



**Universiteit  
Utrecht**

## **Values in Online Dating**

Master Thesis Social, Health and Organisational Psychology

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Track: Social Influence

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Date: 07-07-2023

Word count: 6192

May be made publicly accessible

## Abstract

This study investigated whether basic human values influenced dating interest (Self-transcendence or Self-enhancement values), controlling for physical attractiveness and examined the potential moderator sociosexual orientation. Participants were single heterosexual women between 18 and 30 years old. In online experiment, they were presented with a dating profile with self-transcendence life quote or self-enhancement life quote. In addition, their socio-sexual orientation was measured. As expected, we founded a direct effect physical attractiveness on dating interest, indicating that a high level of perceived attractiveness predicted more dating interest. Promising new results revealed that self-transcendence values, expressed in a life quote, predicted a higher dating interest than self-enhancement values, expressed in a life quote. For the moderating factor sociosexual orientation no significant effect was found. Additionally, exploratory analysis showed that physical attractiveness moderates the effect of values on dating interest, such that a higher perceived level of attractiveness increases the importance of values. Together, these findings showed a continued effect of self-transcendence values on dating interest, even when controlling for physical attractiveness, indicating the importance of expressing self-transcendence values. Concluding that not only physical attractiveness is an important factor in online dating but the content of the description on the profile is also influential factor for the level of dating interest. Further research is needed to examine the effect of values when they are displayed is a more subtle way and to examine the potential effect of other values such as openness to change and conservation.

*Keywords: Online dating, Self-Transcendence values, Self-Enhancement values, Physical Attractiveness, Sociosexual Orientation*

## Introduction

Nowadays, due to covid-19, online dating might be the “new normal” as mentioned in news headlines (Roy, 2022). But what are singles looking for when it comes to online dating? Dating websites and apps frequently mention the importance of values in finding the right match with a dating partner. Could our preference in values explain who we chose as a dating partner? Some might argue that our preference is determined by physical attraction, humor, or length. To others, individuals giving a short description on their profile expressing how much they value understanding and connecting with others may be more important. Research shows that the pictures on a profile are the initial attractors of attention (Van der Zanden et al. 2022). In the context of online dating, the physical attractiveness perceived from the profile picture may be particularly salient, given the limited cues available for people's assessment of a potential partner in this context (Zhang et al., 2022). Research shows that online profiles with attractive photos are judged as more attractive overall (Fiore et al., 2008). In addition to this, the short description on an individual's profile is an influential factor when it comes to dating interest (Van der Zanden et al., 2022). Research showed that attention is devoted to a description of the profiles, for example, language errors have a negative impact on dating interest in the potential partner (Van der Zanden et al., 2020; Van der Zanden et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the question remains if the content of these short personal descriptions matters with regards to willingness to date a potential partner. The content is often linked to what people find important in life, and is therefore closely linked to values. Values are at the core of who we are. They are robust and strong predictors of attitudes, opinions, decisions, and behavior in various life domains, including in the domain of romantic relations (Schwartz et al., 2017). Recent research has reported that overt value disagreements can cause challenges in a romantic relationship (Afifi et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent research has shown that values play an important role in long-term romantic relationships. People who endorse benevolent, self-transcendent values more strongly, report better quality relationships (Van der Wal et al., 2023)

Considering the existing research into the role of values in long-term relationships, it could be assumed that this role might be similar when it comes to online dating. However, when it comes to online dating, the differences in intention to date among single individuals might influence to what extent the singles are interested in dating a person with specific values.

Therefore, it is valuable to consider an individuals' sociosexual orientation. The main purpose of

this study is to examine whether basic human values play a role in online dating, whilst examining the role of physical attractiveness and examining the effect of the potential moderating factor sociosexual orientation. With investigating the role of values in online dating this study aims to fill a research gap. Understanding if values can influence an individual's dating interest could contribute to the existing body of research, as well as help to gain insight on the decision-making and selection process specific to online dating. This knowledge could contribute to the development of more effective matching strategies for sites and apps, leading to an increased quality and success of online dating experiences.

### Defining Values

When we think of values, we think of what is important to us in life (Schwartz et al., 2012). Values are the core of what we stand for. Values are defined as cognitive representations of abstract goals that serve as guiding principles in life (Rokeach, 1973). The model of Schwartz and colleagues (2012) explains the different domains of values. The theoretical model is universal in the content and structure of basic values. The model is divided into 4 dimensions: self-transcendence, self-enhancement, conservation, and openness to change.



Figure 1. Theoretical model of the structure of relations among 19 values (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Firstly, the dimension self-transcendence (ST) is divided in two domains: universalism and benevolence. Universalism focuses on the welfare of others in the larger society. This domain contains the (sub)values: tolerance, nature and concern. Examples are broadmindedness, protecting the environment and prioritizing social justice and equality. In addition, benevolence consists of the values dependability and caring. These values emphasize voluntary concern for others' welfare. Examples are being helpful, honest, forgiving, responsible and loyal. Together, these values focus on social relationships, care for others and universal principles.

A dimension in opposition to the beforementioned dimension, is self-enhancement. This dimension is divided in the domains: achievement and power. Power contains the (sub)values dominance and resources. Achievement values emphasize demonstrating competence in terms of prevailing cultural standards, thereby obtaining social approval. Example values are ambition, a drive for success, capability, and the desire to exert influence. The second domain power focuses more on the values authority, wealth, and social power. Overall individuals that emphasize self-enhancement values tend to strive for social status, dominance and the fulfillment of their own desires and ambitions.

