CASING PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

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Seeking a Last First Date: Strategic Self-Disclosure and Self-Presentation as Persuasion in Initial Online Dating Interactions

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The Internet today is central in communication functions, such as establishing initial interactions, maintaining early and subsequent contacts, and providing outlets for self-disclosure and self-presentation relevant to relationship initiation and development. Today's busy singles are avoiding traditional bar scenes and increasingly turning to Internet services to find a partner. Popular dating websites include, but are not limited to, okcupid.com and pof.com (Plenty of Fish), as well as for fee websites such as eHarmony.com and match.com. Plenty of Fish claims 40,000 new singles and over seven million conversations per day. Match.com emphasizes increased matching success along with the largest number of monthly visitors at 12 million. eHarmony.com claims that an average of 542 eHarmony members marry every day in the United States as a result of being matched using the site's compatibilities on 29 dimensions, including character and constitution, personality, emotional makeup and skills, and family and values.

Many of these dating sites rely on user-generated profiles and relatively anonymous email connections filtered through sites with potential for subsequent use of more personalized email accounts, telephone contacts, and initial face-to face-contacts. Using the Internet to meet potential romantic partners presents new challenges in regard to employing self-disclosure and self-presentation behaviors to facilitate successful relationship initiation and development. Although similar in many respects to face-to-face dating, features of the online environment, such as asynchronicity, editability, and reliance on verbal (over less controllable nonverbal) cues provide individuals with more opportunities for strategic self-disclosure and self-presentation (Walther, 1996).

There are a number of dimensions of self-disclosure that may be consciously and intentionally altered in order to selectively self-disclose (see Wheeless, 1976). These dimensions include depth or intimacy (Cozby, 1973), honesty and authenticity (Jourard, 1971; Pearce & Sharp, 1973), and valence (Gilbert & Hornenstein, 1975) of shared information. Strategic self-presentation may include visually and textually presenting or distorting aspects of you in order to appear more attractive to others (Higgins, 1987). By using strategic self-disclosure and self-presentation, you are trying to influence a potential mate to choose you from a large pool of potential online dating options.

Useful theories for examining relationship initiation and development as a persuasive process include social penetration theory and self-presentation theory. Each theory will be described in the following sections, followed by a discussion of features that influence the type of information exchanged, a hypothetical case of a couple's online dating profiles with email exchange and four possible scenarios, and discussion questions.

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory (SPT, Altman, & Taylor, 1973; Taylor, & Altman, 1987) has been used to explain the role of self-disclosure or information sharing in relationship development. Self-disclosure is defined as "an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another" (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006, p. 411; see also Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). SPT suggests that how relationships develop depends on balancing the amount and nature of rewards and costs, as well as mutual exchange (especially early in the relationship). Thus, SPT argues that relational closeness proceeds in a gradual and orderly fashion, increasing in disclosure breadth (the range of topics) and depth (level of intimacy) as a function of anticipated and future outcomes (Altman & Taylor 1973; Taylor & Altman 1987). In addition, a person engaging in self-disclosure attempts to present qualities that encourage others to view him/her as attractive (Blau, 1964). In the initial stages of relationship development, disclosing aspects of yourself that are negative does not lead to attraction or is unlikely to persuade the other to see you as a good potential mate. Therefore, it is important to withhold negative information early on, yet not wait too long to share important information. For example, you may not want to share immediately (or especially in an online profile) that your brother has been in and out of prison, but it would also be problematic to disclose that you a have a STI the morning after initial sexual intercourse.

The following sections describe components of SPT, including stages of romantic relationship development, rewards and costs associated with romantic relationship development, and the norm of reciprocity in romantic relationships.

Stages of romantic relationship development. SPT involves four sequential stages that vary in breadth and depth of information exchanged. The first stage is *orientation* and occurs during initial interactions between strangers, such as at the outset of online dating. This stage is characterized by little deep or personal sharing (e.g., sharing relatively impersonal biographical information such as height, age, and hobbies that might be listed on a profile). *Exploratory affective exchange,* the next stage, is characterized by a more friendly and relaxed atmosphere where people share a greater number of topics, such as career aspirations and family plans, and move toward increasingly intimate disclosures. *Affective exchange* relationships transition from casual interaction, or exploring, to something deeper, such as a dating partner. During the third stage, individuals learn a great deal about one another as they move toward the highest level of intimacy exchange possible. In terms of online dating, individuals are likely to talk on the phone or plan to meet face-to-face and will share private and personal matters such as lifelong dreams and desires. *Stable exchange* is the final stage of relational development. During this stage, individuals grant access to nearly all information. Few relationships reach this stage; however, if a relationship does reach this level then individuals know each other extremely well (Taylor & Altman, 1987) and may be dating exclusively, engaged, married/partnered, or long-time friends. This stage may not occur if a relationship remains exclusively online. For couples to proceed through these stages to reach long term dating they must manage their disclosure strategically.

