Experiences with online dating tend to be mixed. Some people have excellent experiences with online dating that end in satisfying relationships. Others have stories filled with confusion and frustration. Thus, much like any other way to date, meeting someone online has both benefits and drawbacks. So, how does someone date online successfully? As it turns out, a simple analysis of the pros and cons of online dating can help out a great deal.

Fortunately, the psychological research just happens to have such an analysis. An Analysis of Online Dating Finkel and associates (2012) put together an extremely comprehensive review of the literature investigating various aspects of online dating. The goal of their review was to evaluate whether online dating was 1) fundamentally different from face-to-face dating and 2) was superior. Results of their assessment indicated that dating online was indeed different from "traditional" dating in a number of ways. It also provided some superior features and potential problems.

Overall, Finkel and associates (2012) found that online dating differed in three main areas:

1. Access

Pros: Online dating provided individuals with access to many more potential partners than they could often find in their daily lives. This is especially true for individuals interested in partners of

a particular type, orientation, lifestyle, or in isolated areas.

Cons: The choices of partners can become confusing and overwhelming. Without a clear plan, online daters can get stuck endlessly "shopping" for the perfect partner, rather than actually starting a satisfying relationship.

2. Matching

Pros: Many online dating sites offer various types of personality testing and matching. Such matching can help guide individuals toward dating partners who may be more compatible.

Cons: Matching is a difficult process and testing may not be accurate for everyone. In addition, people may present differently in person or change over time. So, matching may overlook potentially good partners in the process.

3. Communication

Pros: Online dating offers a number of ways to get to know a potential date before meeting in person. Such computer-mediated communication allows for safe and convenient interaction, without much risk or time commitment. For the busy professional, or the safety-conscious, such communication is an excellent way to "test" potential partners.

Cons: Communication through computers is lacking some of the information provided in face-to-face interaction. As a result, it is harder to evaluate a potential match online. Also, some of the cues and features that build attraction (like touching) cannot be accomplished through a computer. So, such computer-mediated communication may have an artificial and unemotional quality. article continues after advertisement Using Online Dating to Your Advantage Clearly, the features of online dating have both costs and benefits. So, how do you make the most of your dating experience online? Here are a few suggestions.

Access

Having choices is wonderful, but keep them manageable. If you want an actual face-to-face dating interaction, then don't get stuck endlessly "browsing" online. Instead, narrow your search to a small location, or a certain set of "must-have" features. After you narrow it down, rather than just "shopping", talk to those who make the list. To ensure success among your many options, make sure you have at least a general idea of what you're looking for in a partner, and what you are offering them too.

Matching

Online tests may not be able to tell you your perfect match, but they can help narrow down the options. In particular, such testing often identifies potential daters who would be a poor relationship partner for anyone. Thus, while you may have to date a few matches to find out who is a good fit for you, matching can help you avoid those who might be a disaster. Beyond that, it might be best to trust your unconscious feelings too as your implicit "gut reactions" can have a big impact on attraction.

Communication

Online communication is designed to make an initial connection, not set the foundation for a whole relationship. So, keep initial online conversation focused on finding out the basics quickly, then setting up an actual date. Generally, a few short emails or quick conversations will suffice. Long introductory emails may be counter-productive and off-putting too. Save it for a date. If you are crunched for time, then meet for coffee. If you still have safety concerns, meet in a public place.

Conclusion

Overall, it is important to remember that online dating is best used as a resource to meet individuals for eventual face-to-face dating. Keeping that goal in mind will prevent you from getting stuck on the drawbacks and limitations of dating online. So, if you get confused, the best

next step is always to move an interaction toward a date. If you are overwhelmed with access to too many choices, then find a way to narrow them down and find better matches. If you don't know what to do with a potential match, send them a quick communication. If you get frustrated with talking online, then suggest a meeting in person. Follow that process and you will more easily find a satisfying connection online and face-to-face too.

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