Website Dating Services: eHarmony.com vs. Match.com
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Online dating has become increasingly popular as the capabilities of internet communication have increased. "Traditional dating relationships that might take months to develop in the real world, take weeks or even days online" (Rosen). A Google search for "online dating" will bring up almost 47 million results, and according to the *U.S. News & World Report*, in August 2003 alone, over 40 million unique users visited online dating sites in the United States alone. That number is equal to almost half of the total number of single adults in the United States, and that statistic was taken almost five years ago. However, there seem to be a few dating sites that have risen above the rest in popularity. Eharmony and Match.com seem to have gained popularity as two of the most used website dating services. Both have similar features that they advertise which are basic necessities for website dating services. However, they also possess their own unique features that set them apart from other sites. The following will both compare and contrast these two website dating services, examining many aspects of the sites, and, in the end, explain why we believe that Match.com is the better internet dating site.

Any user with an internet connection may start a profile on either Match.com or eHarmony. However, once a profile has been created by a member of eHarmony, it is subject to a great deal of scrutiny. eHarmony excludes people from subscribing to its services who do not fit the requirement of being emotionally healthy, heterosexual, and who are looking to get married. eHarmony, created by Neil Clark Warren, a psychologist with a seminary degree, promotes heterosexual marriage, about which he has done extensive research. He says he does not know enough about gay and lesbian relationships to do same-sex matching (Kornblum). Match.com has no such screening process. In addition, eHarmony is the most expensive internet dating service available, with packages starting at $49.95 a month. Match.com has fees starting at 29.95 per month (Kornblum). The difference in prices is substantial and may prevent some consumers from choosing eHarmony. The websites do not appear to experience log-in delays due to heavy usage, and users can connect to the sites 24 hours a day.

Both eHarmony and Match.com require fairly complicated registrations. A user must begin with general information (user name, password, birthday, email address). However, the information after these first questions is what begins to set apart the two websites. At eHarmony, the questions are mostly the kind of question in which a user rates the answer on a scale, instead of simply filling in a typed answer. The detailed registration begins with some personal questions about your life. These include marital status, number of children, income, and education questions. Next, the questionnaire asks about physical attributes, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. Though these may seem like general questions, eHarmony seems to become quite specific in their inquiries. After these are answered, the questions seem to become more specific. They include over 200 questions about the personality of the user and ask for self-descriptions, personal characteristics, interests, and self-described feelings. Finally, as the questionnaire comes to an end, it asks questions about smoking and drinking habits and how the user feels about these habits concerning their matches. In general, the eHarmony questionnaire is extremely long, consisting of twenty pages with an average of twenty extremely detailed questions on each page.

Match.com seems to take a different approach to the registration questionnaire. Instead of the type of question in which a user rates the answer on a scale, Match.com asks questions in which a user must answer in a small paragraph. The first questions are again simple questions like hair and eye color, height and weight. Next, the questionnaire asks questions like "What do

you do for fun?" or "What are your favorite places to hang out?" It then asks about exercise, smoking and drinking, income, children, ethnicity and religion. Next, it goes on to ask about what the user

looks for in a partner. These questions are also somewhat specific, but not as specific as those asked by eHarmony. Finally, at the end of the questionnaire, the user is asked simply to "express yourself in your own words." In general, the questions that Match.com asks are very similar to those asked by eHarmony. However, the Match.com questionnaire seems quite a bit shorter and much simpler than that of eHarmony. There are no confusing "rate yourself" questions or required information. Only simple questions that can be used to accurately describe the user. Registration is free at both eHarmony and Match.com, however, as mentioned before, in order to communicate with a match that is found or have access to the many other special features of each website, a monthly fee must be paid. For Match.com, that fee is either $29.99 for a one-month membership, $16.99 per month for a three-month membership, or $14.99 per month for a six-month membership. At eHarmony.com, the membership costs are quite a bit higher. For a one-month membership, the cost is $59.95, followed by $36.95 per month for three months, $28.95 per month for six months, and $20.95 per month for twelve months. Once again, these fees must be paid in order to access the special features of the website.

Though the goal of both Match.com and eHarmony is to fulfill subscribers' relationship needs, they each have their own unique way of doing so. The success of finding a mate on Match.com is left up to the subscriber, whereas eHarmony has a team of employees whose job it is to search other members' profiles and find the best matches. Subscribers on eHarmony do not have the option of searching other members' profiles. Instead, they fill out an extensive questionnaire (436 questions) using eHarmony's patented Compatibility Matching System, which is meant to narrow the field from millions of candidates to a highly select group of singles with whom the user shares deep levels of compatibility (based upon their 29 key dimensions of compatibility). eHarmony also offers a Premium Personality Profile, which is a more in-depth extension of the basic profile, at an additional cost. After the user completes his/her profile, the website will match people based on the questionnaire. If the subscriber is not satisfied with the amount of matches he/she has received, eHarmony also has a feature called Flexible Matching, where they temporarily relax the criteria which the user indicated are least important to him/her during the questionnaire. This provides the member with additional matches that might have been overlooked at first. Once the user finds a match he/she is interested in, they have one of two options. They can communicate freely on their own using open communication, or they can engage in guided communication. Guided communication occurs in stages and the member is given questions to ask their match by the website. eHarmony also offers Secure Call which is a private, secure way to talk one-on-one with your eHarmony matches over the phone without revealing your phone number or contact information. In addition, the website offers Rely ID. Rely ID is a service offered at an additional cost that verifies a members name, address, and age. The service is meant to give people looking at a members profile an added level of assurance that they are who they say they are. Lastly, eHarmony also has a link to an online library of newsletters and articles with relationship advice from Dr. Neil Clark Warren. This information appears to be well-thought out, written by professionals, and is quite extensive.

