

Demographics: Straight, White man. High Income. Relationship status: in a relationship that started not online.

Interview Summary:

Rafa is a charismatic and funny 26-year-old straight, white man. He is a software developer living in Brooklyn. He is in a long-term relationship that did not originate online, but has used dating apps like Hinge, Tinder, and Bumble.

He preferred Hinge for its limited swiping and higher match rate, but he met people from all these platforms in person. He believes that while people are open to meeting in person, there's a lack of practice and intentionality in doing so. Most of his peers, he mentions, are dating online, as are most of the eligible singles in New York. He also mentions the control offered by online dating, especially for women who can avoid unsavory public interactions, make it a preferred method. He later describes how he got "good" at creating his own profile, and how there are ways of learning how the apps work which then can increase your chance of getting a date.

He discusses the gamification of online dating, suggesting that the dopamine-driven cycle of dating apps might interfere with forming genuine connections. He observed that people often become skilled in presenting themselves attractively on these platforms, which does not necessarily translate into long-term relationships. He feels that online dating has become a necessity socially, and a feeling of never-ending dates on these platforms.

Prevalent Themes:

1. The gamification of dating
2. The ubiquity of online dating platforms
3. Difficulty finding partners online
4. Lack of commitment in online dating
5. Online vs. In-person norms
6. Safety of dating apps

Interview date: 11/14/2023

Transcript:

Interviewer: Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself? Any demographic info, what you do for work, relationship status you'd be willing to share.

Interviewee: Yes. I'm 26, I live in Brooklyn. Um, I am a software developer but I'll be leaving my current role soon to found a start-up. I'm in a committed long-term relationship with a woman... oh, I'm straight-identifying. I'm a white man. Anything else?

Interviewer: No that's useful, thank you for that. Have you ever used any online dating platforms?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me which ones you've used and how you liked them?

Interviewee: I've used Hinge, Tinder and Bumble. And I used ... Yeah, primarily very, there were some other random one I forgot what was called like, coffee something... How did I like them? Hinge was the best. Because the limitation on the number of people that you can swipe on meant that the rate of matches is like, exponentially higher than Tinder as a straight man. Tinder, people were like really was more of a game and not like people weren't actually appear to be looking to actually do anything. I would say Bumble was the second best because of the feature where woman message first. You were kind of able to at least see when you're getting likes. And if someone was engaging with you, you were likely to be able to start a real interaction.

Interviewer: You mentioned that Tinder felt like it was a game, can you expand on that?

Interviewee: Just a really low match rate match rate. I think, like, the number of likes that you're getting means that people just swipe right on almost anything, just trying to see if they kind of get a match. And you go really fast on the platform, because your match rate is so high. So like there's a vicious cycle where you're speed going to the platform. Because there's so many so few matches. And that kind of repeats.

Interviewer: Did you ever meet in person with anyone that you met?

Interviewee: Yes. On all three, actually.

Interviewer: Did you find your partner through a through a dating app?

Interviewee: No, she is someone I was friends with. We kind of navigated the whole dating app thing together then realized we had our person right next to us all along.

Interviewer: If you weren't in a relationship now, do you think you still would be using a dating app?

Interviewee: Yep..I think because there are a lot of high quality people who don't see a better alternative to find that, you know, a high quality person. And I think that people are like, just generally sort of, in a world where you know, there's a lot of sort of, like, isolation due to sort of social media and remote work. People are less open to organic meets. And so you have like, kind of the social activities are sort of current moment have shifted online. And because there are sort of specific online spaces for each kind of type of thing you want to do. You know, it seems as though dating has pretty much shifted into the online space.

Interviewer: Do you think that people are against, like meeting in person? Or is it just like a question of these?