Furthermore, the model contains the dimension conservation and reflects the domains: tradition and security. Tradition includes the (sub)values conformity (i.e. interpersonal and rules) and humility and security (i.e. societal and personal security and face). Tradition values are associated with the group an individual identifies with and are closely linked to practices, symbols, ideas, and beliefs that represent their shared experience and faith (e.g. respect for tradition and acting humble). Security values focus on maintaining individual security (e.g. personal hygiene) and on maintaining the security of the wider group (e.g. national security). In conclusion, conservation values focus mainly on the principles and beliefs that emphasize protection and preservation of tradition.

In contrast to conservation, the dimension openness to change contains the domains: hedonism, stimulation and self-direction. These values derive from organismic needs. Hedonism values derive the pleasure related to satisfying the organismic needs (e.g. enjoying life with a self-indulgent attitude). Stimulation values derive from the need for variety and stimulation in order to maintain an optimal, positive level of activation (e.g. the need for a varied and exciting life). Self-direction values emerge from the desire for control of one's actions autonomy and

independence (e.g. being creative, valuing freedom and choosing one's own goals). Altogether, openness to change values focus on embracing change and experiencing a varied exciting life.

### **Values in Social Relationships**

Personal values predict attitudes, opinions, decisions, and behavior in various life domains (for an overview, see Maio, 2017; Roccas & Sagiv, 2010). Prioritizing certain values can influence an individual's choice in central aspects in life, such as work. For example, individuals who prioritize power and achievement values are more likely to pursue careers as managers, bankers, or financial advisors, while individuals who emphasize benevolence and universalism tend to choose careers such as social workers or psychologists (Sagiv et al., 2017). As values play an important role in an individual's decisions in various life domains (e.g. work), values such as caring for others are expected to influence different behaviors in social relationships.

Research showed that benevolence and universalism promote cooperative and supportive social relations (Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz, 2013; Hanel et al., 2018). This behavior is motivated by the concern for others and therefore leads to actions promoting their welfare (Schwartz, 2010). An example is that expressing self-transcendence values is linked to more prosocial behaviors and attitudes, including acts of kindness, empathy, and forgiveness (Hanel et al., 2018; Strelan et al., 2011). Furthermore, research showed that self-transcendence values affect prosociality, either directly or indirectly, through empathic and social self-efficacy beliefs (Caprara & Steca, 2007). These behaviors, attitudes and beliefs originated from the focus on the care for others, over self-interest, helps to build and maintain social relationships (Kao et al., 2017).

In contrast, achievement and power values predict noncooperation with others due to their emphasis on self-interest (Schwartz, 2013). Research showed that power increases social distance and induces people to be more self-oriented and less attentive to others (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Magee & Smith, 2013). Furthermore, achievement and power promote effortful work and seek to maximize own gain, sometimes even at the expense of others (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 2013). These behaviors might be negatively linked to social relationships due to prioritizing self-interest above the interest of others.

Little research has been done on values in romantic relationships. In the recent past, the role of values romantic relationships has been examined based on the prior studies on the

importance of values in interpersonal behaviors and motives. Self-enhancement values might have a negative effect on romantic relationship, due to the self-oriented perspective and less attentive attitude towards others (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Magee & Smith, 2013). Research showed that self-transcendence values are in fact an important influential factor in romantic relationship functioning. As behavior related to self-transcendence values, such as prosocial behavior, forgiveness and focus on care for others are expected to have a beneficial effect on social relationships. Research showed that the endorsement of self-transcendence values (i.e., benevolence and universalism) was related to higher romantic relationship quality (Van der Wal et al., 2023). This finding can be explained by higher levels of communal strength and intrinsic relationship motivation (Van der Wal et al., 2023).

### **Values in Dating Relationships**

The positive impact of endorsing self-transcendence values on romantic relationships, with the potential negative effect of self-enhancement values based on prior research, raises the question what role these values play in the dating phase. This research aims to investigate the effect of values on dating interest. In this research on dating relationships, the focus is on self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values, due to the central role of self-transcendence values in social relationships and the potential negative effect of self-enhancement values on dating relationships.

If an individual prioritizes self-enhancement values, they might choose their own personal achievement goals over their partner interest due to the self-oriented perspective and less attentive attitude towards others, leading to a less dating interest. Furthermore, showing power in dominant behavior might have a negative effect regarding dating interest. Research showed that dominant behavior of a dating partner is directly linked to intimate partner violence perpetration (Esquivel-Santoveña et al., 2021). These studies provide evidence that expressing self-enhancement values might have a negative effect on dating interest in the context of online dating.

In opposition to self-enhancement values, self-transcendence values could be helpful in creating a satisfactory relationship in close relationships. In online dating, this means that the focus on others is more attractive for starting a protentional relationship. This can be explained by the fact that people who prioritize self-transcendence values, promote supportive social

relations with others originating from internal motivation (Schwartz, 2012). In the online search for a partner, the characteristics dependable, understanding and loyal were rated as the most valued characteristics in a romantic partner (Figuerdo et al., 2006). Expressing these traits linked to self-transcendence values, shows that an individual values being a supportive partner, leading to an increase in dating interest. When people are focused on self-transcendence values, they intrinsically put a lot of effort into their romantic relationship and therefore are more likely to be the same in their potential dating relationship. Furthermore, love is a dynamic state involving both partners' needs and capacities for caregiving (Mikulincer, 2006). The need for caregiving and being cared for, might lead to more interest towards an individual that prioritizes self-transcendence values. In online dating, it is therefore expected that expressing self-transcendence values, instead of self-enhancement values on a dating profile leads to more dating interest. This can be explained by the emphasis on the interest of others (i.e. self-transcendence values), in opposition to one's own interest (self-enhancement values). Therefore, self-transcendence values and contrasting self-enhancement values can provide more insight into what role values play in a romantic relationship than openness to change and conservation, because these values focus more on experiencing new activities and, on the opposing side, maintaining group traditions and security.