Match.com has a plethora of features in order to serve their members. Members can create a profile, search for matches on their own, post a photo, and send winks to other members all for free. Winks are a way of letting another member know that you saw his/her profile and are

interested in talking to them, and searches can be saved for future reference. Match.com also offers reverse searches where the website gives a member matches who have specified that they are looking for someone with their characteristics. Once the member decides who interests them and subscribes to the site, there are numerous ways to get into contact with a match. For example, subscribers can contact other users through IM, or they can receive an instant notice each time a member emails or winks at them though Windows Live Alerts. MatchTalk technology offers a confidential alternative to conventional phone calling, enabling a member to talk on their own phone with any of their matches without revealing personal phone numbers. Match.com also gives each member an email address on their website, but members can also opt to have these emails forwarded to their personal email address. In addition, if for some reason it is necessary, members may block others from contacting them through email. Subscribers to Match.com can also remove matches from appearing in future searches who they have previously viewed and decided they are not interested in. If a member has found a match and is now in a happy relationship, the user can hide his/her profile instead of deactivating. This way, if the relationship goes unexpectedly sour, all the user has to do is unhide their profile instead of creating a whole new one. Users can also sign up for a chance to be on Member Spotlight, where Match.com chooses a few individuals a month to showcase on the opening homepage who they believe are a good catch. Lastly, Match.com has two new features: Match.com Platinum and Match International. Match.com Platinum uses matchmakers who are paid to learn about the subscriber and his/her wants and needs. The matchmaker then searches throughout all the sites 20 million members and does all the filtering and weeding for the member. Match International lets members connect with singles around the globe, and the website supports local languages and currencies (Match.com).

Match.com and eHarmony.com are both fairly easy to use and navigate, and they also have an excellent way of helping the user answer any kind of question one may have. Match.com is tremendously loaded in features, but many of those features will cost you extra money beyond your subscription. After the personality profile has been completed, the user is able to see some of their matches. The outcomes Match.com offers are very clean and well organized. After a user completes a search, they receive 10 results on each page, each in its own frame, allowing you to see the username, age, and location of the person you are seeking. The results also provide a subject header and description of that user. In addition, you have the option to send an email, chat (if the person is online), "wink" at the person, leave a voicemail for the person, or add the person to your favorites. All of these features make the process of finding a match easier. eHarmony.com is very similar to Match.com with the idea of a free starting subscription. If you are interested in finding someone compatible with you, you must pay the service fees. As mentioned before, when you sign up, you must complete an in-depth personality survey that may literally take an hour to finish. The survey inquires into hundreds of these "dimensions" then uses your responses to cross match you with other eHarmony members. You are then presented only with profiles of other members who are highly compatible to you. It is very easy to find matches because the site actually finds them for the user.

Match.com and eHarmony.com also both have very well designed help features. On the Match.com help page, there are many headings with additional subheading that help the user easily find what they are inquiring about. Some of the headings include FAQ, contact info, advice, and safety tips. Match.com also links the user to a forum for users to discuss problems they are having with the website. The eHarmony.com help page is more focused towards the

FAQ. They have popular question examples as well as a search box that allows the user to type any keyword of a question they have. One main feature that the eHarmony help page is lacking is contact information. There are no links to a customer service page or even a mailing address. However, other than the lack of contact information on eHarmony, both these sites make it quite easy for their users to find help for themselves.

In conclusion, we have found that Match.com seems to provide an easier experience overall. The registration is not as overwhelming and the features seem more personal and interactive, while eHarmony seems to be more impersonal and separated by their claim for superiority. Also, Match.com accepts any user that applies while eHarmony has scrutinized and rejected over one million potential users (Grohol). Our observations and recommendations include changing the length of the original registration to make it somewhat shorter. Though, at some point, these other questions should probably be filled out, the user does not want to spend 45 minutes filling out their original registration. Secondly, we would recommend that eHarmony lower their prices, considering they are the most expensive internet dating site available. These exorbitant prices drive potential users away to other rival website dating services. Finally, the emails sent by eHarmony seem a little too constant. After registering, eHarmony would send approximately seven emails per week to the user, while Match.com simply sent one email per week with updates. In our opinions, then, Match.com seems to have prevailed in the battle against eHarmony.com and is overall the best website dating service available.

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