DO YOU WANT TO RIDE AGAIN? UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF DATING

APPLICATION USE

by

MARIYA CHEREPANOVA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

THESIS APPROVAL

"Do You Want to Ride Again? Understanding the Cycle of Dating Application Use" a

thesis prepared by Mariya Cherepanova in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science degree in Counseling Psychology & Psychotherapy was presented June

27th, 2023, and was approved and accepted by the thesis committee and the School of

Graduate & Professional Studies.

Committee Approvals:

Approved: _____

Dr. Remos Armaos, Thesis Advisor

Approved: _____

Dr. Maria Korre, Committee Member

Approved: _____

Dr. Katerina Zymni, Committee Member

Approved: _____

Dr. A. Maragakis Program Coordinator MS in Counseling Psychology & Psychotherapy

Approved: _____

Dr. A. Krepapa Dean, School of Graduate & Professional Education

Abstract

Dating applications are becoming an ever more popular tool for people to use when looking for a romantic partner. Yet, it seems that many people repeat the cycle of downloading applications like Tinder, getting disappointed while using them, deleting them, and then re-installing the applications many times over. The disappointment may arise from not being able to fulfill the ever present culturally ingrained romance master plot. As such the current study will explore how users experience the cycle of using dating applications. Participants were recruited through online means. Two female and four male participants (age range 22-32) who have gone at least once through the cycle of dating application use partook in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Results yielded four main themes that discuss the cycle, how dating is perceived, the understanding of romance and "The One", and finally the impact of technology. Although the study's results are indicative of the current sample, they are not easily generalizable. Future research could aim to explore a larger population to increase the applicability of these results on a larger scale. Additionally, a better understanding of online dating habits is necessary.

Keywords: Dating applications, Cycle, Romance master plot, IPA

MARIYA CHEREPANOVA

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Date of Birth	
Military Obligations	
Citizenship(s)	Ukrainian and Greek

FIELDS OF INTEREST

	Psychology, Counselling Psychology, Sexology

EDUCATION

	Deree – The American College of Greece – Athens, Greece
01/2021 – Present	*Master of Science in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy*
	▪ Specialization in Psychology; 3.87 GPA
	University of San Diego – San Diego, United States of America
09/2018 – 12/2018	*Academic Exchange program*
	Deree – The American College of Greece – Athens, Greece
01/2017 – 01/2020	*Bachelor of Arts in Psychology*
	▪ Specialization in Psychology; 3.53 GPA
	Magnum Cum Laude BA Hons in Psychology, Open University Validated (UK). Dual Degree Awarded
	University of Kent – Kent, England
09/2014 – 09/2016	*Incomplete Bachelor of Sciences in Biochemistry*
	St. Lawrence College – Athens, Greece
09/2000 – 09/2014	*High School Diploma*

WORK EXPERIENCE

	Deree – The American College of Greece – Athens, Greece
09/2022 – Present	*Trainee Mental Health Counsellor*
	▪ Provided therapeutic interventions on clients
	▪ Welcomed Clients, handled incoming calls and managed appointment calendar
	▪ Input all necessary information into documentation forms
	The Dress & Photo Bar – Athens, Greece
06/2017 – 08/2017	*Secretary*

- Welcome clients and guests
- Translated documents
- Handled incoming calls and managed appointment calendar

Thermo Fisher Sceintific – Vilnus, Lithuania

06/2016 – 08/2016	*Intern, Research*

- Run experiments
- Record findings of experiments
- Organise findings in a manner to present to HR

Alvis Emopriki – Athens, Greece

07/2013 – 08/2013	*Partial Secretarial Duties, Shipping*

- Received incoming calls and redirected accordingly
- Organized and maintained filing system
- Printed materials

Seminars

01/2020	Interpersonal Trauma and Sex Education: Understanding the Impact of Sexual Abuse and Interpersonal Violence – Attachment Parenting Hellas – Dr. Christiane Sanderson

Conference

3-6/5/2023	3rd World Congress of Existential Therapy 2023, Symvoli

SKILLS

Language	Greek (Proficient), Russian (Native), English (Native)
Technical	Microsoft Office, Social Media, Photoshop, SPSS
Professional	Reliable when assisting, skillful when explaining, experienced in

organizing, active listener, convincing advisor

ACTIVITIES

08/2020 – 08/2020 -Deree College Club	*Governing Body, Vice President/ Treasurer of Better Days 4 Strays*

- Communicated with all offices both inside and outside the university in order to ensure events ran according to plan the Better Days 4 Strays Club. I also created and managed a budget based on the needs of the club which was presented to and accepted by the Student Union.

08/2019 – 08/2020 – Deree College Society	*Governing Body, External Affairs Officer of the Psychology Society*

- Was in the team that won the "Society of the Year Award" in 2020. Created promotional flyers for events organized by the Psychology Society. Aided in organizing and promoting any events that were made.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Do You Want to Ride Again? Understanding the Cycle of Dating Application Use

Humanity has been making the transition to internet communication for at least 20 years and there seems to be no end in sight. Whether it is to find employment, talk to a family member, or even do a bank transaction; there will be a website or application designed to meet those needs. Thus, it is not surprising that dating has also fallen under the same fate.

Once upon a time, communicating with a potential suitor was done by meeting them in person, eventually, letters and telegrams were sent, and ultimately, we reached telephones and e-mails. The development of intimate relationship experiences has undergone a full transformation because of media technology, social media, and networking (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). These relationships are significantly influenced by computer-mediated communication (CMC). The term "computer-mediated communication" refers to any form of communication that takes place through computers, particularly but not primarily online communication (McQuail, 2010). Although online dating applications are located on phones, they too are characterized as a type of CMC that is solely designed to introduce individuals to one another through online dating services (Purwaningtyas et al., 2021).

According to Blumtritt (2022), in 2022 there were 48.1 million people using online dating services in Europe, and this number is expected to rise to 50.9 million by 2024. The growth of smartphone popularity and the development of mobile communication technologies have increased communication options and raised expectations that people would always be able to interact (Ling, 2004). In tandem, location-based and real-time embedded functionalities within the structure of dating apps, such as Tinder and Grindr, allowed people to meet easier and faster, increasing the desire to use them. More specifically it allowed users to communicate their needs, such as emotional, sexual, and even self-esteem, in a more convenient and effective way thus increasing the speed and convenience at which they can be met.

Types of communications

Despite its increasing popularity, many individuals continue to hold the view that real connections are harder to make online and that conventional dating is fundamentally superior and more intimate (Monica et al., 2020). This view signifies that, to a major extent, CMC and face-to-face (F2F) communication differ, creating a varied experience when it comes to the process of dating. Chesebro and Bonsall (1990) identify five characteristics that differentiate CMC from F2F encounters. Firstly, at the time that these characteristics were described CMC was solely focused on verbal communication whereas F2F incorporates non-verbal communication. However, currently, we have the ability to send photos, videos, and even voice recordings thus allowing for more nuanced conversations but still not equivalent to F2F. Secondly, the differences in verbal communication are pertinent in that CMC is reliant on text thus grammatical and structural organization of the communication affects the perception of the individual. In F2F, verbal communication mixes with non-verbal and affects the perception of the individual. Thirdly, CMC communication does not have immediate responses in comparison to F2F. Fourthly, due to the nature of CMC, the users could reveal as many or as few social factors (e.g. ethnicity or gender) as they wished. This is much harder to do in person thus there is less control over the things that one might be judged upon when meeting F2F. Lastly, the way time is utilized is different in both cases. When it comes to F2F everything is in real-time, with no option to pause, rethink what you want to say, reword the sentence, and the response you will get is also immediate. In CMC you are not as bound by the words you say as you are in F2F.

Dating within different communication structures

Of all the afar mentioned characteristics, Griffin (2006) suggests that verbal signals and extended time are the two main features that affect the romantic courtship experience. CMC employs the use of symbol-like language that is interwoven with computer programs,

using emoticons. This symbol-like language is used in addition to text language. In contrast to face-to-face communication, which utilizes verbal symbols like language and non-verbal signals through body language. CMC also takes longer than face-to-face communication because computer characters and other restrictions prevent CMC communicators from understanding the meaning of the message being delivered right away.