Interviewee: I think people are open to meeting in person, I think that they're they like practice. And it used to be like I think we, I think it's, I think it's possible to meet people in person. It's just It requires a lot of intentionality, when you can live so much of your life online. You know, a lot of people only spend in person time with close friends, or in places that are not conducive to sort of dating and meeting activities. And so yeah, I don't know, I think it's like, I think it's a lot harder to ask someone out on the street, because people kind of, you know, in the past world were forced to be open to meeting someone in the world, because that was the only way. But now that there's this sort of, like, hyper-controlled alternative, people can fully sort of shut down. And I think rightfully so, because, you know, like, the vast majority of interactions that women have with strangers are, like, relatively unsavory and predatory. And so the necessity to be open to those, you know, dating apps, has enabled women, at least from my experience, to basically put up a stronger barrier to the public in sort of public spaces where men take advantage of their sort of attention.

Interviewer: Interesting, or like existence, you mentioned, like more control on like, an online dating platform is, is that what you're talking about?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. Like, I think that, you know, women can exert control over how people quote them in an online space, and I imagine, I don't know this from my experience, but I imagine that like, there, it's there are other ways to exert control go to, like, an exclusive club, where you know, that the clientele are of a certain, you know, or, you know, join a community where you know, that people are sort of pre vetted. But, you know, especially sort of this sort of public meet cute where you meet at a bar or you're walking down the street and you meet someone, or you hold the door for someone, you know, you strike up a conversation, I think that it's possible. But I think there now that people have this alternative option, some portion of daters have just decided that they're not open to sort of in person meet cute moments. But I think that there also are a lot of people who are open to that, and I think that I've seen it sort of transition from, you know, very, like Pro-online dating to sort of, you know, realization that online dating, isn't it, and sort of reversion to being open to that kind of immersive connection.

Interviewer: Interesting. Can you expand a little bit on the realization you feel like you've seen that online dating isn't it?

Interviewee: Um, I think that people sort of realize that. One, there's a lot of mismatch in the dating pool. Likel think I've seen that men find, you know, and in some cases, you know, men find that it's really hard to, you know, find matches when they don't meet certain certain like stereotypical, you know, visual criteria. You did have don't have a certain height, or they don't have a certain job or they don't look a certain way. So I think that's, that's an issue for some people. I think I've heard anecdotally that women find that people online, you know, people they meet online are, you know, like, the dating pools are weak, like there's like not a lot of good

looking men or like enjoy, you know, bye able partners. And so you're hearing it from both sides that, you know, people aren't feeling like the platform is providing them good options. And also, even when people are happy, do have a lot of good options options don't often convert into connections. I don't know if I heard this somewhere, but something like, you know, like, three or four online dates is sort of where you sort of peak likelihood of finding someone and that rapidly declines. Where it's like you're going on to Toy if you've been on 20, online dates, the likelihood that you'll find someone near 21st is almost zero. Interesting. I don't know where I've heard that, or if that's really real, but it kind of feels real. It feels real.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewer: Because I think that when you kind of practice the online, you just says it's like very gamified. And once you sort of get good at it, and started pumping it out. You kind of hack the system. And you get sort of into this dopamine loop where you figure out how to generate that first date over and over again. And I think that people who get like three or four gone three or four dates, they sort of get lucky a couple times, and then they meet someone compelling. And that's it. But people who figure it out and go on 20, 30, 40 dates get, I think typically gets stuck in a sort of dopamine seeking, like, cycle where you're just looking for the novelty of the next day. And the person who you last saw can only be, you know, it's only exciting until you sleep with or whatever. And and then you realize that, you know, you've accomplished the goal of the game, which is sort of the whole motivating factor for being on the platform in the first place. And so like you're some sort of, it just feels very gamified. And I think that the gamification of the online dating platforms, gets in the way, like those chemical, I suspect the like chemicals that you feel those game chemicals are different than love chemicals, and like infatuation, chemicals. And so you end up having this crash every time he's getting excited about someone because you're excited. Your excitement is from you know, hitting the buzzer on the game, and not from the sort of dating experience that you had with them. Maybe.

Interviewer: Are you a neuroscientist in addition to software?

Interviewee: *Laughing* No, no, I'm a armchair neuroscientists.

