

Personality, sexual orientation influence online dating site use

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Assistant Professor of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts Chris Clemens

Your personality and sexual orientation could affect how you use online dating sites—even if your uses do not include finding a life partner, according to a new study led by SF State researcher Chris Clemens.

Clemens, an assistant professor of broadcast and electronic communication arts, and his colleagues surveyed 687 people to see if

[personality traits](#), [biological sex](#) or [sexual orientation](#) could predict why they used [dating sites](#) such as Match.com or eHarmony.com.

The researchers found that women were less likely than men to use the sites to find [sexual partners](#), but more likely to use them to be social, for example by keeping in touch with people they don't often see or by asking for relationship advice or support. Homosexual users were more likely than heterosexual users to go on the sites for a wide range of reasons, including finding a relationship or a sexual partner. Homosexual study participants were also more likely to use the sites as a convenient way to communicate or as a distraction from everyday tasks.

The heavy use of the sites by homosexuals could be especially important, as the sites may provide a safe space for people "in areas of the country where being an out homosexual is not necessarily a good thing," said Clemens. "They offer a way to be able to meet other people without facing ramifications, either social or physical."

The study, published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, also included questions to determine each person's dominant personality traits. The results suggested that people who scored high in terms of neurotic traits—feeling anxious, depressed, moody or having low self-esteem—were more likely to use the dating sites as a convenient companion, as a distraction or as a way to build an online identity that helped them "live out a fantasy" or escape some aspect of their offline lives. Women and homosexuals tended to score more highly for neurotic traits in this study.

Clemens said people may not be aware of the variety of reasons they turn to [online dating sites](#). "I don't think people are necessarily thinking about why they are going on them," he explained. "But I think they go back to them because of the gratifications that they get from them."

In some cases, the researchers' predictions didn't pan out in the study. For instance, Clemens and his colleagues were surprised to find that extroverted people were not more likely than others to use the sites to be social, build an identity or find sexual partners, as they thought might be the case.

"I was kind of surprised that none of those findings was [statistically] significant, because you would think that people who were more outgoing would be willing to use more channels to communicate with people," said Clemens. "But we reasoned that they would probably prefer interactions personally or face to face, instead of through mediated communication channels."

The study participants included 584 students from a northeastern university who were nearly equally split between men and women and were mostly between the ages of 18 and 20. The remaining 94 participants were drawn from the general population and were more evenly split between people in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

The researchers "didn't ask about what sites the people use, but we plan to do this in future studies," Clemens noted, "especially with the rise of new apps like Tinder and Grindr and other mobile options."

Clemens, who met his own partner through the [site](#) OkCupid, said he hopes his study "provides some information about the different kinds of people who go to dating sites and the kinds of things that companies could put on their sites that could make them more appealing."

For instance, he and his colleagues recommend adding a chat function to the sites "for people who want to be social and may not want to look at just a stagnant profile picture."

More information: "The influence of biological and personality traits

on gratifications obtained through online dating websites," *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 49, August 2015, Pages 120-129, ISSN 0747-5632, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.058](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.058)

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