Online dating presents an interesting application of SPT because it involves constructing a detailed profile that describes you. In contrast with face-to-face dating, online profiles do not always progress in a sequential fashion. The online profile reveals information at early stages that has both *breadth* (age, weight, education, occupation, income) and some *depth* (personality traits, family plans, aspirations, political beliefs, religious beliefs). Thus, information typically reserved for exploratory and affective stages of relationship development are shared during the orientation stage between two strangers. This early sharing may result in people viewing many profiles that they do not find attractive and making only selective efforts to explore relationship potential.

Rewards and costs. Advancement through SPT's four stages of romantic relationship development is based on a rewards and costs assessment. This assessment includes potential rewards derived from a relationship, the costs of a relationship, and the reward and cost ratio or balance perceived from prior relationships. If the perceived benefits of the relationship outweigh the costs, then the process of social penetration or the phases of relationship development will proceed. For example, person A reads person B's profile and then evaluates the potential pros/cons of a further interaction

with person B, and person B will do the same regarding person A (and may choose to respond to an inquiry or not). If the pros outweigh the cons, then one person may initiate an exchange. If the pros continue to outweigh the cons across more interactions, then an interaction may lead to exchanging phone numbers, private emails, and even face-to-face meetings.

Of particular interest for online relationship formation are *forecast rewards and costs*. Forecast rewards and costs refer to projections of future benefits and drawbacks of the relationship. Forecasting plays an important role in how relationships progress. For example, if the individual perceives rewards or a favorable forecast, such as attraction and potential symmetry of life goals, then the budding relationship progresses. In contrast, if the individual perceives costs or a forecast that is unfavorable, such as a significant incompatibility in worldview or personality or a mismatch in family plans (e.g., only one wants to have children), then the budding relationship stops or slows down in development (Altman & Taylor, 1973, pp. 46-47). In online dating, relationship progression may include moving from anonymous email to more personalized forms of mediated communication, potentially including face-to-face meeting. If the forecast is unfavorable, then the relationship may stall at one of the earlier stages, such as "liking," "winking," or initial emailing versus meeting or eventually dating.

The norm of reciprocity. Besides stages of relationship development and rewards and costs assessment, there is a general norm of reciprocity in self-disclosure processes. Specifically, you reveal something about yourself and the other person tends to reply with a similar level of information. Reciprocity in online dating may include matching the breadth and depth of personal information exchanged. For example, if one person shares about family upbringing and values, then the other may also share about childhood and future family plans, leading to further sharing by the first person. This give-and-take process may result in each party sharing increasingly deeper levels of feelings as the interaction progresses. If one party violates the norm of reciprocity (i.e., does not share after receiving disclosure) or holds back, then this imbalance may jeopardize relationship progression (Taylor & Altman, 1987).

Self-presentation Theory

Self-presentation is the process by which people control the impressions that others form of them, and it also plays an important role in relationship development. Leary and Kowalski's (1990) model describes self-presentation consisting of (a) *motivational*

processes or the desire to create particular impressions in others' minds and (b) *construction processes* or the selection and implementation of the desired impression. Features of the online environment, such as asynchronicity, editability, and absence of nonverbal cues allow individuals to strategically construct impressions, similar to how SPT described managing disclosure, specifically. The following sections describe self-presentation processes in more detail as they relate to online dating.

Motivational Processes

We care about others' impressions when those impressions are relevant to the fulfillment of our goals (Goffman, 1959), and the motivation to control others' impressions may increase as the importance of the goal increases (Beck, 1983; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In addition, anticipation of future interaction with others may increase the motivation to control how others see you (Walther & Parks, 2002). For example, if person A perceives person B as a desirable partner that s/he could potentially marry, then it is vital that B also perceives A as attractive. If person B lists a number of outdoor hobbies, then person A may highlight enjoying nature and staying active. This motivation to adapt personal characteristics to a desirable partner's preferences is similar to tailoring your resume based on a potential employer's values or the type of company.