When meeting someone in-person personal information will be discussed during the first meeting. However, when communicating with someone online, you have access to their dating profile which contains a large amount of personal information. While employing CMC, the information is easily accessible and accelerates the rate of self-disclosure creating a sense of bonding due to the increasingly personal level of the discussion (Laksmidewi Marghaputra, 2022). Another aspect that accelerates the deepening of the conversation is the space left between the responses. This space is usually present due to time passing and allows users to potentially imagine the response the other person will have to their messages or to potentially explore what they might be doing instead of responding to their message. This imagination usually takes over to cover for the information that is missing which doesn't occur in face-to-face interactions as often because the responses are usually immediate or can be addressed in a direct manner (Antheunis et al., 2019). Since there is a lack of nonverbal cues online daters would communicate about topics deeper and give more information throughout (Bryant & Sheldon 2017).

Timmermans and Courtois (2018) recognized that many dating applications let users chat with several possible partners at once, expanding their options and removing any feeling of exclusivity, particularly early in the dating process. This can help them widen their social network and provide them the freedom to engage with others in their own time. The extent to which an individual is open to the process of establishing a relationship is directly related to the level of self-disclosure a participant is willing to offer. This self-disclosure is guided by

the depth and breadth of the content (Sukardani et al., 2022). In contrast to breadth of

disclosure, which is the array of topics discussed, depth deals with the level of disclosure in

the specific areas (Sukardani et al., 2022).

However, research suggests that prolonged computer-mediated communication prior

to meeting in person does not enhance first impressions. In fact, couples tend to describe less

attraction to their partner in real life rather than online regardless of the depth and breadth of

the prior conversations (Ramirez Jr & Zhang, 2007). This phenomenon can be explained by

the fact that during online communication an imagined version of the individual is created.

This mental impression is one that has been fantasized to perfection, such projection requires

psychological investment in creating visual and communicational expectations. Thus, when

meeting in person, the partners likely don't meet the expectational standards that were

designed to emulate the ones that a perfectly fantasized creation could meet (Schwartz &

Velotta, 2018). This experience is not limited to the fantasized creation of the other party but

also is done to create the perfect version of whom the initial user would like to be and portray

to the other party.

Interestingly, even if a romantic connection is formed in a face-to-face manner, it has

become common practice to include some sort of online communication. Whether it is to

"screen them" by finding their accounts online and learning more information that way or by

adding them as a friend on Facebook (Fox & Anderegg, 2014). We cannot be sure whether

the closeness of connections that are generated from online communication are different from

the ones formed outside. This is somewhat because the perception/purpose of the online

applications affects the way the connections are perceived. Yet, the resulting relationships

when it comes to dating and intimacy do not drastically differ from those that started without

the help of an application (Newett et al., 2017). In one analysis of the online dating process,

one of the key features of online dating services is the contact they facilitate, which enables

potential dates to talk intermittently before meeting in person (Finkel et al., 2017).

Because most online channels are asynchronous, senders can strategically present

themselves and create messages that are more precise. Regardless of the truth, they are

projecting their ideal selves by only sharing information that they believe will further their

relational objectives (Sundar, 2015); due to the isolation from the person, they're talking to,

essential anonymity, and ability to edit any information they send out. CMC users employ

such freedom to craft responses to suit their intentions. This sets the groundwork for easy

deception. Since deception requires a motive, the goal is to increase appeal to others thus

impression management is a great focus of such users (Toma et al., 2008). The benefit that

CMC offers to those who are intending to deceive is the lack of nonverbal presence which

could potentially give away their true nature. These patterns can create hesitancy in anyone

who considered dating online.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, Finkel's (2012) definition of online dating will be used

which states: "practice of using dating websites to find a romantic companion". Traditional

offline dating, in comparison, is "the way people meet potential romantic partners in their

everyday lives through non-Internet activities, such as their social network, a fortuitous face-

to-face encounter, or some combination of the two" (Finkel, 2012). Typically, online dating is

a type of interpersonal connection that starts off in the setting of computer-mediated

communication and can progress to more personal forms of communication like face-to-face

engagement. Similarly, to Portolan and McAlister (2021), the term "dating application" will

be used to encompass a wide range of applications. This is a challenging environment, and

not all applications are made for the same use. While some are transparent about their

primary function, which is to get a long-term love partner, others are built with hookups and quick encounters rather than romance in mind.

The complexity of the definition of offline dating in comparison to online dating can be an indicator of the way that society responds to dating. Meaning, the way we observe and define dating may inadvertently affect the way we interact with the means.

Online dating

Online dating usually entails creating a personal profile, using a searchable database of potential partners, or receiving recommendations for potential partners based on a matching algorithm. Factual information (such as age, gender, and location), responses to open-ended questions covering more personal information (such as hobbies and pet peeves), and images are the three forms of material that are generally used within these algorithms.

If a satisfactory interpersonal or emotional online connection is formed, users will go to other chat programs that are more personal since they use private numbers, such as WhatsApp, after feeling confident and wanting to continue exploring their partnerships (Laksmidewi Marghaputra, 2022), these networks can also be considered informal dating systems that allow for the blossoming of a romantic connection (Orchard, 2019).

Self-disclosure will deepen at this point. Self-disclosure typically happens after lengthy face-to-face interactions during which both parties have had a chance to get to know one another. Although not every person who meets through an online method will meet in person.

Meeting people through CMC means is becoming more common, there are many reasons for this to be the case. One reason could be that it is in fact easier to do so from the comfort of your phone. Another reason could be that telling a family member or a friend about personal dating preferences is uncomfortable. Thus, not having all the information on

the side of the friend or family who is trying to introduce them will lead to unsuccessful results, further discouraging using them in the future. Dating a stranger offers more discreetness than dating a friend of a friend. A very useful feature that dating applications offer is the ability to block someone, yet this is not possible to do with someone that someone close to you knows (Rosenfeld et al., 2019).

Stigma

These benefits were not always noted by the world. As online dating services were introduced to the market, they were considered dangerous and embarrassing to use. Some remarks perceived these services as an easy location for con artists who were looking to take advantage of lonely people or to present themselves as someone who they are not (Kauflin, 2011). There was a stigmatized perception that online dating was used by people who are unattractive or socially awkward and who would potentially find like-minded partners (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). This stigmatized perception created a sense of embarrassment in the users.

Although "old-fashioned" dating was and is still effective, it centered its aim around people who are local. A major reason why online dating has grown in popularity and has partially shed its stigma is that the internet has allowed individuals to reach far outside their social circle to people that have no previous social ties (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Traditional methods of meeting someone via a matchmaker or friends are becoming rarer and are being replaced by sophisticated algorithms (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). Thus, meeting someone online has become so commonplace that walking up to a stranger and striking up a conversation at a bar or a coffee shop is considered "old-fashioned".

Benefits of online dating

There are many ways in which online dating is currently perceived as superior to traditional dating methods. Firstly, there is access to a wider pool of people thus increasing the options beyond the usual. This is pioneered by location-based features that are common in dating applications. This feature also allows user to not only widen their current social circle but also find people in specific geographical locations (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). Secondly, these dating apps allow for communication prior to the in-person date which allows to build a small amount of trust. Thirdly, there's an interaction between one's preferences and information about themselves that aids the algorithm's ability to make better pairs, potentially increasing the likelihood of meeting people who are more appropriate for them.

Another benefit was identified by Hobbs, Owen, and Greber (2016), they found that 66% of the people they interviewed agreed with the notion that dating apps allowed them to feel control over their romantic and sexual encounters. This means the users get to decide how quickly they progress with their matches and how much they reveal to matches. Due to the nature of their communication, users tend to be more straightforward in expressing what they are pursuing to levels that may not be considered acceptable when dating someone in-person. Moreover, some suggest that the ability to access the internet anywhere is beneficial to us because we are able to save on time, which is a precious and limited resource, of which the internet has an abundance of (Balasubraman et al., 2002).

