that there is information we can learn from the profiles about online dating and self-presentation that may not be elicited in an interview.

Another strength of the study was the researcher’s subjectivist position and related experiences. From a subjectivist perspective, the researcher determined what was known about self-presentation in online dating profiles based on her experiences, acknowledging that others
may have a different perspective as a part of the research process (Daly, 2007; Dupuis, 1999). This process begins when the researcher selects a research topic, which tends to be a personal interest to them. For the current study, the researcher had selected this topic based on her own experiences with constructing an online dating profile in the hopes of finding a partner. The researcher also shared demographic characteristics with the women whose profiles were collected for the study, with regards to age, gender, seeking male partner, and residing in Canada. The researcher’s personal experiences with constructing an online dating profile allowed her to be aware the greater context, such feelings of vulnerability and courage, when it comes to constructing and publicly posting an online dating profile. The researcher was able to use her experiences throughout the multiple readings and reflections that shaped the results of the current study. For example, when the continuum was identified by the researcher, the researcher reflected on her own profile, where it would have been situated in the continuum, and if her current explanation fit with her own experience of constructing her profile. The benefit of the researcher having her own experiences with online dating profiles is it constructs an enriched set of outcomes that would not have existed without the researcher’s own experiences.

Limitations. There are several noteworthy limitations of the current study. First, the choice to use Plenty of Fish may have impacted the results. Plenty of Fish is a free service, which may attract people who are not willing to make a stronger commitment to find a partner online. For example, if someone wanted to try online dating without making a firm commitment, they would use a free site like Plenty of Fish, rather than a site like e-Harmony in which members have to pay a fee to use the services.

The choice to collect online dating profiles with narrow criteria, including age, gender, sexual orientation, and geographical location, limits the generalizability of these findings. With
that said, this study may encourage researchers to develop other studies with slightly different sampling criteria. For example, some of the results were linked to North American societal norms and traditions that are different than those in other countries. Future studies could compare the themes and structures of the profile’s narratives from different countries or even social locations to understand how one’s culture impacts their self-presentation when finding a partner online.

A final limitation of the study was the lack of attention given to the photographs included in the women’s profiles. The profiles were collected with the original intention to do a visual narrative analysis of the photographs to investigate the story the photograph tells and how it compliments or contradicts the textual aspects of the profiles. The choice to not conduct a visual analysis was due to time constraints. Although narrative thematic and structural analysis provided rich details about women’s self-presentations online in the context of textual presentation alongside photographs, an analysis of the photographs themselves would be an added layer of detail.

**Future Research and Implications**

**Future Research.** The results of this study support previous research with respect to the influence the online dating context has on the construction of self-presentation. Participants of previous studies reported that the context of online dating, including fewer cues, greater control of editing, and increased self-disclosure, impact the construction of the online self-presentations (Ellison et al., 2006; Whitty, 2008). In addition, one’s demographic and personal characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, life stage, relationship interests) (Morgan et al., 2010) also impact what one includes in his or her profile and how they shape their self-presentation. The current study extended these findings by taking into account the impact that audience awareness has on
one’s self-presentation, such as an emphasis on one’s self or a potential partner. In addition, these findings and the limitations of the study introduced ideas for future research about the integration of photographs, the choice to go online, the connection between poetic language and emphasis on self, and self-presentation on other dating sites and with different demographics.

Future studies could examine the interaction between the photographs and written text in online dating profiles using visual narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). Previous research found that women seeking men in personal ads tended to include descriptions about their physical attributes (Koestner & Wheeler, 1988; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). Nevertheless, in the current study this was not the case, possibly due to the inclusion of photographs in the online profiles. In addition, there has been some research on online dating profile photographs and how they are enhanced to make the person look more desirable (Hancock & Toma, 2009; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). However, the relationship between the textual presentation and visual presentation has not yet been investigated. This would add to the results from the current study in creating a more full understanding of self-presentation in the context of seeking a partner online.

Further research could explore questions related to how societal norms influence competing discourses contained within women’s online dating profiles, such as wanting to be independent and in a relationship. Perhaps societal norms influence women to think that they should be entering into a long-term relationship at this stage in their lives at the same time that they are establishing their independence (i.e. not living with parents, traveling, starting new job, and life experiences (Arnett, 2000)). In addition, research could examine why women choose to use an online dating, specifically, to initiate a long-term relationship (e.g., to gain control of their love life, or to find a partner rather than be found).
The results of the study raised some questions with regards to connection between and emphasis on one’s self and the use of poetic and philosophical language. Further research could investigate women’s motivations for particular writing styles and descriptions and/or examine the differences in writing style when women are asked, in a laboratory setting, to describe themselves or themselves and their ideal romantic partner.