Construction Processes

Once motivated to create particular impressions, people may alter their behaviors to affect others' impressions of them. People generally have a sense of how they want to come across to others and then implement this desired image by engaging in various self-presentation strategies (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Self-presentational strategies include, but are not limited to, spending a great deal of time creating/editing an online profile, as well as asking trusted others to review your profile in order to present the most attractive version of yourself. Two of the five determinants of impression content relevant to online self-presentation are how self-presenters see themselves (self-concept) and what they perceive that others value (target values).

Self-concept. People's persuasive efforts are tied to how they view themselves, and this is based on several forms of self-concept. Self-concept includes the *actual self,* or attributes one currently possesses, the *ideal self,* or attributes you would like to and could possess in the future but do not currently, and the *ought self,* or attributes you think you should possess given social norms and others' expectations (Higgins, 1987). The more motivated someone is to impress others, the greater the tendency to downplay the actual self and select aspects of the ideal self to present to others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 2002).

Target values. People also consider the values of the target and tailor their self presentation to those specific preferences. For example, people looking for romantic partners reporting interest in travel and adventure will try to match these potential partner preferences by highlighting desires to see different places and try thrill-seeking activities. These kinds of characteristics often correspond to the *ought self,* or how people think they should appear in order to meet the desired target's expectations.

Online dating context. Online daters strive to achieve a balance between presenting actual, ideal, and ought selves. For example, the impression formed from the profile should be flattering and positive in order to attract and appeal to a potential partner's values, yet the description must be generally realistic to avoid disappointing or violating a potential partner's expectations based on visual and verbal descriptors. Deception in online profiles makes it difficult for daters to predict whether someone who appears attractive online will also appear attractive face-to-face or whether someone accurately represent his/her hobbies and interests (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). This is consistent with SPT theory contentions that presenting and disclosing honestly is necessary for future relationship development (see Whitty, 2008).

Channel Features

Self-disclosure and self-presentation strategies used during mediated interactions can be contrasted with face-to-face interactions based on the features of the channel. Three features of the channel include *asynchronicity, editability,* and *reliance on verbal cues. Asynchronicity* refers to the time between composing textual information (e.g., personal and physical descriptors) or selecting images (photographs) and making them available to others. This delay allows people to take as much time as needed to try to create the desired impression and share, strategically, as well as to respond within an interaction. *Editability,* or the opportunity to revise an impression after it has been posted, may include updating information based on desired partner's preferences and adding or deleting photographs. *Reliance on verbal cues* (e.g., textual descriptors and verbal exchanges) removes less controllable nonverbal cues that may contradict verbal cues, such as revealing deception in physical appearance and hobbies described or social skill deficits, such as nervousness and shyness (Walther, 1996).

Daters' physical appearance is usually transmitted via photographs or textual physical-descriptors. Some physical descriptors are objective, such as height and eye

color, whereas other descriptors are subjective and open to interpretation, such as photographs posted (how recent the photo or how attractive) and body type (average build or curvy) (Walther, 2007). Photographs and textual physical-descriptors may build expectations about a potential romantic partner's attractiveness. Expectations may be violated if an old photo has been posted or features listed were approximate (e.g., 130 instead of 145 pounds). A potential romantic partner may also no longer look like the photograph(s) posted.

Textual personal-descriptors can be easily altered in order to present a favorable impression. The majority of profile-based websites direct members to respond to specific questions that incorporate both breadth (age, weight, education, occupation, income) and depth (personality traits, family plans, aspirations, political beliefs, religious beliefs) of disclosure. This may place pressure on daters to distort or misrepresent intimate pieces of information that are not usually disclosed early on in face-to-face environments. If any distortions are later viewed as untruthful, this may negatively affect relationship development.

Conclusion

Social presentation theory (SPT) and self-presentation theory describe persuasive processes that influence relationship initiation and subsequent development. SPT examines the role of breadth and depth, honesty, and valence of self-disclosure on relationship progression from orientation to stability. Self-presentation theory examines both motivational and construction processes used to portray a desired self-image. Both theories describe strategies used to appear attractive to potential romantic partners (especially early in relationship development). Online dating is an interesting context in which to apply both theories. The features of the channel, including asynchronicity, editability, and reliance on verbal cues, facilitate strategic self-disclosure and self-presentation. In this context, physical and personal descriptors take the place of face-to-face observations, making it easier to present one's ideal self or ought self versus actual self. Although favorable profile descriptors may lead to successful initial interactions, honesty enables the relationship to progress and move forward. Thus, one must balance attractiveness with authenticity for future persuasive success and relationship development. We present next two online profiles of potential online daters and options for how their exchange might proceed, followed by theoretical analysis.