On another note, the comfort that we experience with online communication transfers over to online dating, creating a non-threatening atmosphere to start a conversation, offering various forms of CMC to interact with potential partners, and simplifying the partner selection process (Wiederhold, 2015).

Effect of online dating on culture

Online dating has also transformed contemporary culture and led to some of the most significant and pervasive shifts in conventional romance (Sharabi & Dykstra-DeVette, 2019). According to Merkle and Richardson (2000), relationships formed through online dating don't often follow conventional models of relationship growth, like meeting someone, dating them for a while, getting married, and having kids; or meeting someone, allow for emotional bonding, become a couple, and then engaged in sexual intercourse. Online daters are introduced to virtual profiles to aid them in finding a love companion rather than meeting a real person.

This would suggest that even the means through which dating occurs are becoming more integrated, removing the boundaries that we may have once been vigilantly aware of. The separation between dating applications and dating in real life is starting to blur. Coupled with two distinctive features of the world of mobile internet usage identified by (Watson et al., 2002); ubiquitous access (access anywhere in the world) and universal access (the ability to stay always connected), it isn't surprising how ingrained it has become in our daily lives.

There seems to be a paradoxical relationship in that more than ever people have the desire to have fulfilling relationships yet there are fewer resources to meet those desires, time being the most in-demand resource. Time is a finite resource, it seems that there has been a shift of the amount of free time one may have due to the economic state of the world, this is seemingly because many people are becoming more in need of money so will spend more time investing it into working or developing themselves professionally than focus on developing their romantic life. The investment of time is something that many are not able to do, as such a reliance on something that is able to save time is becoming ever more alluring.

Considering the internet has become part of day-to-day activities via the means of phones that is part of our daily routines, ingraining itself in all aspects of our lives, and its usage changes the way our culture perceives dating (Jung et al., 2019). It has allowed us to become more efficient and quicker with our communication, problem-solving, and even entertainment. Thus, it is not surprising that those who use the internet for more of their tasks are also more likely to use online dating sites (Kang & Hoffman, 2011).

Since these online platforms require you to design your "self" online, the person is able to create the version of their real self-creating a performative version of who they are "offline". Users are aware that they have a tendency to do so, thus when it is not surprising that in a study by Selterman and Gideon (2022), the participants revealed that they felt fewer positive emotions and were more uncomfortable prior to a date that started in dating applications. However, the participants demonstrate significantly equal joy in perceived emotion, attraction, partner perception, and actions between application- and offline-initiated encounters once they met their partner in person and saw the real version.

Societally speaking, there has been a transition in norms. Prior to online dating, there was a limited expectation of finding someone with specific attributes that were desired mainly because it was difficult to do so. However, now with online dating, there is an ability to filter and search for very niche attributes (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). In the past, there was a limited expanse of our social circles, for example, it would be unlikely to assume that someone whose circle does not have people who are interested in non-traditional erotic practices i.e. BDSM would struggle to find someone who is also interested in such practices. However, now, there are applications and websites designed to search for those specificities.

Online dating applications

Since the success of mobile applications and a desire to profit from those, many pre-existing dating sites have created applications through which people can use their services (e.g Match.com). There have also been many stand-alone dating applications that are exclusively designed to be mobile applications (e.g. Tinder, Her) (Jung et al., 2019). The most effective apps for finding a partner are location-based, like Tinder or Grindr. By utilizing the GPS on the devices, they are made to increase social, romantic, and sexual relationships between close strangers (Yeo & Fung, 2017). Online dating applications offer an alternative and practical solution to ease the partner-matching process. However, with time, they have evolved into transactional tools. They not only allow for partner-matching but also as a steppingstone for the progression of the connection with the partner.

Although the contemporary understanding of dating application usage is not consistently established, there is an overarching narrative. Dating applications are online emotional marketplaces, that adopt the hook-up culture, that do not value monogamy or long-term relationships (Fetters, 2022). Users can now construct their perfect relationships or partners and look for connections (Quiroz, 2013). Thus, having the option to never meet again but still being reachable via predetermined proximity boundaries, along with the idealization and actualization, creates hookup prospects. However, user attitudes have changed, and the majority consider Tinder as their "go-to dating app" rather than a sex app (Klinenberg & Ansari, 2016). Users of mobile dating applications like Tinder have the chance to dream about anonymous people, relationships, interpersonal behaviors, and sexual antics (LeFebvre, 2017).

Other negative evaluations of dating applications focus on emotional and physical safety (Ng, 2019) and users lying about themselves. According to Peng in study done in

2020, 83% of participants lied to a certain extent on their online dating profiles. The extent of the lie can vary in significance and is usually aimed to achieve attractiveness, for example, adding an extra 2cm to one's height description, this is done in order the attract others.

Additionally, something that is considered a positive such as having a large selection pool of options in dating applications does not guarantee a successful romantic outcome according to Finkel et al. (2012). Online profiles do not accurately translate the multi-faceted perspective of a person and there is only something a face-to-face interaction can uncover. The drawback of having such a wide number of options is that this may lead to uninformed decisions (Wiederhold, 2015), objectification of potential partners (Anzani et al., 2018), and limited commitment (Anzani et al., 2018).

That being said, Beltran (2021) suggests that it is time to adopt dating apps for all the advantages they provide because dating has evolved over time. Dating apps have something to offer to every user, whether it be altering how someone approaches dating in the first place, meeting new individuals in a platonic or romantic fashion, or empowering a user in their hunt for romantic or sexual satisfaction. When compared to traditional dating, the convenience of discovering someone from anywhere one chooses to unlock their phone and be able to regulate the speed of those relationships is unequaled. While utilizing apps like Tinder may not be for everyone, this most recent method of matchmaking should be welcomed as a new era of dating that gives couples more control over their relationships in today's busy and technologically advanced society.

It seems that online dating service users are satisfied with their experiences because they are more likely to positively describe the platforms positively rather than negatively (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). It would be unfair to compare internet dating to traditional dating on variables such as risk, personal connection development, and benefits vs

risk mainly because such variables are rather personal to the individual and usually dictated by the individual's unique life experiences. It is too soon to draw a solid conclusion on the matter because there is much that has changed in the past five years with Tinder let alone twenty-five years since the creation of Match.com. Ultimately, people will still go to great lengths and take risks to find love and romance. Con artists and liars will continue to exploit such weaknesses with the help of new tools and the Internet. Love is a dangerous game no matter the means through which you do it, you are never guaranteed that you won't be in pain. Thus, we can observe users repeating a cycle in which they enjoy using the applications until they don't. Once that occurs, they delete the application, nevertheless, after a while, they decided to return to using it.

Dating application algorithm

As mentioned previously, part of the reason there is a different reaction to dating applications is due to the way the algorithms are designed and how those designs affect the decisions that the users take using them.

There seems to be an interesting contradiction in the way online dating sites or applications are designed. It is in the dating sites or applications' interest to have users find a match that would create a positive interaction and then cease to use it. In this way, the word spreads about its effectiveness leading to more users signing up to the site or application. Essentially the algorithm is interested in creating a safe and usable atmosphere with as many matches as possible, to lose the existing clientele in hopes that this would bring new clientele in (Jung et al., 2019).

It is of important note that the intimacy that is observed in digital spaces also occurs in face-to-face contact (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). This is further supported by the notion that dating sites encourage the development of an in-person connection through their

messaging and allow for social networks to be engaged. Even if a connection is created in a digital context, it is frequently regarded as necessary to move to physical settings to guarantee that it endures and is acknowledged (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008).

Although the communication that occurs may be different depending on the generation. Online dating services that allow users to exchange non-text file types like gifs (short, animated image files) help taps into the millennial market, who frequently utilize computer-moderated communication to interact with one another in ways that people from other generations tend to avoid. Teenagers who spend a lot of time online may be more acclimated to the notion of meeting partners online and may be more conscious of algorithmic impacts on dating platforms (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Older generations may have distinct conventional beliefs about dating and utilize technology (including dating sites) less frequently.