Given the findings of the current study that the online audience can influence self-presentation, it would be valuable to investigate other online dating contexts such as e-Harmony, where members are matched with each other. In this different context, where less emphasis is on the person finding a partner on their own, there might be less “you” or “someone” and more “I” or “me” in the structure of the profiles. In addition, a person may include less detail about himself or herself because they have already been matched with their most appropriate partners based on a survey. These differences would support the theory of symbolic interactionism that the context of social situations can impact the construction and management of one’s self-presentation.

Further consideration of age-related factors, and broader study of different groups of online dating site users would extend knowledge about the influence of age, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Women within a later life stage, for example, might express stories about “starting over” after a divorce or looking to “settle down” with a husband and children. Jagger (2005) found those women 45 years and older accessed online dating services more than their counterparts 34 years and younger. This trend is the opposite for men. Investigating the ways in which demographics characteristics influence self-presentation could provide insight into what people of different ages or genders consider necessary to include in their profiles when finding a partner online. Further, the benefit of studying online dating profiles on an online dating site is
the presence of a search engine that allows anyone to narrow down their search based on particular characteristics. Therefore, future studies on online dating profiles can easily look at a variety of different demographic characteristics.

**Implications.** Online dating has become increasingly popular in Canada since it was introduced in 1996 (Brym & Lenton, 2003). Concepts and theories about mate selection and relationship initiation are changing and evolving due to this new, convenient method of meeting people. In the online dating world, there is less focus on physical attractiveness and more on self-disclosure to unknown people because there is more emphasis on the written profile, perhaps alongside photographs. The current study demonstrates that there are many ways (content and structure) in which a woman can present herself using textual descriptions in an online dating profile. There were some women who used the textual context of online dating to their advantage and included more detail and depth to their descriptions, such as incorporating their values, beliefs, and personal philosophies. These results could help women in constructing an online dating profile by encouraging them to not only describe what they are interested in, but *why* they are interested in it. In doing so, this would set the profile apart from the others and provide the reader with more insight into who the woman is and if she could be a potential romantic partner. In addition, these results may encourage women to include descriptions about their potential partner and relationship.

Findings from this study could also help with designing new or improving current online dating sites. For example, Plenty of Fish invites people to write about themselves with little direction about what would be beneficial to include to increase one’s chances of finding a partner. This freedom for members can be advantageous for producing more unique profiles based on the varying content and how it is organized. However, Plenty of Fish could offer
suggestions to its members as to what to write, including the suggestion to describe *why* certain activities or jobs are of interest to the person, or perhaps explicitly note that a description of desired partner characteristics is appropriate or beneficial to include. Adding these suggestions to the ‘About Me’ section would not only be helpful to the members, but also helpful with the site’s success.

Another implication for social change is the growing phenomenon of publicly posted self-presentations on social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Less than two decades ago, it would have been unusual to post your life online, including pictures, interests/activities, whereabouts, and/or what was on your mind. The idea that people beyond your circle of friends and family, neighbours, and work/school colleagues could know who you are was unimaginable, and undesirable. However, today, people are becoming more comfortable with describing themselves in public spaces without knowing their audience. This raises the question as to what and how self-presentations are constructed without social interaction with an audience, a component to the theory of symbolic interactionism. The current study considers how one’s self-presentation can change without knowing or acknowledging the specific audience, which is the beginning of a change in how we understand human social interactions.

Overall, this study contributes to our evolving understanding of social interaction, whether it is initiating a romantic relationship on Plenty of Fish, connecting with your high school friends over Facebook, or posting your feelings about the latest election on Twitter. The Internet and technology are changing the way we interact with each other and therefore, impacting the ways in which we present ourselves socially. This study is a valuable
demonstration of how self-presentation is constructed in the dawn of this rapidly changing, increasingly more “social” world.
References


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As used in this Agreement, “we” and “us” means Plentyoffish or any successor or assign of Plentyoffish.

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OVERVIEW

This Terms of Use Agreement (the “Agreement”) sets forth the terms and conditions which apply to your use of the Plentyoffish.com website and all services offered by Plentyoffish. By completing the subscription process you are indicating that you agree to be bound by all of the terms in this Agreement. Please print and keep a copy of this Agreement for your records.

We reserve the right, at any time, to change or modify the terms and conditions applicable to your subscription. Such changes will become effective upon notification, which we may effect by sending you notice by email and posting a revised Agreement on this website, which you can access at any time using the “Terms of Use” link. Your continued use of our service after notification of such a change has been sent shall be deemed to constitute acceptance by you of any such changes, modifications, additions or deletions. You agree to review this Agreement periodically to be aware of any such revisions.