Interviewer: I want to just touch on two more two things that you just said. The first as you said, like, you get really good at these apps. What do you mean by you get really good at them?

Interviewee: Um, you figure out how to what pictures work, you know, what order you figure out, you know, what sort of signals you descend with a sort of very specific profile, so you need to sort of show that you're safe so that people feel comfortable meeting up with you. You have to show that you're attractive but not taking yourself too seriously. You have to pander to like a certain you know, you kind of pick the kind of figured out a vibe and you sort of start noticing patterns and who had the kind of person that is swiping on you.

Interviewer: Did it ever feel fake at all?

Interviewee: No, I think that my dating profiles are pretty authentic. And I was able to get the system nailed down pretty well where I was matching with attractive people who were kind of have my similar vibe. Or at least on paper seemed like they should be. And like definitely had some fun dates, but it wasn't you know, everybody had there was no there was always like some. Yeah, nothing that really had staying power beyond maybe a month of seeing someone lightly and feeling medium compelled by the relationship.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that. I noticed that you mentioned this feeling of like, getting really good at going on dates, and going on many dates kind of consecutively, almost more like for the thrill than for what might come of them. Did you ever start to feel disconnected from the actual romantic progress of finding a specific mate?

Interviewee: No, I think that everybody sort of just felt like another human in the world, like looking for someone exciting for them. And I think it's really interesting to go on a first date and talk to someone to meet them and see what they're up to, on some pretty interesting first dates, with people who are doing relatively cool things and read different thoughts on dating. It's relatively interesting to talk about. But I think it's because I did this thing where I, if I were to start seeing someone, I would delete the apps. Because I was so addicted to this cycle of swiping and getting matches, that I would sort of undermine my focus on that particular person. And I would start additional conversations with others, while I'm still sort of dating someone, and, you know, would kind of get interested in the next sort of attractive person who could have came across and not really give the current, you know, first or second date, enough attention to really sort of develop a sense of if I like them or not. And I think you have to, because, in some ways, because everybody's kind of hedging. And it takes so much effort to get a date for many people. Depending on how well you've tuned your profile, and like, how much game you're saying that you kind of just like need to keep a robust, you know, like the pipeline is even even on the most effective app like hinge. It's like, you know, 10 matches turned into one or two dates. And so, depending on if you are a super desirable dater, I think the vast majority of people are just trying to, you know, get a date period, which means they probably are talking to 15 people. Yeah, at the same time hoping that one of them turns into a date.

Interviewer: Interesting. So it's less about like a feeling of interchangeability, maybe. But it's like a feeling of kind of like constant optionality?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, depends on what side of the demand, I think there is, like, probably a small number of people who have really good options on dating apps. And then there's, I think it was a larger number of people who feel a lot of scarcity in dating apps, because I would say the majority of people are looking for the small number of highly eligible people, the standouts, who probably who are completely overwhelmed, there's probably a variety of like personas in the game. There's the people who are completely overwhelmed by the volume of inbound, you know, attention. And then and, you know, basically could go on a date every single day of the week with someone they find attractive and have a good time. And then the vast majority of people are competing for those those few people's attention. And subsequently, those people who are trying to get the attention of the sort of desirables end up putting out tons of likes to

people sort of all over and those people then get further inundated by people who they don't feel are eligible. And there's like kind of a cycle where the vast majority of the dating market is like super mismatch of your time and you're really busy.

Interviewer: Do you feel like online dating has become a necessity for people in your similar situation?

Interviewee: 100%. It's the done thing now. I think it totally changes how we are dating, like you know everything about someone before you meet them. You can really easily remove yourself from a relationship that isn't working because you met completely virtually. It feels like there is less pressure to commit, but that's a double-edged sword in some ways... like no one is looking for commitment and if you are you're SOL.

Interviewer: I see. Thank you for that. That's useful. Well. congratulations for getting out of that cycle then, I guess?

Interviewee: Haha, yeah. I'm one of the lucky ones.

Interviewer: Thanks tons for your time.

Interviewee: Of course.