### **The Role of Sociosexual Orientation**

To what extent self-transcendence values are associated with a higher level of dating interest might be influenced by an individual's sociosexual orientation. The construct sociosexual orientation captures individual differences in the tendency to have casual, uncommitted sexual relationships (Penke, 2011). A weaker association between values and dating interest is expected when singles have a high tendency to have casual uncommitted sexual relationships (i.e. short-term sociosexual orientation). In other words, when an individual has a short-term sociosexual orientation expressed values might be less important with regards to dating interest. This can be explained by the motive that singles have for casual uncommitted sexual relationships, which is fulfilling one's own sexual desire and physical pleasure instead of a more emotional and caring connection that is also focused on the other (Garcia et al., 2018).

A stronger association between self-transcendence values and dating interest is expected when single individuals have a long-term sociosexual orientation, because these individuals



might be looking for more committing and emotional meaningful connections, strengthening the effect. Self-transcendence values revolve around concern, commitment and care for others, which are important factors for singles looking for a long-term relationship (i.e. long-term sociosexual orientation) (Figuerdo et al., 2006). Research from Herold and Milhausen (1999) showed that qualities such as being understanding, considerate, kind, and honest that are closely related to self-transcendence values and are preferred for committed and intimate relationships, and thus are likely to be preferred from a long-term perspective. These studies support the expectations that long-term sociosexual orientation strengthens the association between self-transcendence values and dating interest.

### **The Present Study**

In this study, we analyze the effect of values on dating interest. The main hypothesis is that self-transcendence values versus self-enhancement values predict higher dating interest, with a higher level of interest with self-transcendence values.

In addition, the second hypothesis states that sociosexual orientation influences the relation between values and dating interest, indicating a stronger association between self-transcendence values and dating interest in case of a long-term sociosexual orientation. When single individuals have a long-term sociosexual orientation, this might strengthen the association between self-transcendence values and dating interest due to the tendency they might have to look for more committing and emotional meaningful connections, strengthening the effect. To sum up, this research focuses on the role of values with regards to dating interest moderated sociosexual orientation, controlled for physical attractiveness.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and design**

Participants were recruited through the online research database Prolific. The first dataset consisted of 121 participants. Only heterosexual single females between 18 to 30 years old were included in the collection of the data. Therefore, 12 participants were deleted: participants who answered differently in regards to sexuality (N=6), age (N=1), and gender (N=1). Hereafter, participants were removed from the dataset because of an incorrect answer on one or more of the two attention check questions (N=3; i.e., "Click on the answer option that says "four times"").

Lastly, a participant stopped filling in the questionnaire after a few answers (N=1) and was therefore deleted.

The final sample consisted of 109 single heterosexual women aged 18 to 30 ( $M = 24,7$ ,  $SD = 3,2$ ). Most of the participants were White or Caucasian (70,6%), the rest were Asian or Pacific Islander (11%), Black or African American (8,3%), multiple ethnicity (7,3%), or preferred not to say their ethnicity (2,8%). Most participants had a bachelor's degree (50,5%), the rest were high school graduates (27,5%), had master's degree (19,3%), or doctorate degree (2,8%). Participants received € 1,50 in exchange for their participation. Furthermore, the sample we used was large enough, based on a small effect, within design with 2 within levels, 80% power, that showed that a power was needed of at least  $N = 80$  individuals (G\*Power, Version 3.1.9).

The study had an experimental design. We used a 2x1 within-factor subject design to examine the effects of values expressed in life quotes (self-transcending or self-enhancing) on dating interest as dependent variable, controlling for physical attractiveness. Additionally, we examined the moderator sociosexual orientation to assess its impact on the relationship between self-transcendence values and dating interest.

## **Procedure and Materials**

Firstly, the research was approved by the Ethics Review Committee (FETC) of University of Utrecht, and pre-registered at the “aspredicted.org” webpage: [https://aspredicted.org/475\\_SK1](https://aspredicted.org/475_SK1).

In this research, the data was collected using Qualtrics software. After reading the information letter and giving informed consent, participants were randomly presented with 14 dating profiles: 7 self-enhancement profiles and 7 self-transcendence profiles. These profiles included pictures of men that were extensively pretested on characteristics: perceived age, level of physical attractiveness, and appropriateness for the use as online dating pictures (Pronk & Denissen, 2020). The profiles also included an international commonly used name, a distance between 2 and 5 miles, and a self-enhancement or self-transcendence life quote. These factors were all randomized to each profile. Two questions were presented after each profile. The first question below the profile measured the participants' dating interest in the presented potential partner with the question: “How interested are you in dating this person?”. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). The second question

below the profile measured to what extent they were physically attracted to the presented potential partner, by asking participants: “How physically attractive do you find this person?”. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). Then, the participants were instructed to fill out the Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory. The survey also included two attention check questions (i.e., “Click on the answer option that says "four times"”). At the end of the survey, several demographic questions were asked with regards to gender, age, level of education, ethnic group, sexuality, and relationship status. Followed by a question to check whether the participants read the questions carefully and to check what factors they based their rating of dating interest on. The question asked was: “Which factor(s) influenced your answers of your willingness to date the men the most?”. Participants could check up to a maximum of 2 boxes. The answer options were name, distance, picture, life quote, physical attractiveness or other. Then, they were informed on the goal of the study, asked if they had additional comments and thanked for their participation. Participants were allowed to quit the survey at any point. The duration of the survey was around 5 minutes.