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You must be 18 years of age or older to visit or use this website in any manner. By visiting Plentyoffish.com or accepting these Terms of Use, you represent and warrant to Plentyoffish that you are 18 years of age or older, and that you have the right, authority and capacity to agree to and abide by these Terms of Use. You also represent and warrant to Plentyoffish that you will use this website in a manner consistent with any and all applicable laws and regulations.

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The Personal Information Protection Act (“the Act”) regulates the way private sector organizations within British Columbia, Canada collect, use, keep, secure and disclose personal information. “Personal Information” means all information about an identifiable individual. Plentyoffish recognizes the importance of privacy and recognizes the sensitivity of personal information received by us in the course of offering our service.

We recognize our professional obligation to maintain the confidentiality of our clients’ information, and recognize our obligations concerning the personal information of all individuals that we collect, use or disclose in our practice. This policy has been developed with those obligations in mind.
Plentyoffish collects personal information from you in order to create your online dating profile. Plentyoffish will not use or disclose your personal information for purposes other than those described in this policy.

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If we change our privacy policy, we will notify you.

If you have any questions with respect to our policies concerning the handling of your personal information, or if you wish to request access to, or correction of, your personal information under our care and control, please contact our Privacy Officer at: administrator *at* Plentyoffish.com

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(a) we cannot ensure the security or privacy of information you provide through the Internet and your email messages, and you release us from any and all liability in connection with the use of such information by other parties;

(b) we are not responsible for, and cannot control, the use by others of any information which you provide to them and you should use caution in selecting the personal information you provide to others through the Service; and

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You may not use the Service for any unlawful purpose. If you use this service unlawfully we will pass along all information to law enforcement. We may refuse to grant you an ID or nickname that impersonates someone else, is protected by trade-mark or proprietary law, or is vulgar or otherwise offensive, as determined by us in our sole discretion.

We do not share any personal information with third parties, and we do not send advertising to our members.

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This Agreement constitutes your agreement with Plentyoffish with respect to your use of the Service. You must agree to abide by all of the terms and conditions contained in this Agreement in order to become or remain an authorized user of the Service.

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Your right to use the Service is subject to any limitations, conditions and restrictions established by us from time to time, in our sole discretion. We may alter, suspend or discontinue any aspect of the Service at any time, including the availability of any Service feature, database or content. We may also impose
limits on certain features and aspects of the Service or restrict your access to parts or all of the Service without notice or liability.

CODE OF CONDUCT

You agree to use the Service in accordance with the following Code of Conduct:

a. you will keep all information provided to you through the Service as private and confidential and will not give such information to anyone without the permission of the person who provided it to you;

b. you will not use the Service to engage in any form of harassment or offensive behavior, including but not limited to the posting of communications, pictures or recordings which contain libelous, slanderous, abusive or defamatory statements, or racist, pornographic, obscene, or offensive language;

c. you will not forward chain letters through the Service;

d. you will not use the Service to infringe the privacy rights, property rights, or any other rights of any person;

e. you will not post messages, pictures or recordings or use the Service in any way which

i. violates, plagiarizes or infringes upon the rights of any third party, including but not limited to any copyright or trade-mark law, privacy or other personal or proprietary rights, or

ii. is fraudulent or otherwise unlawful or violates any law; and

f. you will not use the Service to distribute, promote or otherwise publish any material containing any solicitation for funds, advertising or solicitation for goods or services.

g. you will not use the Service to distribute or upload any virus, trojan horses or do anything else that might cause harm to the Service, Plentyofish systems or to other members' systems in any way.

h. you will not post or transmit in any manner any contact information including, but not limited to, email addresses, "instant messenger" nicknames, telephone numbers, postal addresses, URLs, or full names through your publicly posted information.

i. you will not cause the Service to be accessed through an automated or robotic means, including but not limited to the rapid access of the site as in a denial-of-service attack. Such restriction shall not apply to legitimate search engine activity which does not place an unreasonable burden on the Service.

j. you will not use a third-party application such as a mobile smart phone application, social media or other Web page widget, or any other such mobile, social media, Web, or desktop application to access the Service, except where such application is either provided by us or endorsed by us. Such restriction shall not apply to a browser application which merely displays the pages of the Service in their entirety without modification or reformulation of content.

MONITORING OF INFORMATION

We reserve the right to monitor all advertisements, public postings and messages to ensure that they conform to content guidelines that are monitored by us and subject to change from time to time. To learn more about this behavioral advertising practice or to opt-out of this type of advertising, you can visit
REMOVAL OF INFORMATION

While we do not and cannot review every message or other material posted or sent by users of the Service, and are not responsible for any content of these messages or materials, we reserve the right, but are not obligated, to delete, move, or edit messages or materials, including without limitation profiles, public postings and messages, that we, in our sole discretion, deem to violate the Code of Conduct set out above or any other applicable content guidelines, or to be otherwise unacceptable. You shall remain solely responsible for the content of profiles, public postings, messages and other materials you may upload to the Service or users of the Service.