Online Profiles and Interaction

Alicia's Profile

Age: 26

Location: Northern New Jersey

Education level: College Degree, pursuing Masters Degree

Occupation and Income: Elementary school teacher, $30-60,000

Sexual orientation: Heterosexual

Body type: Curvy

Height/Weight: 5'5, 130 pounds

Sense of humor: Love to laugh

Children: None, would like to in the future

Relationship status: Single, never been married

Hobbies: Music, dancing, movies, cooking, baking, and traveling

Drinking: Socially

Smoking: No, deal breaker

Music preferences: Pop, anything that can make me smile or want to dance

5 facts about me:

1. I am always smiling and think that no matter what happens you can find a silver lining.

2. I secretly wish I grew up in the south. Something about southern hospitality.

3. I would love to go swimming with dolphins.

4. My family and friends are extremely important to me.

5. I do not have baggage unless you are referring to luggage to take traveling.

Shawn's Profile

Age: 28

Location: New York City

Education level: College Degree, taking CPA exam

Occupation and Income: Accountant, $60-100,000

Sexual orientation: Heterosexual

Body type: Average build, broad shoulders

Height/Weight: 5'10, 180 pounds

Sense of humor: Self-deprecating, sarcastic

Children: None, would like to in the future

Relationship status: Single, never been married

Hobbies: Music, reading, movies, biking, and traveling

Drinking: Socially

Smoking: No

Music preferences: Rock, alternative

5 facts about me:

1. I would rather laugh than cry
2. I secretly wish I was a rock star. Something about being on stage.
3. My philosophy is: life is short, so make it count.
4. I would love to go scuba diving.
5. My family and friends are central in my life.

This section presents an initial interaction between Alicia and Shawn, followed by four options for how the exchange might proceed. Scenarios vary in persuasiveness of self-disclosure and self-presentation and have implications for relationship development. All four scenarios begin with the following interaction based on the profiles presented above:

Alicia:

SUBJECT: Moves Like Jagger

Your profile intrigued me, an accountant with a rock god alter ego. I had to find out more. I too love music, dancing, and performing. You have to see teachers after school hours singing karaoke.

Shawn:

Karaoke is always a great time to hang out and unwind with friends. My favorite instrument to play is my air guitar. It takes a confident person to put themselves out there and be able to laugh at themselves.

In addition to this guilty pleasure, I try to keep active. I live in New York City and enjoy running and biking in and around Central Park. I have always wanted to travel to Hawaii and climb the volcanoes and go scuba diving. How do you spend your time?

Alicia:

I really love my music and have a group of friends who regularly attend Zumba classes. If you have not tried it, Zumba is great way to socialize and stay in shape. I've also wanted to go to Hawaii. I never considered volcano climbing or scuba diving, but I want to swim with the dolphins in beautiful, clear blue waters. Traveling is always fun, but is more satisfying when you have a travel companion. How do you feel about traveling with somebody?

Shawn:

I completely agree that two makes everything more fun. That is why I decided to join this website. Now that my professional life is in order I would like to concentrate more on my personal life. I have had girlfriends in the past but nothing serious. Now I am ready to have a more long-lasting relationship.

Continuation Option A (Breadth, Depth, and Valence)

When reading this relational scenario, please look for inappropriate information exchange in relation to previous relationships. Think back to the earlier discussion about disclosing both too much (Cozby, 1973) and negative information (Blau, 1964) during early stages of relationship development. Consider the consequences of inappropriate, negative disclosures on attraction and relationship progression. The "next" exchange in the online interaction between Shawn and Alicia is:

Alicia:

I too have only had relationships that have been short lived. I just do not understand because I tend to be quite nice to people. I think at times I may be too sweet. It is a great quality but also a great downfall. I give everyone the benefit of the doubt but always end up empty-handed with guys cheating on me. I joined this website to meet someone I could have a more serious relationship with. I have been on here for almost 3 months and only met losers. So far it really has not been worth it. That is until I found you. We seem to be on the same page about developing a long-term committed relationship. I was so excited when I saw you wanted to have children, too. It seems to be a life-long goal we both have and could help each other fulfill maybe even soon. Would you like to meet for dinner sometime? My cell is 123-456-7890.