*Pilotstudy.* A pilot study was used to ensure the validity of the link between either self-transcendence or self-enhancement values and the life quotes. Participants were asked to rate 28 quotes on to what extent they thought the life quotes reflected self-transcendence values or self-enhancement values (N=112). An example of a life quote linked to self-transcendence values was: "If two people take care of each other, they are both taking care of" (benevolence - caring). An example item of a life quote that expresses self-enhancement values was "Get rich or die trying" (power resources). The life quotes were selected based on the highest mean, the biggest difference between the means and the lowest standard deviation (see appendix B for a detailed description of the pilot study).

*Sociosexual orientation.* We used the Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R), consisting of 9 questions, also presented in randomized order. SOI-R is a widely used inventory that is divided into three domains including (1) behavior, (2) attitudes, and (3) desire. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ‘strongly disagree’, to 9 ‘strongly agree’. An example of an item is “Sex without love is OK.”. Cronbach’s alpha was measured 0.85, indicating a good internal consistency (Fiacco et al., 2019).

## **Statistical analyses**

Firstly, the assumptions regarding normal distribution and the presence of potential outliers were examined. Then, we conducted preliminary analyses, including descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and examining correlations. Moreover, to test our hypotheses two confirmatory analyses were conducted. First, using JASP, a GLM repeated measures analysis was conducted with the within-subjects factor values (self-transcendence values or self-enhancement values) on dating interest. Physical attractiveness was taken into account as a covariate. Second, a linear mixed model analysis was conducted in JASP with sociosexual orientation and values as fixed effects variables and the dependent variable dating interest with prolificID (participants) as random effect grouping factor to analyze the potential moderating effect of sociosexual orientation.

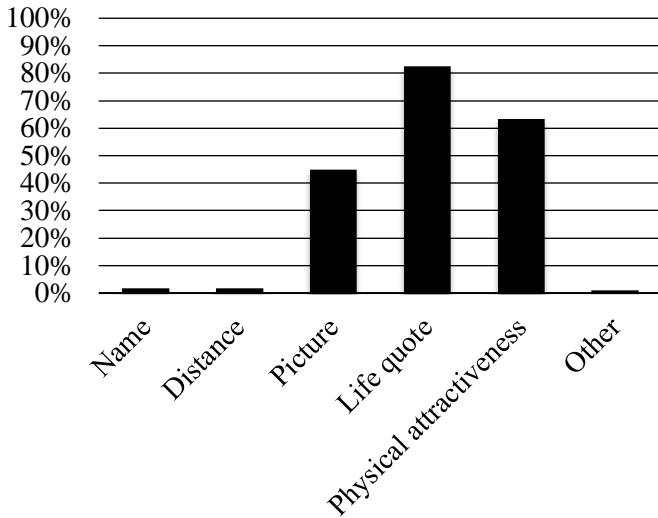
## **Results**

### **Preliminary analysis**

To ensure validity of the analysis, the assumptions were examined. The distribution and potential outliers in variables dating interest, physical attractiveness and socio sexual orientation were checked. The assumption of normality was checked with Q-Q Plots, giving visual insight in the distribution of the data. A normal distribution of the variables dating interest physical attractiveness and socio sexual orientation was established.

Subsequently, it was analyzed on what factors influenced the participants' decision rating their dating interest. Results showed that most of the participants based their rating of dating interest on the life quote, physical attraction, and picture. As visually shown in the figure 1 below, among these factors “life quotes” was mentioned by the majority of the participants as an influential factor in their decision, validating that the life quote is a prominent factor in rating dating interest and that they carefully followed the instructions.

**Figure 1.** Factors of influence when rating of dating interest



*Note.* “Other” is the factor “age”

Furthermore, as visible in Table 1, the correlation analysis showed a strong positive and significant correlation between physical attractiveness and both dating interest in self-transcendence and self-enhancement profiles ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that physical attractiveness is overall influential factor in regard to dating interest, regardless the values expressed. Furthermore, dating interest in self-transcendence profiles and dating interest in self-enhancement profiles were significantly and positively correlated ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a possible overall level of dating interest in all the profiles. No significant correlations were found with the factor Sociosexual orientation.

**Table 1.** Correlation Analysis of Dating Interest ST, Dating Interest SE, SOI and Attractiveness

**Pearson's Correlations**

Variable	Dating Interest ST	Dating Interest SE	SOI	Physical attractiveness
Dating Interest ST profiles	—			
Dating Interest SE profiles	<b>.68 ***</b>	—		
SOI	-.11	-.03	—	
Physical Attractiveness	<b>.82 ***</b>	<b>.71 ***</b>	-.03	—

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$   
 ST=self-transcendence and SE=self-enhancement  
 SOI= Sociosexual Orientation

### Confirmatory analyses

First of all, and as expected, a main effect of physical attractiveness was found ( $F(197.46) = 1076.096, p < .001$ ), suggesting that a high perceived physical attractiveness is a strong predictor of higher level of dating interest. However, most importantly, the analyses also revealed a main effect of values on dating interest ( $F(1.108) = 47.560, p < .001$ ) showed in Table 2. Results showed that with controlling for physical attractiveness, the effect of value quotes remained significant ( $F(1255.04) = 6.143, p = .014$ ), indicating the importance of the effect values on dating interest.