TERMINATION OF ACCESS TO SERVICE

We may, in our sole discretion, terminate or suspend your access to all or part of the Service at any time, with or without notice, for any reason, including, without limitation, breach of this Agreement. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, any fraudulent, abusive, or otherwise illegal activity, or that may otherwise affect the enjoyment of the Service or the Internet by others may be grounds for termination of your access to all or part of the Service at our sole discretion, and you may be referred to appropriate law enforcement agencies.

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no responsibility

You acknowledge that we are not responsible for suspension of the Service, regardless of the cause of the interruption or suspension.

security

Your account is private and should not be used by anyone other than you. You are responsible for all usage or activity on the Service by users using your password, including but not limited to use of your password by any third-party.

external links

The Service may from time to time contain links to other Internet sites and resources ("External Links"). You acknowledge that we are not responsible for, and have no liability as a result of the availability of External Links or their contents. We suggest that you review the terms of use and privacy statements of such External Links prior to using them.

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You hereby agree to indemnify, defend and hold harmless Plentyoffish and all officers, directors, owners, agents, information providers, affiliates, licensors and licensees (collectively, the "Indemnified Parties") from and against any and all liability and costs, including, without limitation, reasonable attorneys' fees, incurred by the Indemnified Parties in connection with any claim arising out of any breach by you of this Agreement or the foregoing representations, warranties and covenants. You shall cooperate as fully as reasonably required in the defense of any such claim. Plentyoffish reserves the right, at its own expense, to assume the exclusive defense and control of any matter subject to indemnification by you.

MISCELLANEOUS

This Agreement represents the entire agreement between you and Plentyoffish regarding the use of our services and supersedes any other agreement or understanding on the subject matter. This Agreement, your rights and obligations, and all actions contemplated by this Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the Province of British Columbia, Canada. As a condition of using Plentyoffish.com's services, each user agrees that any and all disputes and causes of action arising out of or connected with Plentyoffish.com, shall be resolved through arbitration, with such arbitration to be held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Additionally, except where prohibited by law, as a condition of using Plentyoffish.com services, you agree that any and all disputes and causes of action arising out of or connected to our services shall be resolved individually, without resort to any form of class action. You also agree that regardless of any statute or law to the contrary, any claim or cause of action arising from or related to the use of Plentyoffish.com must be filed within one (1) year after such claim or cause of action arose or be forever barred. The failure of either party to exercise in any respect any right provided for herein shall not be deemed a waiver of any further rights hereunder.

If any provision of this Agreement is found to be unenforceable or invalid, that provision shall be limited or eliminated to the minimum extent necessary so that this Agreement shall otherwise remain in full force and effect and be enforceable. This Agreement is not assignable, transferable or sublicensable without the prior written consent of Plentyoffish. Plentyoffish may assign this Agreement in whole or in part. No agency, partnership, joint venture, or employment is created as a result of this Agreement. Headings are for convenience only and have no legal or contractual effect. All notices under this Agreement shall be in writing and shall be deemed to have been duly given when receipt is electronically confirmed, if transmitted by facsimile or email or upon receipt, if sent by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested.

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In addition to the free services provided on the Plentyoffish.com Web site, certain services are offered which require payment for service. Where payment is required, the following additional terms and conditions will apply

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Plentyoffish will use the credit card information you provide to bill you for goods and services. By registering for a for-fee service and providing your credit card details, you agree to be billed by us for your for-fee service in advance. Plentyoffish will not share your financial information with third-parties, except as necessary to process your payment. By providing your credit card details to us, you consent to and authorize us to provide your credit card details to such credit card processors and financial institutions as are necessary to process your payment.

TERMINATION OF SERVICES FOR NON-PAYMENT
Where payment is required for a service and we are unable to charge your credit card for any reason, we may discontinue any and all service to you either temporarily or permanently.

CANCELLATION OF SERVICES

You may request cancellation of services of any Plentyoffish service at any time. Where, however, a fee has been paid for a service, all such payments for service are non-refundable. Where billing for a service is recurring on a monthly, yearly or other periodic basis, the unused portion of the current service period will not be refunded.

MODIFICATIONS

We may modify this Agreement from time to time. Notification of changes in this Agreement will be posted on the Service or sent via electronic mail, as we may determine in our sole discretion. If you do not agree to any modifications, you should terminate your use of the Service. Your continued use of the Service now, or following the posting of notice of any changes in this Agreement, will constitute a binding acceptance by you of this Agreement, or any subsequent modifications.