[Shawn never responds]

Continuation Option B (Honesty and Authenticity of Disclosure)

Recall the same initial interaction between Alicia and Shawn. When reading this scenario, please keep in mind that Alicia has been engaged in the past and that this is her first relationship after calling off the engagement. Think back to the earlier discussion of the consequences of deception on relationship development (Whitty, 2008). The "next" exchange in the online interaction between Shawn and Alicia is:

Alicia:

I too have only had relationships that have been short lived. I joined this website to meet someone I could have a more serious relationship with. We seem to be on the same page. Would you like to meet for coffee sometime? My cell is 123-456-7890.

Shawn: Looking forward to it. My cell is 987-654-3210.

[They make a plan to meet, but as the relationship progresses Shawn finds out about the past relationship and perceived misrepresentation.]

Continuation Option C (Incompatibility and Forecasting)

Recall the same initial interaction between Alicia and Shawn. When reading this scenario, please look for incompatibilities in information exchanged. Think back to the earlier discussion of forecasting (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Consider the consequences of costs, or an unfavorable forecast, on attraction and relationship progression. The "next" exchange in the online interaction between Shawn and Alicia is:

Shawn continues:

I am looking for a partner who I can start a family with. I have job security and make a very good salary. This would make it easy for my partner to stay at home and take care of my children. I had a traditional upbringing where my father was the breadwinner and my mother was the homemaker.

I was particularly drawn to your profile because of your job and hobbies. As an elementary school teacher, I am assuming you must be good with children. It is also hard to find a woman nowadays who is passionate about cooking and baking and wants to raise a family. Now I am ready to have a more long-lasting relationship and I think that can be with you. Would you like to meet for dinner sometime? My cell is 987-654-3210.

[Alicia never responds.]

Continuation Option D (Happily Ever After)

Recall the same initial interaction between Alicia and Shawn. When reading this scenario, please keep in mind that both Alicia and Shawn are engaging in honest and authentic information exchange that is consistent with the theories presented. The "next" exchange in the online interaction between Shawn and Alicia is:

Alicia:

I too have only had relationships that have been short lived. I joined this website to meet someone I could have a more serious relationship with. We seem to be on the same page. Would you like to meet for coffee sometime? My cell is 123-456-7890.

Shawn:

Looking forward to it. My cell is 987-654-3210.

[They make a plan to meet, end up dating and progressing through additional relationship stages.]

Case Study Reflection

The hypothetical profiles and four email exchange continuation options are applications of *social penetration theory* (SPT) and *self-presentation theory*. SPT has been used to explain the role of self-disclosure in relationship development. SPT suggests that how relationships develop (advancement through *stages of relationship development*) depends on *forecasting* (rewards/costs assessment) and *reciprocity* (mutual exchange). These features are especially critical early in the relationship such as the orientation and exploratory affective exchange stages that constitute online dating. Self-presentation theory has been used to describe the role of impression management in relationship development. Self-presentation theory suggests that individuals strive to create particular impressions of themselves for others (*motivational processes*) and this motivation is manifested in the selection and implementation of the desired impression (*construction processes*). Each italicized term is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs including selected text from the profiles and four email exchange continuation options.

In relation to *self-presentation theory*, Alicia's and Shawn's profiles were strategically constructed to present the most attractive version of their physical traits, personality traits, and hobbies in order to attract the desired type of romantic partner. *Motivational processes* are reflected in Shawn and Alicia's statements. For example, Shawn discusses how, "Now I am ready to have a more long-lasting relationship." Alicia states, "I joined

this website to meet someone I could have a more serious relationship with." Both Alicia and Shawn are ready for a more serious, long term romantic partner. The desire to attract a partner for marriage increases Shawn's and Alicia's motivations to construct an attractive impression. *Construction processes* include using euphemisms to portray physical descriptions and many examples of humor and positivity. Alicia describes herself as "curvy" and Shawn refers to himself as "average build, broad shoulders." Alicia mentions her optimism and resilience, "I am always smiling and think that no matter what happens you can find a silver lining." She also reveals her sense of humor, "I do not have baggage unless you are referring to luggage to take traveling." Shawn shows his playful personality including statements such as, "I secretly wish I was a rock star. Something about being on stage." Shawn's profile prompts Alicia to initiate an email exchange with him, using humor in reference to a current song in the subject line (Moves Like Jagger). Shawn decides to respond based on Alicia's profile and first email, an email that is clearly personalized and tailored to his posted profile.