**Table 2.** Repeated Measurement ANOVA of Direct Effect of Values on Dating Interest and Direct Effect of Attractiveness on Dating Interest

#### Within Subjects Effects and Between Subjects Effects

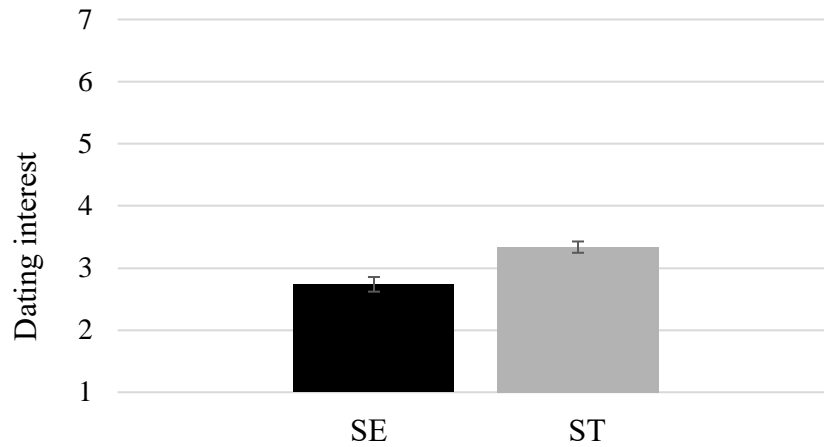
Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Condition	19.551	1	19.551	47.560	<.001
Residuals	38.257	107	0.358		
Physical Attractiveness	154.054	1	154.054	259.630	< .001
Residuals	38.257	107	0.358		

*Note.* Type III Sum of Squares

Condition is Self-Transcendence values or Self-Enhancement values

As can be seen in Figure 2, self-transcendence values led to higher dating interest ( $M = 3.34, SD = 1.23$ ) than self-enhancement values ( $M = 2.74, SD = 0.95$ ). This indicates that as hypothesized, participants were significantly more interested in dating a potential partner that expressed self-transcendence values in a life quote than in dating a potential partner that expressed self-enhancement values in a life quote.

**Figure 2.** Visual Graph of the Difference in Means in Dating Interest for ST values and SE Values (Condition) with Standard Errors



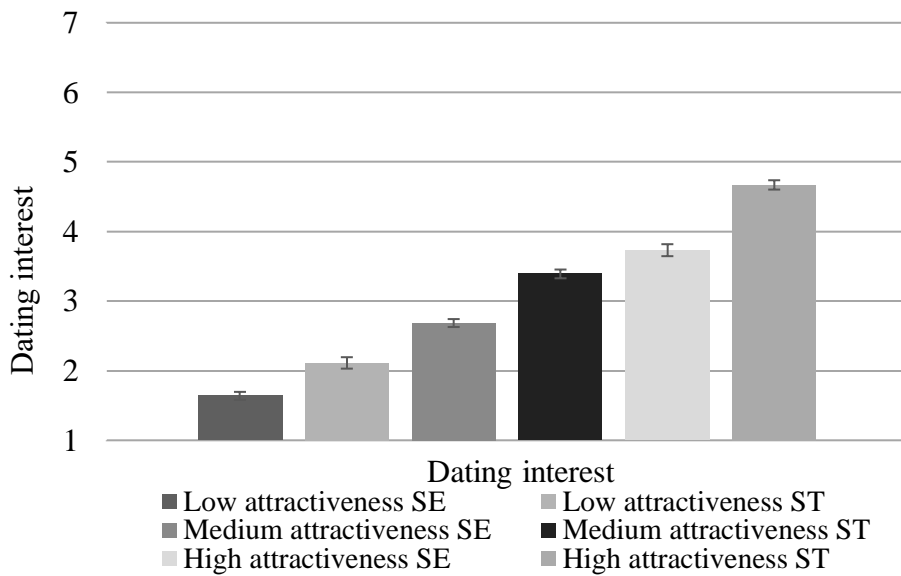
*Note.* ST=self-transcendence and SE=self-enhancement.

The second hypothesis, which suggested that the association between self-transcendence values and dating interest is stronger with long-term sociosexual orientation, is not supported. A linear mixed model analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of the variable sociosexual orientation but no significant interaction for moderating effect was found ( $F(1272.47) = 1.164, p = .28$ ).

### **Exploratory analyses**

Due to the importance of physical attractiveness and values showed by the results beforementioned, a linear mixed model analysis was conducted a second time to further explore potential interactions between the variables. The exploratory analysis showed that physical attractiveness moderates the effect of value quotes ( $F(1299.18) = 23.913, p < .001$ ). The interaction between perceived physical attractiveness (low, medium and high) and self-transcendence and self-enhancement values influencing participants' dating interest is shown in Figure 3. This figure indicates that physical attractiveness positively effects the importance of expressed values in regard to dating interest, meaning that the exploratory results suggests that values become more important as an individual is perceived as more physical attractive.