DISCLOSURE AND OTHER COMMUNICATION

We reserve the right to send electronic mail to you, for the purpose of informing you of changes or additions to the Service, or of any Plentyoffish related products and services. We reserve the right to disclose information about your usage of the Service and demographics in forms that do not reveal your personal identity.

Appendix B

Profile 0129 – “Sarah”, age 29:

I don't know how many times I have filled this thing out just to delete it a few weeks later. Hoping this version sticks or I get that "big catch" that everyone is on here looking for.

Who am I??

I am a bubbly; giggling girl who wears my emotions on my sleeve. I have been travelling on quite a bumpy backroad for awhile, I am ready to turn onto a smooth highway ...

My old roommate says that I am a great houseb!@#h, she never wanted to leave me.LOL I cook and clean but HATE doing the dishes; cleaning the toilet and folding laundry.

What am I looking for??

Someone to do my dishes; clean my toilet and fold my laundry!;)ha ha

I would love to spend my time with someone who can make me laugh with corny jokes and silly stunts. Someone who will let me cry during girlie movies and hold my hand walking down the street. I am looking for a guy who can carry a great conversation and teach me new things or enjoys going for long drives and can be content with not saying anything at all. I am looking for a man's man .. someone who likes to get dirty and go camping or 4 wheelin and who can fix things. But also a guy who can clean up and go out dancing.

I love to go out dancing and spending time with my friends but also love to stay in at home and cuddle.

But most important is the way a guy is going to respond and interact with my [child], [he/she] is my world and we're a 34package deal. I have no time for someone who will try and compete with [him/her], they won't win. Or someone who wants to turn [him/her] away. I am looking for someone to join our team.

Updated January 1, 2009

"Find the guy, who calls you beautiful instead of hot. Who calls you back when you hang up on him. Who will stay awake just to
watch you sleep. Wait for the guy who kisses your forehead. Who
wants to show you off to the world when you are in your sweats.
Who holds your hand in front of his friends. Wait for the one who
is constantly reminding you of how much he cares about you and
how lucky he is to have you. Wait for the one who turns to his
friends and says, "...that's her."
Profile 0227 – “Melanie”, age 27:

1. My major displeasure is someone who can't laugh at themselves - I tend to be sarcastic but I consider that one of my finer traits, that and the fact I'm a [origin]. I love to laugh and I love to laugh at myself – I don't take life too seriously. I love who I am and I consider myself confident and self-assured. I'm not conceded, but I don't waste time wanting to be someone else.

2. I love music, and I mean real music like The Red Hot Chili Peppers/Nirvana/Johnny Cash (absolute favourites) and there's Oasis, Kings of Leon, Our Lady Peace, Foo Fighters, Goo Goo Dolls, Buckcherry, Fleetwood Mac, Greenday, Eric Clapton, Third Eye Blind, Velvet Revolver...the list goes on.

3. I love snowboarding, camping, the quad, driving without a destination, and talks about completely random things that leave other ppl wondering "what the ...?" I'm a random person and I love that I'm random.

4. Take me for who I am, and I am "Old Dutch Dill pickle chip" awesome.

5. * If you're someone who has photos of youself shirtless from every angle I doubt there's an angle of you I want to get to know, so don't bother. Don't send me a vulgar message and not expect to get blocked, you wanna send a distasteful/cheap message? Find a distasteful/cheap chick - I'm not it.*
Profile 0328 – “Jessica”, age 28:

1. Please to meet you....
2. I have an outgoing and friendly personality and yet I cherish my privacy. I love to laugh and I've been known to be sarcastic since I love to make the people laugh. I love to spend time with friends & family and would love to find someone who has the same values and morals.
3. I believe that you must respect others to be respected and nothing is given in life but the harder you work, the bigger the reward. I would like to find someone who doesn't settle but can also simply go with the flow.
4. I’m looking for my best friend, someone to connect with and enjoy similar activities and yet maintain our status as two separate human beings and who can appreciate our individuality. Someone who can appreciate that honesty and faithfulness are the foundation of true friendship.
5. I’m looking for someone who appreciates me for who I am. I’m always striving to live a balance life and would like to find someone who works hard and plays even harder. I’m always up for a challenge and trying new things. I love to travel\roadtrips and recently I've "picked up" golfing and skiing. However, I appreciate my quiet time and watching movies yet my love for music inspires me to be one of those fearless ladies that sign with the tunes in the car lol. I also really enjoy being outside, camping, taking walks, going to the gym and I'm always looking for the next "adventure".
6. If you share the same interests, I would love to chat so drop me a line! Don't be shy.
Profile 0427, “Tanya”, age 27:

1. Hello you,
2. What I am looking for (really simple!) : A funny, outgoing and open-minded guy. All I want is to share great moments with you.
3. Here I am, back in [city] after living la vida loca in [city] and traveling around Europe/Africa for a few years.
4. A little bit about myself:
   1. I love sharing a smile and great conversations.
   2. I enjoy travelling, discovering new cultures and meeting new people.
   3. I am really open-minded and it's always a real pleasure for me to discover a new rythm of life (food, music, culture, people, etc.)
   4. I am a [ethnicity/nationality] and I also speak Spanish and trying to learn Kreyol, Igbo and Arabic.
   5. I enjoy dancing Kompa, Zouk and some African moves!
   6. I have the opportunity to work in the field of [field of study] and I love it.
6. What I am looking for (really simple!) : A funny, outgoing and open-minded guy.
7. Everything happens for a reason.
8. All I want is to share great moments and little pleasures of life with you. Let's start from there and see how/where it goes!
9. All the rest can be discussed :)
10. So, if you think you might be the great guy, let me know :)
Profile 0526 – “Amy”, age 26:

Alright here goes. This is always tough, deciding what approach to take when describing oneself. I think I'll just stick to honesty, since it seems to be what I am best at.

Always smiling, on the go and having fun. There can never be too many laughs in one day. I welcome challenges as they create opportunities for learning and growth. Love to be active with basketball running and weight lifting.

Just starting my MA in [field of study] and looking for some fun people to hang out with!

I am open to where ever my life takes me, rarely turning down an opportunity for adventure. If a door opens, you better believe I am walking through it. Not afraid of what is to come, only excited for it, although it would be nice to have someone special to experience all these new adventures with!

If you like what you have read so far, don't be shy.
Profile 0625 – “Bethany”, age 25:

I believe that a general curiosity about the universe leads to a fuller and better life. I try to take joy in the little things, since the big things don't always happen. I am in many ways a romantic, but I also have a strong cynical streak. I love animals, from the standard soft and cuddly, down to insects and amphibians. I am working towards a degree in [field of study], planning on specializing into [field of study] or [field of study].

I am far from squeamish, and as such you are just as likely to find me knee deep in a swamp catching frogs as in the kitchen cooking or baking (things I also enjoy). I have also taken two years of studio arts, studying painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking and ceramics. Currently I am taking a year off school and working, I plan to return to school in the fall. I am working part time at a [job location] and a [different job location].

I am a caring and sensitive person with a great sense of humor. I love the outdoors and the sense of beauty and wonder that they can impart. I spend a decent chunk of my time outside, mostly gardening these days. I value intelligence and integrity highly. I believe that trust is the backbone of any relationship, and that laughter actually is pretty damned good medicine. I want to make ripples with my life, good ripples. Take the knowledge and love of nature that I have and educate others, spread that appreciation and respect and hope, that like a stone dropped in a pond, my ripples will spread.
Profile 0725, “Kate”, age 25:

Everyone says there is a someone out there for you. But so far I have not had any luck. My friend told me about this site, so I thought I will give it a try.

I wouldn't say I am looking for the perfect guy, cause honestly there is no such thing as a perfect guy/woman.

About myself:
As from my description, well you have the pictures to look at (which by the way, I love taking pictures) Height: [height] :(
(though I wear high heels) but I still enjoy my runners, or flats. Love movies, Recently I have started baking, since I have sweet tooth. I do also cook.
Besides that, there is my gym (which I sometimes skip, still go frequently enough to keep in shape), during summer time I enjoy the beach, bbq's, swimming, camping, hang out with friends, bike riding.

Winter time: Well we are all busy with the Hockey season!!!

Along with all that, I still love being lazy.

About yourself:

Honest, hopefully gets along with my friends (and family when it is time to meet them). Enjoys being outdoors as well as indoors. And has time to spend with me.
Profile 0826 – “Laura”, age 26:

1  I wake up smiling. Almost every morning.
2  
3  I believe in being responsible, but also in enjoying life. I laugh all
4  the time.
5  
6  I'm passionate about my work. I work with youth, and I love it! In
7  fact it brought me back from living in [a country], where I was
8  quite happy in the sun, sand and surf.
9  
10  I'm very social. I like to host, visit, meet up, whatever. Usually I'm
11  of the mind set: the more the merrier.
12  
13  I'm a double leo with an aries moon. If you know what that means,
14  great. If you don't, no matter.
15  
16  I'm caring, kind, loving, attentive, fun, adventurous, and well
17  balanced.
18  
19  I love heading out of the city on weekends, even if it's just a little
20  ways. I like to be in the woods, the water or cozied up in a tent. I
21  grew up all over the place, and enjoy a change of scenery
22  sometimes. Although I like [city] and am settled here for now, I
23  will eventually be looking for a smaller community to live in and
24  contribute to.
25  
26  I'm the kind of person friends come to with their problems, and I'm
27  very trustworthy.
28  
29  As far as music goes, I'm a lover. Hip-hop (old school, Chali 2na,
30  Roots), dubstep, folk, reggae, dance hall, electronica (bassnectar,
31  bonobo, shpongle), a man and his guitar, some oldies, and once in a
32  while something on the top forties list.
Profile 0925 – “Nancy”, age 25:

1 Hey guys, how's it going?
2 I don't really enjoy these dating sites but I guess I will give it
3 another try, since I've got nothing much to lose.
4 I'm kinda new to [city]. Only been here for about 1 year. I'm
5 originally from [city].
6 I'm here to try to meet new people and see where it goes. I also
7 hope to make new friends. And I know my profile says that I'm
8 looking for a long-term relationship but I'm also looking for dating,
9 hanging out and make new friends.
10
11 A little about me:
12 My background is [ethnicity] but I was born in [province], Canada.
13 I'm a fun, honest, open girl. I love to have fun and enjoy life. I love
14 to hang out with my friends and family. I enjoy going out to nice
15 restaurants, going to the movies, do something fun on the
16 weekends. But I also like to relax sometimes and stay in.
17 I love to travel whenever I have time. I like to try new things.
18 My favorite meal is sushi and actually one of my favorite
19 restaurants in town in [restaurant name], that place is awesome :) 
20 Hummm, I don't know what else to say about myself that you guys
21 want to know....it's kinda weird writing about my life on here...so if
22 you are interested and want to know more about me, just message
23 me and I will be glad to reply.
24
25 Good luck to all of you!!
26 [name] :) )
Profile 1025 – “Georgia”, age 25:

1 hello gentlemen,
2 Nice to meet you I'm [name]. I am a [ethnicity] Woman. I am a fun
3 girl. I am Truly a hopeless romantiq at heart. If you kno you're jerk
4 pls just dont bother messageing me. I'm lookin for a guy who has a
5 good head on his shoulders and is down too earth, smone who likes
6 too have fun and enjoy chilled days aswell.
7 My favorite quote "live* *love *laugh", Never have regrets bc at
8 that point in time its exactly what you wanted to do.
9 I love the UFC, horses..cats..dogs..bunnies... aswell as the
10 summer.. jet skiing.. tubeing..camping.. road trips too really
11 anywer, skiing, Ice skating, Dancing ...going on holidays.. My
12 favorite place too travel so far has been Cuba.. i love just hanging
13 out, goin too the movies.. don't mind the odd party, I love too just
14 be me!
15 Don't be shy leave a message.
16 Look forward to chatting soon gents!
Hey there, I'd say that I am an outgoing, fun-loving and caring chick who believes balance in life is what keeps us all going. I have a great social life which includes great friends and I keep myself busy between socializing, working, working out and walking my two rescue dogs [name] and [name]. I am a HUGE animal lover and would need a man who respects my love for animals and hopefully enjoys them as well. I am happiest during all of the activities mentioned above in addition to listening to great music, dancing (usually while listening to the great music) and watching great movies.

I have always had a passion for helping people and animals, which is why I probably work in health care, and would love to find a man who respects health and animals as well. I would also love to find a man who is hardworking and educated like I am and would love to join me traveling as I love to travel. I love to exercise and be outdoors; I enjoy biking, playing tennis and softball and swimming, so if you enjoy any of those activities as well that is a bonus for me. No pressure boys :)
Profile 1227 – “Holly”, age 27:

I want to grow grapes and be a winemaker when I grow up. If that ever happens. The growing up part. I am leaving to study to become a winemaker and am soaking up every inkling of knowledge on [location] wine that I can whilst I'm here. This is my home, I'm happiest running around barefoot with the [same location] soil between my toes.

Turns out I'm a bit of a hippie and love laidback, easygoing and loving people. I love digging in the dirt, working with the sun on my shoulders and the soft [same location] wind in my face. I love it here, and if I have to explain it to you, you might not understand.

I have a debilitating soft spot for animals, children, old people and families. No joke.

I love to surround myself with positive, smart and inspiring people.

I love athletic challenges and exploring. Physical expression is an amazing manifestation of life, and I feel like I'm really living when I'm in a meditative, physically demanding state. Sport is beautiful.

My doggie is my baby boy, he's an [age] old [type of dog], he's my sunshine, my training partner and will probably love you instantly!