Other online dating algorithms focus on encouraging their user base to not use their computer-moderated communication as a communication product but to focus on meeting in person. This perspective demands viewing these services as "introducing sites" rather than "dating sites" (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). This favors an older perspective of dating but in a modern way, in which the meeting point is not the focus of the interaction.

The limitations of online dating algorithms that have focused searching and filtering options are that individuals give increased value to the aspects of themselves that match with the other. This focus decreases the chemistry and focus on quirks that make someone desirable through their undesirable attributes. The main source of this issue can be considered the over-integration of social media and other platforms into the base of these online services. Being able to see in advance the differences one has can create a sense of distance, for example looking at someone's Spotify account and finding a genre of music one doesn't like

creates ascribed prejudice. This ascribed label can even prevent the first date from occurring merely because they don't match the imagined perfect person. This strategy is called "filtering". It narrows the options people have, affecting how users view such dating applications. These findings imply that common beliefs about online dating might affect people's dating choices (Huang et al., 2022).

Part of the way Tinder's algorithm is designed allows for the users to not only have more partner selections available but also allows for one to consider a different type of partner than they are normally used to (Newett et al., 2017). Additionally, as Race in 2015 suggests, Tinder can be seen as a framing device, within which one can focus on creating a specific type of connection. If someone wanted to hook-up with the use of Tinder, that is the frame of mind with which they approach it. Other applications such as Bumble that have other options like the "BFF" one in which meeting friends is encouraged may create a different connotation in the user's minds.

More recently, Sharabi (2020) investigated how people's views of a first date were impacted by their ideas by their perception of online dating algorithms. People's perceptions of the algorithms may have a greater impact on online dating behaviors and outcomes than the algorithms themselves, as evidenced by the fact that participants who thought the algorithms were successful in connecting compatible matches engaged in more pro-relationship communication behaviors and were more likely to report greater first date success. It's interesting that the majority of survey participants seemed to be ignorant of algorithmic impacts on online dating sites, further supporting the notion that the users are the driving force behind the way a dating method is used.

Means of online dating

Of important note, although the concepts apply somewhat liberally to computer-based online dating sites and phone-based dating applications, there have been observable differences depending on the means through depending on the medium used. This is because the user experience of the internet seems to be different depending on the type of device used (Jung et al., 2019). Those who use the internet via a mobile tend to spend more time on the internet than those who use a personal computer (Ghose & Han, 2011). As such it becomes so commonplace that the mobile experience is become less "internet-like" and is becoming just a tool through which, they communicate that is in line with our normal day-to-day conversations. Shen et al. (2016) contend that using a touch interface encourages the selection of an emotionally charged option whereas using a computer, results in intellectually better choices.

In practice, Nusrat et al., (2022) indicates that users would interact less with the core personality features in a dating profile while viewing it on a smartphone. Thus, they will feel psychologically removed from the individual in the profile, giving inner qualities less weight. Users will therefore focus more on the internal qualities when using computers to evaluate the relationship's prospective viability. Increased psychological proximity to the profile's subject will result in higher customer assessments for appealing interior qualities. This effect, however, seems to be moderated by gender in which females tend to experience more psychological closeness with the profiles when using computers.

Psychological effects of dating applications

Dating is a valuable experience, it has been described that having a dating partner has the propensity to lead to an experience of higher levels of mental health and well-being in comparison to those who do not (Dush & Amato, 2005). Lyubomirsky, et al. (2005)

identified a relationship between romantic life satisfaction and subjective well-being in which they both have an effect on one another.

Van De Wiele and Tong (2014) identified that dating applications have a positive influence on the user's self-disclosure. Multiple factors that are observed in online dating practice namely: entertainment, sex, relationship seeking, friendship, and social inclusion, strongly influence a person's subjective well-being. In the same way, there are benefits to using the internet, but there are also drawbacks. When someone is using the internet compulsively there seems to be a correlation between a decrease in happiness and self-esteem; and an increase in stress and depression levels (Muusses et al., 2014). When compared to individuals who did not think they were successful utilizing online dating tools, those who thought they were successful, had better evaluations of life satisfaction, romantic life satisfaction, and good affect.

Motives to date online

There are many motivations that one might have to use of dating applications such as Tinder, Sumter et al (2017) identified correlations with motives such as love, casual sex, self-worth, validation, and thrill of excitement. It seems that of all these motives, love was the strongest motive of all. Men have a higher tendency to be motivated to use Tinder for casual sex and excitement or to alleviate boredom. Additional motives identified by Carpenter and McEwan (2016) are seeking a relationship/soulmate, to lessen boredom, entertainment, and generally meeting people. In a study by Roese et al., (2006), men expressed greater remorse for their sexual passivity and for perceived missed possibilities for casual sex. It's probable that the larger propensity for regretting missed sexual possibilities has a stronger impact on how males use online dating tools.

Although online daters may complain that no one is looking for commitment, this view potentially exists because many online daters disappear after one or a couple of dates causing an experience of rejection. However, this could be because there are so many options to choose from creating either a sense that something better might be out there or individuals are no longer confident in their own decision-making abilities placing this responsibility on the applications thus, they go back to so-called "marketplace" (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018).

For some people, the act of online dating itself was entertaining since it resembled a game or a quest, however, this does not discourage use, in study by Huang et al. (2022)., it was demonstrated that people did tend to be supportive of dating applications, comparing the algorithms to tools that helped online daters find appropriate matches regardless of the game-like structure. This demonstrates that the entertainment factor of dating applications is also an important factor to consider when it comes to the motivations one could have to use them.

According to Berkowitz et al. (2021), college students who use Tinder frequently approach the app with the purpose of hooking up rather than forming lasting relationships. This practice eventually reinforces ingrained cultural norms and dating scripts. The need for meaningful relationships is in fact a basic motivator for utilizing online dating services that aim to improve emotional well-being, making this motive the most prevalent reason for consumers to start using or stick with online dating services (Fitriani et al., 2016).

Augmented reality

Much of the discussion surrounding online dating still tends to focus on the separation of "online" and "offline". This separation creates the need to compare between what works and what doesn't, what is worse or better. Yet it is becoming harder and harder to distinguish them due to the integrative nature of the Western culture and its rapid adoption of everything technological. According to Jurgenson (2012), conversations regarding "online" and "offline"

environments, are pointless. Viewing them from this perspective serves to promote a duality

ignoring that it is not the case. He describes the various ways that interactions taking place in

digital and physical locations are linked criticizing the divide by using the phrase "digital

dualism." According to him, the lines between online and offline places are now actually so

intertwined that isolating them is counterproductive and fosters the idea that digital

interactions are either less genuine or nonexistent. Jurgenson (2012) suggests that the

combination of the digital and physical worlds creates an "augmented reality" in which

reality exists in both planes. His approach emphasizes the effect CMC users themselves have

and exert while also acknowledging the significance that digital social spaces play in the

creation and performance of social life.

The effect of this "augmented reality" is most evident in the way online dating has

changed our conception of the serendipity of finding the perfect person. The

conceptualization of finding "The One" through mere chance is starting to be pushed out by

the notion that a systematic approach has been designed. There is a "scientific" method so to

speak, that can more precisely identify the perfect person for you. Thus, the era of serendipity

has been replaced with the era of assisted serendipity.

Hobbs et al. (2016) identified that in the life of users, Tinder was considered an

"intermediary" by providing the chance to broaden personal prospects, it did not affect their

desires when it came to their romantic life; finding or being in a committed, monogamous

relationship, for instance. Quiroz (2013) postulates that assisted serendipity is merely

notifying when it is the optimal time or area to meet the perfect someone.

