The Impersonal Personal of Online Dating Services
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"It's like, 'If this doesn't go well, there are 20 other guys who look like you in my inbox.' And I'm sure they feel the same way—that there are 20 other girls who are willing to hang out, or whatever…People are seen as commodities, as opposed to individuals" (Fetters & Tiffany). That perspective has become quite pervasive in the online dating market with many believing that it has increasingly become impersonal and systematic at its core and it can be considered that way, at least in the eyes of many consumers.

This may become especially apparent when examining the backgrounds of today's dating apps and sites. With the expansive range of types of online dating and their accompanying companies-- ranging from long-lasting relationships with eHarmony and quick flings with Tinder or Bumble to specific subtypes with sites/apps like GlutenFreeSingles and ClownDating--many may be reassured by the idea that there must be no "malicious" intent behind at least one of these websites through monopolies. However, that idea would be largely incorrect; a little-known corporation by the name of IAC dominates the dating market under the name of the NASDAQ-listed subsidiary Match Group by owning around 50 online dating brands. Its list of brands includes sites/apps like Tinder, Hinge, Meetic, OkCupid, Pairs, Plenty of Fish, Azar, Hakuna, and its subsidiary's namesake, Match. While the broad range serves as a way to broaden the company's customer base, it also creates the question of whether or not the services are truly of quality. After all, when someone matches with someone for a long-term relationship, an online dating service loses a potential client. With that, there could be the potential inclination for these online dating websites to intentionally focus on making brief relationships a priority in connecting individuals. However, a competitive focus on quality does at least counterbalance that idea to a degree. In order to continue to maintain a competitive edge over their rivals, a company must provide something that makes them outstanding and in the world of online dating, often it's the quality of the service, which means being the link to long-lasting relationships rather than being the link to short-term relationships. At the very least, even the apps aimed towards people who want short-term relationships will need to provide a service that creates a sort of chemistry between clients, meaning that companies need to provide good quality service or even better in order to remain competitive in a field where there are thousands of rivals popping up each day with new gimmicks.

However, where as many as 6 out of 10 online dating service users are correct in their suspicions is in data collection. Every single action a person does online generates data and dating services are no different, if not even more greedy in collecting data from your actions. On top of the excessive data collection by dating services, many are suspect and even have suffered numerous data breaches, many devastating to the point that deaths have been attributed to them. In the words of Alessandro Acquisti, professor of information technology at Carnegie Mellon University, "'Tinder knows much more about you when studying your behaviour on the app. It knows how often you connect and at which times; the percentage of white men, black men,

Asian men you have matched; which kinds of people are interested in you; which words you use the most; how much time people spend on your picture before swiping you, and so on."' (Duportail). One may ask what purpose is all that data collected for and the answer is as fuel for the economy through advertising. Personal data is used to determine what job offers you may have access to online, how much you will have to pay for insurance, what ads you will see, whether or not you will be able to subscribe to a loan, and so much more. Personal data runs our world and online dating sites are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to that. Nevertheless, online dating services are a significant source of user data and can be considered incredibly invasive due to that. It can be said though that it's no different from any other service we use, from mobile data to online shopping, even in terms of data collection.

　　　　Along that line of thought, there is the consideration that online dating services are impersonal at their core, no matter what other "personal" services they may offer. However, there is a fatal flaw in that thinking: what exactly that impersonal factor is. No matter what one's goals are for online dating, they still come in with expectations for who they want to "connect" with, ranging from young European women to rich, tall Korean men. Those expectations factor into one's online dating experience to the point of amounting to what can only be described to be like online shopping. One searches through a catalog spanning thousands for their "perfect" match and "checks" out in a manner all too similar to looking through a catalog for the best phone model and checking out. This logical approach to online dating, referred to as applying market logic, is what often causes people to become disillusioned with online dating & related services. This logic isn't used by online dating services and is rather applied by customers looking for what they think is their perfect match. However, that logic often falls short of expectations because humans are beings with emotions who think they know what they want but truly don't. All around us, relationships seem to pop up among exact opposites and never appear among those who are thought to be perfect matches and that is where market logic falls: it cannot truly predict the randomness that is love.

　　　　While digital dating services may be considered especially invasive in their data collection, they nonetheless play an important role in many people's lives and will continue to be used as a way to create personal connections. In the end, online dating services are simply a method to connect with people in a meaningful way, similar to blind dates. All that matters is who is using it and how it is used.

Sources

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