I heard some good advice from an elder woman celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary, she said just find someone you really like to talk to.
Profile 1326 – “Patricia”, age 26:

1. I'm not one for sending the first message, so feel free :-). A little
2. about me, I live on my own, raise my [child] on my own and work
3. full time. I have my own unique appeal. I'm energetic, and very
4. social. I absolutely hate to be alone. I'm generous, Very loving,
5. beautiful and can be very Flirtatious at times. I'm not a gold digger
6. girl like most I don't need your money I make my own and I
7. already have everything I want, just looking for a partner to take on
8. the world with me :). I like to play pool and sports, and go out
9. clubbing occasionally. I have 2 tattoos. 4 piercings. I don't put up
10. with peoples b.s. and drama (so if u have alot of this, plz spare me).
11. I'm a very outspoken individual and I say it how it is. I'm very
12. assertive and EXTREMELY independent. Not interested in long
13. distance relationships, so if you live in [city] please don't waste
14. your time Also not interested in one night stands or casual flings or
15. if your an army boi for various other reasons.
16.
17. A little on what I'm looking for, someone who can make me laugh
18. and smile and also realize that its the little things in life that count
19. the most. also someone who is independent and can handle his own
20. like me!!! looks aren't everything to a person but I'm a sucker for a
21. gorgeous smile. :), I'm looking to meet new people, and maybe
22. meet someone who actually appreciates and can respect a good
23. woman who has a good head on her shoulders. I guess time takes
24. and runs its course. but anyhow that's just a little about me, if you
25. wish to know more just drop me a line :0) GL FISHING
I’m an extremely laid back, down to earth girl. I love life and don’t take anything for granted. I try not to take things too seriously, I love to laugh and at times that means laughing at myself. I’m not a prissy girl, I’m happiest in jeans, t-shirt and flip flops.

I’m a very social person, I love spending time with my friends. As much as I love my friends, I also like getting some down time so I can relax watching movies, reading and gardening. I absolutely love playing slow pitch, I play year round. During the summer when I’m not playing ball I like to sneak in a round of golf or head off to the lake for some R&R in my hammock. During the winter, I’m really busy with work, but I’m going to give curling a shot this year. I also like ice fishing, but it’s a rare moment that I drop my line in the water, I’d rather sit there sipping a drink or five and enjoy the outdoors.

I love animals and feel like I’m one of the luckiest people alive because my career involves working with animals. I’m a [profession], working in the field of [field of study].

I have a great career, I don’t think it’s possible to have a better group of friends, I’m just looking for the last piece of the puzzle in my life, someone to share it with. I don’t want to get married right away, but I am ready to settle down.

What am I looking? Quite simply, I’m looking for my partner in life. I’m looking for someone to enjoy life together. I want someone to laugh and smile with me during the good times. I want someone who wants to go for a round of golf, watch a hockey game, or sit at home and cuddle on the couch and watch a movie, football game or hockey game. Life isn’t always perfect, so I’m looking for someone who’ll hold my hand and make me smile when I’m going through the rough patches that creep up from time to time. I want someone who can carry on an intelligent conversation but loves to laugh and have a good time.
Profile 1529 – “Yvonne”, age 29:

1 I want to take it easy, get to know someone and see where things
2 go. I am a chatty person and can hold a conversation about pretty
3 much anything. For fun, I like to watch movies and hang out with
4 friends, see family, travel, and go out for drinks/coffee and go
5 away for a weekend. Not looking for any games - well I do enjoy a
6 good boardgame, but no head games! ;)
7
8 I am open and honest and will tell it like it is and expect the same
9 from you. My friends would describe me as fun-loving and easy to
10 get along with, not afraid to try new things, and always with an ear
11 to lend.
12
13 I love to smile, so a great sense of humour is a must. If you can
14 make me laugh, you are half way there...
15
16 Wanna know more, just send me a message! (en francais aussi!).
Table 1.

*Thematic Analysis Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile #</th>
<th>Single Woman Story</th>
<th>Relationship Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetic</td>
<td>Idealistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0129 – Sarah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0227 – Melanie</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0328 – Jessica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0427 – Tanya</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>0526 – Amy</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0725 – Kate</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>0826 – Laura</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0925 – Nancy</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1025 – Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1126 - Christina</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1227 – Holly</td>
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<tr>
<td>1326 – Patricia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1429 – Willow</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1529 - Yvonne</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘X’ indicates a profile that contains one theme within a story
‘x’ indicates a profile that contains two themes within a story
Table 2.

*Number of Profiles that Contained Each Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative title</th>
<th>Number of profiles containing narrative</th>
<th>Number of profiles with one theme (within same narrative)</th>
<th>Number of profiles with two themes (within same narrative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Woman Story</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Story</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Structural analysis continuum with the profiles (4-digit numbers) listed in order based on the degree of emphasis on one's self (Who I Am) and one's potential partner (Who You Are).