**Figure 3.** The Interaction between Low, Medium and High Perceived Physical Attractiveness and ST and SE Values Influencing the Interest to Date with Standard Errors



### Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether basic human values play a role in online dating. We examined whether, above and beyond the positive effect of physical attraction, the endorsement of self-transcendence versus self-enhancement values (by means of a life quote in a fictitious dating profile) affects dating interest. Moreover, we examined whether this effect was moderated by sociosexual orientation. Using a sample of 109 heterosexual women, we found, as expected, that physical attraction predicts higher dating interest. Most importantly, however, we also found that - even when taking physical attraction into account - Self-transcendence values predict higher dating interest. We did not find evidence for a moderating role of socio-sexual orientation. Exploratory analyses revealed that physical attractiveness moderates the effect of values on dating interest, such that a higher perceived level of attractiveness increases the importance of values. Together, these findings provide initial evidence for a potential crucial role of values in online dating.

As expected, the results showed that physical attractiveness is an important influential factor. Research shows that online profiles with attractive photos are judged as more attractive



overall (Fiore et al., 2008). Besides the perceived physical attractiveness, research showed that attention is devoted to a description of the profiles (Van der Zanden et al., 2022). Findings showed that language errors have a negative impact on dating interest in the potential partner (Van der Zanden et al., 2020). A new and promising perspective is showed by the results of this study, namely that the content of the text in a dating profile matters as well. Self-transcendence values as content of the description of an online profile predicts higher dating interest than self-enhancement values expressed in the content, creating a foundation for the groundbreaking perspective on the effect of content in dating profiles. This finding was in line with before mentioned expectation and can be explained by the fact warmth and trustworthiness (i.e. self-transcendence values) are highly valued aspects, in contrast to the focus on status and resources (i.e self-transcendence values), in the research of a partner (Fletcher et al., 2004; Valentine et al., 2020), leading to a preference for self-transcendence values. Self-enhancement values predicted less dating interest, which can be explained by the emphasis on power and achievement that might lead to choosing one's own personal achievement goals over their partner interest (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 2013). The prioritizing of own interests originated from a self-oriented perspective and the less attentive attitude towards others explains the lower dating interest (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Magee & Smith, 2013). These studies provide evidence that aligns with the results that self-transcendence values attracted more dating interest than self-enhancement values.

This research shows the importance of self-transcendence values and their effect on dating interest. A potential explanation for the effect of self-transcendence values is that these values evoke a feeling of connectedness, altruism, and empathy. These are linked to their willingness to put effort and support in a romantic relationship. Representing an overall committed, caring and supportive potential partner, leading to an increased dating interest. An underlying mechanism that explains for the preference of self-transcendence values could also be that compatibility is enhanced when individuals share similar self-transcendence values. Research found that similarity in values and attitudes can enhance the relationship quality and satisfaction (Leikas et al., 2018). This could lead to more dating interest. For example, the desire to help others and care for the world could serve as shared interest and form a foundation of a potential romantic relationship and therefore increase dating interest. Whether similarity in values is an influential mechanism in dating relationship has to be further researched.

Subsequently, a moderating effect of physical attractiveness was found. This indicates that when an individual was perceived more physically attractive, self-transcendence values (life quote) were a stronger predictor for a higher level of dating interest, meaning that values especially played a role when an individual is perceived as highly attractive. These findings can be explained by the fact that more attractive pictures are receiving more attention (Van der Zanden et al., 2022), which explains that they might be looked at for a longer period and are viewed as more favorable. Research showed that attractive people are also likely to have profile texts that are socially adept, and that display intelligence and, perhaps, a good sense of humor (Brand et al. 2012). The stereotype ‘what is beautiful, is good’ could be explanation (Dion et al., 1972). The self-transcendence values expressed in the description of a physically attractive potential partner might be linked to a description of a good person, leading to more dating interest. Thus, the strengthened positive effect self-transcendence values of on dating interest could be explained by this stereotype due to the values (life quotes) being linked to the high level of physical attractiveness, explaining the more important role of values predicting a higher level of dating interest.

On the contrary to the hypothesis, long-term sociosexual orientation (the tendency to look for a long-term committed relationship), had no moderating effect association between self-transcendence values and the level of dating interest. An explanation for these insignificant results can be that women looking for a long term committed relationship prioritize the desire for indicators of ability and willingness to provide resources (Fletcher et al., 2004; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Li et al., 2002). Research shows female subjects have a higher desire for romantic partners that have good earning potential than among male subjects (Eastwich & Finkel, 2008). Furthermore, it has been found that dating appeal depended on ambition (Wilbur & Campbell, 2010). The perspective of participants on the importance of the ability of a man to provide could lead to the prioritizing of other values, causing the lack of influence of sociosexual orientation on the positive effect self-transcendence values of dating interest. Another explanation is that sociosexual orientation is not an influential factor on the association between values and dating interest. One possible explanation could be that values are stronger predators for dating interest than sociosexual orientation. Values are defined as guiding principles in life (Rokeach, 1973). Prior behavior can predict one’s sociosexual orientation, however, social sexual orientation can change through the years (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008), where values are more set in stone as they

are predictors of attitudes, opinions, decisions and behavior in various life domains (Schwartz, 2017).

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

It is important to acknowledge some specific limitations of this study. Firstly, the experiment contained designed profiles that differ from real world conditions, resulting in the laboratory effect, meaning that participants might adjust their answers due to the awareness of the profiles being not real. For example, the profiles did not include their job or hobbies. The age of the potential partner was also not displayed. The previously mentioned information is available on most dating profiles in the real world. In addition, the content of the description consisted solely of one bold life quote. This could decrease internal validity due to the values being not expressed in a subtle way using a short story in the description of the profile. In addition, the comparison that participants made to real life profiles could have influenced the results, explaining the relatively low means, which indicated that the participants were not highly interested in dating the showed potential partners. A suggestion for further research is to further examine if the effect of self-transcendence values is still as significant if the profiles contained a more detailed description of their personal interest such as an individual's job and hobbies.