Continuation option A addresses the appropriateness of disclosing too much (Cozby, 1973) and negative information (Blau, 1964) during early stages of relationship development. In terms of SPT, inappropriate and negative disclosure decreases attraction and slows down if not halts relationship progression. For example, Alicia states, "I think at times I may be too sweet. It is a great quality but also a great downfall. I give everyone the benefit of the doubt but always end up empty-handed with guys cheating on me. I joined this website to meet someone I could have a more serious relationship with. I have been on here for almost 3 months and only met losers." Alicia's inappropriate and negative disclosure about prior relationships resulted in Sean never responding and the relationship not advancing.

Continuation option B explores the role of deception on relationship progression (Whitty, 2008). According to SPT, presenting and disclosing honestly is necessary for future relationship development. Alicia had the opportunity but chose not to share the fact that she was previously engaged and this is her first relationship after calling off the engagement. On her profile, Alicia lists "single, never been married" for relationship status. During email exchanges Alicia simply states, "I too have only had relationships that have been short lived." Although one portion of Alicia's description is technically accurate (not married but engaged), Alicia could be perceived as misleading by stating that she had only been in short-term relationships. The negative, relational consequences of this representation are reflected in Shawn and Alicia meeting and the relationship progressing but breaking up after Shawn finds out the truth about Alicia's past and feels betrayed.

Continuation option C examines the effect of *incompatibilities* uncovered through information exchange on relationship progression. Based on SPT, incompatibilities (costs outweighing rewards) decrease attraction and relationship progression. In this example, Shawn may have very different ideals for a relationship structure and partner. Shawn describes, "I am looking for a partner who I can start a family with. I have job security and make a very good salary. This would make it easy for my partner to stay at home and take care of my children. I had a traditional upbringing where my father was the breadwinner and my mother was the homemaker." Alicia never responds to his description of a relationship ideal, likely indicating that she did not share his vision of a potential future relationship and probably perceived his statement as a perceived cost or unfavorable forecast. In this context, further information sharing revealed fundamental incompatibilities in relational goals, and the relationship terminated. In this context, failing to respond or to continue the exchange is equivalent to a "breakup."

Continuation option D presents the most viable scenario for potential relationship progression. Engaging in honest and authentic information exchange increases attraction and enables advancement through additional relational stages. *Reciprocity* is seen throughout Alicia's and Shawn's email exchanges. Shawn describes what he currently does and would like do in his free time, "I enjoy running and biking in and around Central Park. I have always wanted to travel to Hawaii and climb the volcanoes and go scuba diving. How do you spend your time?" Alicia matches the *breadth* (the range of topics) and *depth* (level of intimacy) of Shawn's self-disclosure, "I really love my music and have a group of friends who regularly attend Zumba classes. If you have not tried it, Zumba is great way to socialize and stay in shape. I've also wanted to go to Hawaii. I never considered volcano climbing or scuba diving, but I want to swim with the dolphins in beautiful, clear blue waters." In addition, Alicia asks a follow-up question to continue the email exchange with Shawn, "How do you feel about traveling with somebody?"Alicia and Shawn continue the mutual information exchange and end up dating with potential for a future established relationship.

Overall, the profiles and four continuation options vary in persuasiveness of self-disclosure and self-presentation and have implications for relationship development. In some cases, the progression illustrates theoretical recommendations for persuasive success but in others one participant does not manage the interaction appropriately. Online dating continues to increase and provides an appropriate context to examine application of disclosure (SPT) and impression management theories of interpersonal communication.

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe yourself if you were writing an online profile to attract a potential romantic partner? What information would you share? What would you emphasize? What would you exaggerate? What would you leave out? Why?

2. Why is a truthful and realistic online profile important for the online dating context? How is this different from other online communication contexts? How do you think Alicia lying about her past will influence her face-to-face interaction with Shawn and the likelihood of relationship development?

3. How are self-disclosure and self-presentation online similar to face-to-face communication (such as a job interview)? How are self-disclosure and self-presentation online different from face-to-face communication?

4. Based on social penetration theory and self-presentation theory, which of the four interaction options was the most and least successful? Keep in mind breadth and depth, honesty and authenticity, valence, and rewards and costs of disclosure, as well as presenting one's actual, ideal, or ought self.

5. The four interaction options leave off at the request to meet in person. Select one scenario and write a dialogue between Alicia and Shawn during their first in-person meeting.

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