Adaptation to augmented reality

To achieve this calculated/assisted approach many of the sites began hiring social

scientists to create sophisticated algorithms that would be more effective in their pairing

process. For example, eHarmony had psychologist Steve Carter help develop their algorithm (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018); Helen Fisher, an anthropologist, and authority on intimate relationships, joined Match.com and its sibling site Chemistry.com in 2005 as its Chief Scientific Advisor (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018); PerfectMatch. com commissioned sociologist and co-author Pepper Schwartz to develop their algorithm. Although they have been hired to design such algorithms, what has not been revealed is how the algorithms operate and how effective they are at surpassing the judgments and experiences of human beings when it comes to romantic pairings. The proliferation of a brand-new profession of online dating specialists is maybe one of the strongest signs that these websites are not as effective as they promise to be (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). These dating specialists educate users on how to be more desirable and effective while online thus partially undermining the effectiveness of the algorithms that are designed to find your perfect match.

Romanticization

Due to the way the internet operates, in combination with our desire to do anything to find "The One" a complex reality is created in which we are engaged in romantic activity both online and in person.

One of the most common storylines in Western culture is the romantic one. It is a cultural master plot, a well-known tale that has the power to fundamentally alter the way we think about our lives (Portolan & McAlister, 2021). Abbott (2008) defines master plots as 'stories that we tell over and over in myriad forms and that connect vitally with our deepest values, wishes, and fears'. These are stories with which almost everyone is familiar, which can deeply and intrinsically shape our perspectives. This longing is best expressed by Hechter in 2022 "Romanticizing everything is never dull, but it's incredibly disappointing.". To

circumvent this disappointment, we circle back to the hope the romance plot offers life-long happiness.

The romance plot can be traced to the comedies of Ancient Greece, which end with a union and usually marriage (Regis, 2007), yet romance plots have not always ended happily. Only since the happy-ever-after romance stories started to appear in popular literature did the romance storyline as we know it now started to take shape. The romantic story has been oversaturated in modern popular culture, it is composed of romantic genres like the ones seen in well-known romance novels, romantic comedy films, and love songs. Romance plots also show up as supporting characters or even the main narrative in practically all other genres and media. This sort of media representation not only affects how we perceive romance but also guides the imaginative representation of what romance should look like.

Most of the media we watch and read has romance stories, which have evolved into templates that have cultural backing (Roche et al., 2018). The story contains certain turning points and events: you meet someone, fall in love, get hitched, have kids, and live happily ever after. Although the meaning and sequence of these milestones can change—for example, not all couples marry, have children, or delay having children until after marriage—the cultural supremacy of the romance storyline and our nearly universal familiarity with it cannot be disputed.

Illouz's (2008) claim that "the one" is built as "unique and irreplaceable" it is supported by the broad adherence to the romantic master narrative. If we are to conceptualize the search for "the one" through the perspective of shopping, we can understand why we observe quick formation and separation of connections. These connections are not made to last, to ensure that when "Mr. Right" comes around "Mr. Right now" can be discarded with ease (Portolan & McAlister, 2021).

Narratives of online dating

Important narratives when discussing dating that were mentioned in Huang et al., (2022), were the concept that there is inherent random luck, an essence of lack of control of who their match will be, when it came to online dating. Viewing online dating platforms as open marketplaces in which you search within a random array of options to find something good.

Interestingly when it came to the shopping metaphor, it was described in both online and traditional dating. However, when it comes to traditional dating the shopping metaphor was focused on the dating process in which the participants would describe gathering information to assess the viability of the relationship. In contrast, when discussing the shopping metaphor with online dating the focus was on the selection of the profiles equating them to "window shopping" almost the way we do shopping online in which we cannot touch the items so we rely on other means to assess the quality (Huang et al., 2022). Although there is considerable overlap between people's conceptions of conventional and online dating, the existence of these widespread notions shows that there are also some fundamental differences.

Huang et al., (2022) identified a popular belief, that when two people first meet and there's instant chemistry like in movies. According to popular culture, conventional dating should happen relatively naturally as individuals go about their everyday lives. Participants expressed annoyance with how traditional dating does not match the expectations set by movies while believing it to be the best method for finding a love partner. This exposes the potentially inherent contradiction between the way we are shown by the media that love can look like and experiencing something completely different. Yet when are exposed to the false

expectation, we might cling to a comforting narrative rather than creating a more realistic one that would incorporate personal experiences.

When romanticizing the connection, one is building the romantic context, this requires a level of daydreaming and imagination to maintain. Especially when the partner is not directly in our presence of us. Imagined interactions (IIs) are versions of daydreaming in combination with internal monologue. In which people either imagine future interactions or relive past ones thus indirectly experiencing them through a personal filter (Honeycutt, 2003). These processes reflect the level of fantasy and imagination involved in maintaining interpersonal relationships (LeFebvre et al., 2020). The IIs serve to maintain our self-understanding, conflict linkage, rehearsal, catharsis, compensation, and relational maintenance (Honeycutt, 2003, 2019).

Imagined Interactions

It is ever more so important to address this because, in an environment where the other person is not within reach, there tends to be more frequent presentation of IIs (Honeycutt, 2010), these include long-distance and online dating. Additionally, evidence has been shown to support the idea that imagined interactions can take place with people whom people haven't met in person but nonetheless fulfill crucial interpersonal roles for romantic relationships (Carpenter, 2021).

These IIs are present before and after the real encounter thus they guide the way we always represent the interaction with the person within our minds. The ones that revisit the encounters after the fact, ultimately strengthen trust in others. The drawback is that it increases the negative consequences people feel when the idealized connections end or are abandoned, which can make the online dating process even more difficult for certain people (Walther & Whitty, 2021). Additionally, they then may become uncomfortable re-imagining

their unsuccessful online dating relationships or other experiences such as rejection due to the

tremendous emotional toll (Eichenberg et al., 2017).

Cycle of online dating use

Although observed but not fully understood why, when it come to the way users have

been known to use dating application, a cyclical pattern emerged. Participants would return to

dating apps desperately wanting to experience the comfort of the pattern that the romantic

master plot offers. They would swipe, match, and send many messages to many candidates.

Following that, they would either lose interest or faith in the application, delete the

application, experience loneliness, and hurriedly return to the beginning of the cycle

(Portolan & McAlister, 2021). With every new cycle, users essentially create a new chapter

in their lives and place themselves in the role of the romantic protagonist as Catherine Belsey

(1994) suggests "to be in love is to be the protagonist of a story".

Using dating apps like a cycle is nothing new. When users are dissatisfied, they are

frequently just as motivated to leave an app as they are to discover a stable and long-lasting

love connection. But under the more extreme conditions of the pandemic, users wanted to

connect more through dating applications. The process of swiping and talking to deleting to

going back to the applications wasn't smooth at all. Users expressed a continuous sensation of

being "broken" or having "something wrong with them," plainly shaken by the jagged cycle

(Portolan & McAlister, 2021). Users in the epidemic were desperate to be cast in the romance

master plot to get the security it offers, to not miss their "perfect" opportunity for love, and

out of enthusiasm for the lockdown's special advantages for a certain type of romantic story.

It also revealed distress over the challenges of moving from casual chat to more personal

topics of conversation and the impossibility of judging love chemistry virtually. Participants

found themselves both desperately seeking romance yet unable to accomplish the master

plan's crescendo because they were stuck in the jagged love cycle (Portolan & McAlister, 2021).

Even though individuals may experience fatigue in their online dating experience, they may need to take a break and start fresh with a better outlook on their potentially new experience (Schwartz & Velotta, 2018).

Much of the fatigue that is experienced by the users comes from having to make quick decisions, regretting certain decisions, being exposed to external opinions and validations, and rejection based on unsuccessful interactions (especially those that are based on one-sided desires). Additionally, discouraging experiences occur quite often, especially in an environment where no one owes each other anything. There is a contradiction that is experienced in that when there are many options, you are more likely to create a higher list of requirements and deal breakers because the assumption is that there will be someone who meets a larger number of them. This, however, creates the perfect atmosphere for many rejections due to not meeting those requirements. Further explaining the results found by Lenhart and Duggan (2014) that a third of those who date online have never gone out on a date with someone they met there.

Aim of the study

Overall, the current literature demonstrates an understanding of how dating applications operate and how they affect the way communication occurs within the given context. Moreover, there is a comprehension of the reasons that online dating can cause someone to experience satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences. Within the context of online dating, imagination plays a key role and exploring how that affects a person has been addressed in previous literature to a certain extent.