Furthermore, the questionnaire SOI-R was a self-report measurement, causing a potential self-report bias. Participants were asked to provide subjective information about their sociosexual orientation. The questionnaire assessing sociosexual orientation is particularly prone to the social desirability bias because of the sensitive topics, namely the number of sexual partners, which can influence the answers the participants gave. The social desirability bias around this subject can be explained by the social stigma around women engaging in casual sexual relationships. This bias could lead to less reliable data and influence the internal validity of the study and could be an explanation that sociosexual orientation is not an significant influential factor on the between values and dating interest.

An additional limitation to consider is that the influence of values on dating interest, controlling for attractiveness, has been examined based on a sample that only consists of women. Multiple studies have well established that men and women differ in their reports of the importance of certain characteristics in the search for a romantic partner (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). In choosing a potential partner, women were more selective than men (Alterovitz &

Mendelsohn, 2011). Research showed that men sought physically attractive partners whilst women had the tendency to look further and particularly valued the educational background of potential partners (Goodwin & Tinker, 2002). An expectation is that self-transcendence values might be a less significantly influential factor due to the tendency of men to focus on physical attractiveness. In order to generalize this research, further research is needed with a sample that also contains male participants.

Furthermore, in this research, only two dimensions Self-transcendence and Self-enhancement from the model of Schwartz (2012) were highlighted. A suggestion to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of all values on dating interest, is to examine the influence of other values: openness to change and conservation. Values within the dimension of openness to change may be important in the dating phase to facilitate intimacy and fun first dates. In the beginning of a romantic relationship, the first dates entail lots of new and exciting experiences showing the importance of openness to change values. On the other hand, prioritizing conservation values may be preferred stemming from culture or religion perspectives. It might be the case that when an individual prioritizes tradition, they might seek a potential partner who is focused on maintaining traditional gender roles for example.

In conclusion, these results highlight the importance of understanding the role of values in the dating phase. Our findings show that self-transcendence values, expressed in life quotes, lead to higher dating interest than self-enhancement values, especially when physical attractiveness is high. This means that not only is physical attractiveness an important factor in online dating but the content of the description on the profile is influential factor for the level of dating interest. Leading to the conclusion that expressing a caring, loyal, and forgiving side is beneficial for single men in their online dating profiles. This shows that self-transcendence values are not only beneficial in long-term relationships but also in the first phase where the first butterflies are flying; the online search for a potential partner.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Information letter and informed consent**

Please read the information carefully and give consent if you agree.

Dear participant,

With this letter we want to inform you about the study you are about to start from Utrecht University.

#### **What is the aim of the study?**

This study can give insight into the prephase of romantic relationships, and what factors contribute to mate choice. In this study, we want to examine if values are important in choosing a romantic partner. If so, this research can contribute to further explaining dating behavior and perhaps finding a romantic partner more easily.

#### **How will the study be conducted?**

Please read this information letter carefully. If you decide to participate in the study and after signing the consent form, you can complete the study online.

The study consist of three parts:

- Rate 14 dating profiles on physical attraction and willingness to date the man
- Fill in two quantitative questionnaires
- Complete six demographic questions

There will also be two attention check questions, i.e., 'please check the box a little like me'.

Participating will take an average of 5 to 10 minutes.

#### **Advantages and disadvantages of participating in this research**

A possible 'disadvantage' is that filling in the questionnaires takes time. The advantage may be that you become more aware of your own personal values and dating interests.

#### **Are there risks and side effects?**

The study was approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The committee has agreed that taking part in this research does not involve any risks other than those encountered in daily life.

### **Participation in the study is voluntary.**

You decide for yourself whether to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you do not have to do anything else and do not have to indicate your reasons. If you do participate, you can change your mind at any time and quit without consequences.

In order to participate in this study, you first provide consent before answering the questions. If you do not provide consent, you will automatically be sent to the end of the questionnaire.

### **Inclusion criteria**

Only heterosexual females, aged between 18 and 30, that are not in a romantic relationship during participation of this study can take part.

### **How will your data be processed?**

This research meets the requirements for scientific research. This means that your data will be protected. Your answers will only be accessible to the members of the research team of this study.

All answers and results will be anonymized before they are processed in publications (e.g. any comments or remarks will be removed).

After publication, parts of the dataset are placed anonymously on a secure server at Utrecht University, so that other researchers can check the data analyses and further research on this topic can be conducted. The retention period for this anonymized dataset is ten years.

### **Complaint procedure**

If you have complaints about the research you can report this to the researchers (see below for contact details). If you prefer not to, you can contact the faculty complaint officer of Utrecht University, email: [klachtenfunctionaris-fetsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetsocwet@uu.nl). For questions about privacy, please email: [privacy@uu.nl](mailto:privacy@uu.nl).

### **Further information**

If you have any questions about this study please email Sanne Willigenburg ([s.e.willigenburg@students.uu.nl](mailto:s.e.willigenburg@students.uu.nl)) or San Albers ([s.y.albers@students.uu.nl](mailto:s.y.albers@students.uu.nl)). The project is supervised by Dr. Reine van der Wal ([R.C.vanderWal@uu.nl](mailto:R.C.vanderWal@uu.nl)) and Dr. Leslie van der Leer ([L.vanderLeer@uu.nl](mailto:L.vanderLeer@uu.nl)).