Yet what is lacking in contemporary research, is deep exploration of the reasons for the cyclical pattern of deleting and re-installing dating applications observed in users. This is important to understand because the number of users is continuing to increase throughout the years and the cyclical pattern exposes the true benefits and drawbacks that a user will feel from the applications. Understanding that will give us better insight on how support can be offered to those in distress. The research that does exist focuses more narrowly on either homosexual men, the specifics of the most popular dating app Tinder, the risks associated with using dating apps, or the direct motivations one may have to start them. This is understandable given that dating applications have only been around for 25 years and scientific interest in online dating has only just begun. Additionally, there has yet to be an extensive discussion in how the combination of romanticism affects dating use. This paper will aim to cover the existing gaps to some extent.

Thus, exploring the cyclical pattern of dating application from the perspective of romanticization and imagined interactions offers a broader understanding of the phenomenon. As a result, I want to contribute to the discourse by investigating the following study issue as a qualitative researcher: *How do users experience the cycle of using dating applications?*

Method

Analytic Strategy

To better achieve the goal of exploring in a meaningful way what works and doesn't when online dating, a qualitative approach was utilized. More specifically, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is designed to focus on and investigate a participant's real lived experience within a given context. Considering this paper wanted to explore one's experience when it comes to online dating, more specifically the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that would cause someone to delete and re-download dating applications. The

exploration of the topic through IPA allows for a deeper understanding of the overlap of concepts that have previously not been combined in previous literature, giving a more insightful overlook. This approach allowed for meaningful interpretation, without any presumption of previous knowledge from both parties. For the protection of the identity of the participants, I will use pseudonyms that will be untraceable, they will be based on a randomly assigned color.

I followed the method based on the theory and research proposed by Smith et al. (2009). In which I reviewed the transcripts, identified themes, offered interpretations, and some personal reflexivity.

Recruitment of participants

The recruitment of the participant occurred after the acceptance of the thesis proposal by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The American College of Greece - Deree. Once approval was received, a post was shared both on the researchers Facebook account and on the Facebook page "Αγανακτισμένοι στο DEREE" on which Deree students frequent, as well as the Reddit website in the subsections of r/psychologyresearch, r/samplesize, and r/collegestudents pages. This allowed the option of capturing a wide selection of people with various cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological backgrounds for a wider range of experiences. The post was phrased as follows: "Have you ever used dating apps? Have you ever deleted and then re-downloaded any dating app? Are you currently dating? Please help a graduate student working on their thesis explore the experience of online dating by participating in an interview. If you are interested, please comment or message me and I will provide you with more details."

To ensure that the participants yielded fruitful results, there were requirements that must be met by the participants. The participants would have had to use at one point in time,

at least one dating application for a minimum of a month, deleted it at some point, allowed time to pass, and then re-downloaded the same or different dating application again; they would also have to consider themselves as people who dated, meaning they are talking to people with romantic intent or going out on dates.

As a result of these postings, all the six participants reached out through private messages, to the researchers' private Facebook account offering help with their project. As they were the first to reach out and met all the criteria mentioned previously, there was no need to further search for participants, so all posts were promptly deleted. Of the six participants, four of them were male and two of them were female. For confidentiality reasons, they will be referred to as colors that were randomly assigned to them.

Blue is a 32-year-old female, who works as a project manager in the UK. She has used both Tinder and Bumble since 2018-2019, and then again from the beginning of 2020 to the middle of 2020, since then she has not been using them and is currently in a relationship.

Peach is a 25-year-old female, who is a second-year master's student who lives in Greece. She has only used Tinder since 2015 on and off. At times she's deleted it as quickly as a month into using it at times it took years. She is currently single.

Grey is a 31-year-old male, who is working a graphic designer and lives in Greece. He has used both Tinder and Bumble from 2017 till 2022 on and off without a specific pattern. He is currently single and not dating.

Yellow is a 30-year-old male, who is working in theatre as a director, designer, and performer who is based in Greece but travels quite a bit. He has used both Grindr and Tinder, although he prefers Tinder. He has used them since 2018-2023 on and off.

Red is a 32-year-old male, who is a jewelry creator and distributor, living in Greece. He has used Tinder, Bumble, Feeld, Hinge. He has been using dating applications from 2012-2023 on and off. He is currently in a relationship.

Green is a 22-year-old male, who is a flight dispatcher living in Austria. He used Tinder for about a month in 2021 and redownloaded a couple months later, hasn't really used it since.

Interview procedure

Once the participants consented to taking part in the project, we attempted to establish a time and day to meet with them in person or online, depending on their preference. All but one of the participants opted to meet online as it was difficult to find a secure in-doors area to meet that was convenient for all parties.

For the participant who had their interview in person, an informed consent and audio release forms were provided on the day of the meeting (See Appendix A and Appendix B respectively). For the participants who had their interview online, the above-mentioned forms were sent via email and were required to be returned with a signature prior to the interview. A copy of the interview schedule was available in front of me, during all interviews. This is because the interview was semi-structured, and I needed to have access to my prompts throughout the process. When the interview was completed, the participant who was physically present received a printed debriefing form (See Appendix C); the ones who were online received a verbal description of what is on the debriefing form and were also sent a copy of it to their e-mail. After the interview was over, the audio footage that was recorded on my phone was transferred to a safe USB drive. Once transferred, any remnants of the recording were removed from the phone. The USB was stored in a secure location until it was used for transcription purposes, after that all recordings were erased.

Interview schedule

Since the IPA framework encourages the use of a semi-structured interview, it enabled a complete investigation of the cycle of dating application use. Consequently, the inquiries and prompts, which are in the brackets, that I made are as follows:

- To begin with, tell me a bit about yourself (Are you single?)

- What does your dating life look like? (Do you primarily use dating applications while dating?)

- Which dating applications do you use? (Why do you use them? Is it more convenient to have it on your phone? For how long? When was the last time?)

- Where do dating applications fit into your dating life?

- What has your experience been like on dating applications? (Positive experiences? Negative experiences?)

- When was the last time you deleted a dating application? (Why did you delete it?)

- When did you last re-download a dating application? (Why did you re-download it?)

- How was your experience after you re-downloaded the application?

- How do you understand the way people around you view romance? (To what extent do those views apply to you?

- When I say the phrase "The One" what do you think of? (How was it shaped?)

- How does your understanding of your perfect romantic life affect your online dating habits?

- Can you describe what your perfect online relationship would look like?

- Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation that I have not asked you?

Transcription

The primary student researcher completed a verbatim transcription of the whole interview, with all the interviews.

Analysis of data and validity

I worked closely with my supervisor, Dr. Armaos, to maximize the saturation of my data as part of the analysis and validity of the data. This approach allowed for an improvement with my work. The analysis consisted of a four-stage process. First, the interviews were listened to, and the transcripts were created and re-read several times to familiarize oneself with the information, adding notes in the right margins of the text for noteworthy and intriguing comments. Second, these notes were examined to spot any emergent themes, which were then noted on the transcript's left margins. The developing themes were then analyzed once again to determine whether the notes reflected what the participants discussed. Thirdly, any linkages or patterns between the emergent themes were looked for, and then they were categorized under superordinate themes, themes and subthemes that were organized into an appropriate order. A summary of fourth step along with the quotes place in each category has created a table of themes (See Appendix D).

In addition, Yardley's viewpoint was used as a yardstick for excellence, focusing on the four traits of "sensitivity to context," "commitment and rigor," "transparency and coherence," and "impact and importance" (Yardley, 2000).

I have reviewed a lot of literature in relation to this topic, encouraging a focus on what Yardley refers to as "Sensitivity to Context" and have addressed any ethical issues. In addition, I was receptive to my participants' viewpoints so they may have provided me with a

whole picture of the circumstance. I aimed to have recorded the interviews and have done a proper analysis of the data using the Smith et al. technique (2009). To further the principle of "Commitment and Rigour" it is important to note that the participants and I engaged in the use of metaphors and analogies. Using metaphors can be an intuitive and approachable way to understand participants' widespread understanding (Eslami et al., 2016; French & Hancock, 2017 72), it is important to keep in mind that because metaphors are indirect, culturally specific, and possibly ambiguous, they can make it more difficult to identify shared meanings and conceptions. Yet, all effort was put to accurately transfer the meaning expressed by the participants. Any analogies and metaphors that were not quickly understood by me in the context of our conversation were immediately clarified thus removing any opportunities for miscommunication. This, however, only happened once and was due to a difficulty, on the participants part, to translate a Greek analogy into English.

For "Transparency and Coherence" all my technique has been thoroughly explained in the relevant places. I have offered a discussion in which the findings of the phenomenological analysis were discussed from the standpoint of how they fit into the existing body of knowledge. To further the understanding of my process throughout the study, I also elaborated on my reflexivity. Finally, the study's "Impact and Importance" section attempts to further knowledge by contributing to the ongoing dialogue on dating, which was formed by the literature review.

Ethical Considerations

The participants are guaranteed that their voices will be heard and valued while retaining confidentiality, and this was my primary ethical concern. As a result, the participants received verbal confirmation from the principal researcher as well as all the informed consent and debriefing paperwork. At the scheduled time, the audio file was

deleted. Additionally, I shall only do things that have been previously cleared by the IRB board and my supervisor, Dr. Remos Armaos.

A personal reflection on motivations to conduct this research

I am currently a 27-year-old master's student who is single. I have used multiple dating applications both actively and experimentally to see what is out there as options. I have tried a large range of applications starting from Tinder, to Bumble, to Hinge, to Her, to Eve, to Feeld. Additionally, I have previously explored the topic of online dating in my academic career thus it aligns with my personal and career interests.

I grew up in a world where the internet was just starting to take shape. I watched the evolution of what it was to be on the internet, the change from the wild west to more organized structures. Thus, I observed the evolution of meme culture and the pursuit of connection that is inherent in the way humanity operates. Relationships, especially romantic ones, are vital to our functioning, and yet we are still not able to understand one another. There's an air of mystery and misunderstandings that occur when we are pursuing love.

As someone who went into the field of psychology to understand people, this is just another hill to conquer. My experience with computer-mediated communication and online dating influences how I approach exploring this topic, however, this experience also gives me the advantage of being able to empathize with the good, the bad, and the ugly of online dating. I have had my fair share of good and bad experiences as a result of using dating applications since I was approximately 18 years old. I have cycled many times both for more expected reasons such as being in a relationship but also because I was frustrated with not having any successful results. Thus, I believe I would be able to empathize and understand any reason that someone would use or not use the dating applications.

When it comes to the romance master plot, I believe I have been entrenched in it from a young age. The message is that there is a perfect someone that will sweep me off my female feet. As an adult, I have been trying to recognize where I stand in relation to it. Am I believing in it? Am I no longer believing because I have been too disappointed in not getting it that this hurt has turned to distrust? Is my imagination hijacked making my desires not my own? All these questions point to an inner turmoil that allows me to explore the different possibilities in an honest and open pursuit for answers. This ambiguity within me empowers my desire and respect for all answers possible. Although this research does not guarantee that I will find those answers, it will bring me one step closer. I believe the answers are in the details, which require time and care to explore.

The qualitative approach allows for such exploration. A gentle peeling of the onion layers to see what lies underneath. I have had minimal experience with such research, but I am invested in utilizing its perspective and point of view to milk as much information as I can. Throughout the whole process I found myself being invested heavily in the lives of the participants and was exploring the underlying thought processes that not many had considered previously. It took me a bit by surprise as I have thought about these ideas before, but it seems that not all my interviewees have. This meant that at times I had to explain my understanding and hope it matched that of the participants.

The whole experience really opened my eyes to the world of dating that I had not fully considered. Additionally, I have not experienced the level of commitment that some of my participants have, such as marriage, being able to see a dating life through that perspective really opened my eyes to such a wide array of experiences I sort of forgot may exist.

I was very glad to have taken such a deep dive into a narrow pool and would love to explore this topic even further at a much broader scope.

Analysis Overview

I. The Good, The Bad, and The Cycle

    A. App on the Loop: Understanding the Cycle

    B. Positive Perspectives on Dating Applications

    C. Negative Perspectives on Dating Applications

        — Stigma

II. The Language of Dating

    A. Understanding "good times" and "fun"

    B. The Tinder Script

    C. From Words to Images: The Art of Visual Storytelling in Dating

        — Advertisement Analogy

        — Changing Shirts Analogy

        — Clothing Catalogue Analogy

        — Fast Food Analogy

        — Traveling Analogy

        — Fairy-tale Analogy

III. Subjective Notions of Amourness

    A. Knowing Oneself

        — Building Yourself

        — Challenging Yourself

        — Individual Differences

B. The Perfect Romance - "The One" vs "The One Right Now"

C. Tradeoff between expectations and reality of dating

D. Are we different from others?

IV. Technology

A. Technology as an Enrichment, Not a Replacement, of Life

B. Safeguarding Love in Dating Apps: Algorithms, Structure, and Safety

Presentation of analysis

I. The Good, The Bad, and The Cycle: When it comes to the discussion pertaining to the cycle of dating application use, the way the cycle looks is different for everyone. At times the process was to delete all dating applications from the phone. At times, it was a process of not using the applications even if they were on the phone. The time people spend between using and not using varies thus making it a quick or slow cycle. All the observed behaviors mentioned above will have been impacted by their experience with dating applications, the type of applications used, and other outside matters. For example, a participant expressed that it took her a while to recover from her divorce, so it took her a long time to even consider dating again.

A. App on the Loop: Understanding the Cycle

The dating application that all participants used was Tinder. Some participants used more than one dating application, such as Bumble, Feeld, Hinge, and Grindr. Tinder seems to be the most popular because more people use it; thus, word of mouth significantly impacted deciding which dating application to download and which applications were most popular on the application store. Although one participant described that they had a bad experience using Tinder, they had to switch to using Bumble and had a more pleasurable experience due to the

platform's structure. "*So Tinder was actually quite popular back then, so that was the reason.*

And then, when I got fed up with Tinder, I thought, okay, what else is out there? Like

Googling, what else is there? And I found the Bumble app, which, like, what was kind of a

catch for me in Bumble, that it is kind of female first." (Blue, 66-69). The popularity that

Tinder had in Greece was not the same as abroad. This is because more foreigners could be

found on Bumble in Greece, according to Red, and occasionally it was preferable because he

connected more with non-Greeks. People always returned to the applications they knew when

cycling through the dating applications.

The reasons that initially brought people to dating applications varied. Although they

have been designed for users to find romantic or sexual partners, participants also

downloaded them to make friends because they struggled to date in person and found talking

online to be much easier, as well as out of curiosity to see what else is on these dating

applications, and because it was a trend to download Tinder.

When it came to the reasons the participants deleted the dating applications, they also

varied. The most common reason was that they were in a relationship, so deleting the

application was necessary. Additionally, others stated that if they were not interested in

meeting someone in real life, they would delete the application(s) as there was no need to

have a conversation if it would lead nowhere. Others stated that they were bothered by the

notifications and did not see much value when storage on the phone was limited. Finally,

some participants described feeling bored or discouraged from unsuccessful progress while

using the applications, so they proceeded to delete them.

The reasons to re-download the applications did not differ much from the reasons to

download them in the first place, except for one participant who added that she would

sometimes re-download Tinder to get validation that she is attractive, especially after a

breakup or when she has lower self-esteem. It should be noted that the experience of using the applications did not change much how they felt about the applications "*It was the same, but they were changing things, as an app does, to update things. But it was the same for me. Nothing changes.*" (Red, 345-346).