Kind regards,

Sanne Willigenburg and San Albers  
Master students Utrecht University

### **Informed consent**

Your participation is valuable and appreciated. However, your participation is voluntary.

1. I agree to take part in the study carried out by San Albers and Sanne Willigenburg.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, including after consenting to participate.
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in reports, articles, or presentations by the research team.
4. I understand that my participation and data that I provide with my responses will be kept confidential. The data will be used anonymously.

I consent

I do not consent

## **Appendix B**

### **Detailed description of pilot study life quotes**

A pilot study was used to ensure the validity of the life quote and their link with either self-transcendence or self-enhancement values. A questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics.

#### **Participants and design**

The data was collected in Prolific. 112 participated (72 women, 40 men), with an age range of 19 to 67 ( $M=37.86$ ,  $SD=11.13$ ). Most of the participants were White or Caucasian (84,2%), the rest were American Indian (5,8%), Black or African American (4,2%), multiple ethnicity (4,2%), or prefer not to say their ethnicity (1,6%). Most participants were high school graduates (41,7%), the rest had a bachelor degree (40%) or master's degree (10,8%), or doctorate degree (3,3%). A few participants preferred not to answer this question (2,5%) or did not complete schooling (1,7%).

#### **Procedure and materials**

The pilot study started with the aim of the study and presenting the duration of the study (5 minutes). Participants were allowed to quit the survey at any point. Afterwards the participants were then asked to give their consent and there were demographic questions regarding gender, age, education and ethnic group. Hereafter, participants were provided with an explanation of self-transcendence and self-enhancement values. Then participants were then asked if they could rate 28 quotes on self-transcendence or self-enhancement. First, they were asked to rate 28 quotes on self-enhancement: "Please rate the extent to which you think the life quotes below reflect self-enhancement values." on a 7 point-likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Then they were asked to rate 28 quotes on self-transcendence: "Please rate the extent to which you think the life quotes below reflect self-transcendence values." on a 7 point-likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Examples of life quotes are: "the simple act of caring is heroic" or "get rich or die trying". In the pilot study 28 statements were retrieved from quote sites (e.g. goodreads.com), from world influential persons who are representative for each sub-domain (e.g. Dalai Lama for self-transcendence values, and Donald Trump for self-enhancement values).

Lastly, they were thanked for their participation and informed on the goal of the study, and asked if they had additional comments.

### **Pilot study results**

The quotes representing the values are selected from the results of the pilot study. In selecting the quotes, we examined the mean scores and standard deviations showed in Table 1. First, we checked the highest mean on SE or self-transcendence regarding the quotes. Then we looked at the biggest difference between the means scores self-enhancement and self-transcendence, leading to a clear difference in what values the quote represents. Then, we chose the lowest SD for the lowest variation in answer. Based on these factors the quotes were selected for the experimental study about values.

**Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, Difference between the rating of life quote to SE or ST values**

Life quote	Value	Mean	SD	Difference
World peace is the one project we have to do together.	ST	6.01	1.16	2.36
The world is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it.	ST	5.73	1.49	2.05
There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends.	ST	5.72	1.24	1.96
If two people take care of each other, they are both taken care of.	ST	5.93	1.05	2.15
The simple act of caring is heroic.	ST	5.79	1.18	2.03
Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. If you can't help them, at least don't hurt them.	ST	6.04	1.15	2.57
In my mind, having a care and concern for others is one of human's highest qualities.	ST	6.17	0.98	2.23
Winners are losers who got up and gave it one more try.	SE	5.58	1.52	1.98
If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.	SE	5.59	1.50	2.04

I don't follow the rules; I make the rules.	SE	5.02	2.09	2.67
Do as I say, not as I do	SE	4.74	2.01	2.31
Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.	SE	5.19	1.64	1.80
Act as if you're a wealthy man, rich already, and then you'll surely become rich.	SE	5.04	1.99	2.53
You can make a million excuses or you can make a million dollars.	SE	5.32	1.92	2.82

*Note.* ST=self-transcendence and SE=self-enhancement.



## Appendix C

### The Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R)

Please respond honestly to the following questions

1. With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months?

0 1 2 3 4 5–6 7–9 10–19 20 or more

2. With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse on *one and only one* occasion?

0 1 2 3 4 5–6 7–9 10–19 20 or more

3. With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse without having an interest in a long-term committed relationship with this person?

0 1 2 3 4 5–6 7–9 10–19 20 or more

4. Sex without love is OK.

Strongly disagree 123456789 Strongly agree

5. I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying “casual” sex with different partners.

Strongly disagree 123456789 Strongly agree

6. I do *not* want to have sex with a person until I am sure that we will have a long-term, serious relationship.

Strongly disagree 123456789 Strongly agree

7. How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone with whom you do *not* have a committed romantic relationship?

- never
- very seldom
- about once every two or three months
- about once a month
- about once every two weeks
- about once a week
- several times per week

- nearly every day
- at least once a day

8. How often do you experience sexual arousal when you are in contact with someone with whom you do *not* have a committed romantic relationship?

- never
- very seldom
- about once every two or three months
- about once a month
- about once every two weeks
- about once a week
- several times per week
- nearly every day
- at least once a day

9. In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met?

- never
- very seldom
- about once every two or three months
- about once a month
- about once every two weeks
- about once a week
- several times per week
- nearly every day
- at least once a day