B. Positive Perspectives on Dating Applications

The reasons to use a dating application or to maintain using the application are somewhat linked to convenience and self-esteem. All the participants mentioned that they struggle to find time to date, and these applications allow dating on their schedule. Not only does it make it more convenient, but it also saves time for those who have only limited availability. It allows one to text when they can to communicate clearly and quickly what they want. If someone wants to meet in person for a date and their counterpart wants the same, it can be arranged in minutes. Essentially it saves time on dating, especially when one knows what they are looking for, as Blue suggests, "*But I think it can be a good tool. It's just it degrades a little bit. So if we can bring it back to what it was intended to be, then I think it can still be a good thing to do.*" (Blue, 436-437).

Blue also describes, *"I don't oppose the idea of dating apps. As I said, there are people who are very busy; they don't have time to go to parties and mingle around and stuff. There are people who, like myself, used to be; they're just socially awkward. They don't exactly know how to build contacts in real life, so it's easier for them to kick-started online just with texting or maybe calling.*" (Blue, 432-435). It is a space in which one is likely to meet someone; now, the guarantee that's lacking is whether the connection will last. Although, it is likely to experience a sense of confidence when seeing that a person you want to match matches with you. This positive experience is so strong that people will return to the application to feel it again.

Finally, as Peach suggests, "*The good thing for me is that I wanted more of a communication rather than sex. Like, I've never had sex with Tinder, but I've met people that I really talk nicely with and kind of connect, and I have gone on dates with them. I've had some good connections, and then the most positive one would be I had this match that we've been talking with for maybe five years."* (Peach, 93-96); each person can dictate how much talking they do before going out on a date. Nevertheless, the design is such that talking is unavoidable, and for those who like to develop a mental connection, dating applications offer fertile ground for such a development to occur.

C. Negative Perspectives on Dating Applications

After talking to the participants, it seems that the reasons for not using dating applications outweigh the reasons for using them. Blue best described the main critique that the participants had "*I just felt like well, to start with, I felt like it was a bit of dehumanizing experience because, like, after 10-15 minutes of swiping through the profiles, I felt like it's not people that I'm looking at."* (Blue, 86-87). Essentially, people start focusing on how the other person looks and begin to dehumanize them. Even those who did not place a person's appearance as a top priority noticed that their expectations started to shift the more they used dating applications. "*We want to feel appreciated, as I said before, and because we live in an image era, appearances, images, and all this stuff are more welcome than words and thoughts. We lost the meaning of all this, so everything is creating around images and appearance."* (Grey, 297-299). There is no way to change it because, at the end of the day, that is its design.

Another topic that was mentioned quite often was the increased sexual desire of the people who used these applications, meaning that many people wanted to hook up. That also included people who did not outright express that they wanted to hook up but expressed

themselves in ways that could be interpreted as less or more serious, depending on the

context. *"And of course, it's not reasonable for anyone to say to the person they just met, oh*

let's start a relationship. Of course not. But when someone says the opposite from the

beginning, it's like they're closing the door immediately to any possibility of this being

something more than just sex." (Yellow, 249-251) he found himself in multiple situations

where he expressed wanting a relationship and the other person cutting communication; thus,

using the applications stops being interesting if no one wants to participate with you.

Furthermore, although mentioned previously as a benefit, the convenience dating

applications offer in terms of time is not as convenient for everyone as it seems. Some

participants described investing much of their time into weeding out the appropriate people.

Finding a person that meets the participants' expectations, at times, took so long that they

would be exhausted by the time they got a match even to consider putting in the effort to talk

to them. This frustration only doubled when users found the same profiles they had seen on

Tinder, on Bumble. This is partially because some users go onto the dating applications to

find a variety of people, yet it seems that this only ends up with the same group of people

using multiple applications.

On another note, long-term users found themselves using the dating application out of

boredom without any mental investment. *"And then I totally deleted the app at some point*

because I realized that, you know what, real life is more interesting than the dating apps. So

if I find someone, I'll find them. If I don't, I don't. I just don't want to spend my time on it

anymore. Even though it was COVID, I was still like, I'm good alone. I am better alone. I do

not want to chase anyone on any apps. If it happens, it happens. So, yeah, I think I just got

bored and tired and yeah." (Blue, 236-240). This type of usage can eventually become a

habit, further encouraging people to download the application to swipe and see what is out

there rather than investing any effort into making the application work for them.

Finally, it seems that the consistent disappointment raises a sense of lack of incentive to keep using the applications. This further crept into the sense of defeat and setting low expectations for success on the applications, which sometimes led to people deleting the applications altogether. Having said that, for some participants, hope dies last: "*You always have that hope. I mean, I always have that hope that, oh, maybe I'll meet someone eventually.*" (Yellow, 212-213).

Stigma

A couple of ideas were expressed that demonstrated stigmas that still exist about dating applications. These stigmas either drove people away from using dating applications or kept them focused on the negative aspects until they stopped using them *"Because through dating apps, you know what they want, they're looking for sex while meeting in real life might not want it."* (Red, 804-805).

To begin with, a participant described a cousin of hers judging her for using dating applications because it is considered a hook-up application. It did not matter that the participant is known for being a serial monogamist who prefers long-term dating. Just because she was using the dating application, it implied that she was looking for one-night stands. *"I can't imagine that people would want their close circle of friends and relatives to know where they met their partners because they might be like, oh, the perception is going to be that I went there to hook up and it just evolved unintentionally."* (Blue, 422-424). It is clear to see the legitimacy of a relationship being questioned because online dating is not considered a serious form of dating.

On the other hand, Yellow addresses the experience of how other users stigmatize each other. There seems to be an era of accepting people interested in casual sex but shunning

those expressing a desire for an emotional connection is shunned. Grindr, for example, has a more sex-positive attitude among its users in contrast to Tinder.

"I mean, that I feel that what was a taboo in the 90s, which was sex, and, like, openly discussing about all the sexual experiences you may have or all the crazy things that one might have done in sex. And now it's the other way around. I feel that the taboo is to be romantic or be faithful or to actually admit what you are looking for intimacy and not the basic pleasure of sex." (Yellow, 227-231). This could be explained by the fact that people who do not find what they intend on the applications end up getting psychologically hurt and start avoiding getting their emotions invested yet, still want to experience physical contact, so they forego any mention of emotions in favor of self-preservation.

II. The Language of Dating: We communicate our intentions through language every day. When it comes to dating, there is a specific way one can express themselves and a specific set of words that are used. There is a performance to be had when meeting someone, and that performance has an order in which it goes. Moreover, people have been creating analogies of what it is like to date through dating applications that communicate the experience much more concretely.

A. Understanding "Good Times" and "Fun"

When discussing what the participants wanted to gain from going on dating applications, the phrases "good time" and "fun" would keep repeating. For example, Peach suggested that "good time" could sometimes mean enjoying time with someone or that "good time" could mean having intercourse with someone. The same concept could be applied to the word "fun". Additionally, "relationship" falls under the same predicament in which there is ambiguity. In this sense, when someone is describing a relationship, they could be talking about monogamous commitment, or they could be talking about forming a new friendship.

Peach said, *"When I was younger, too, it was very easy to get this whole sense of oh, he's saying that, so he means that. So the only thing is for me to be kind of more critical on seeing actions before words."* (Peach, 442-445), she has had to learn between the lines of what people send on the dating applications. This takes time and experience being on dating applications. It could be an example of the way users of dating applications do not want to communicate their intentions due to fear of rejection. However, it is vital to note the words used in this case as more lighthearted and airy words for joy are used. This could signify the lightness with which the "relationships" are meant to be experienced.

B. The Tinder Script

Discussing language used in dating not only includes specific words exchanged but also the expectation of how the discussion is expected to proceed. *"Like, where are you from? What are you studying? What do you want to do after your study? Yes, very clean and get to know each other."* (Green, 182-183); he describes something he and a couple of other participants called a Tinder script. It follows the usual pattern of exchanging pleasantries, not unlike a first date. Once the script is done, the expectation is that they will meet their chatting partner in person *"...there's a limited amount of things you can say via texting before you meet the other person. At some point you stop talking about the weather, like what do you study and where do you work and all these things."* (Yellow, 102-104).

Those participants who have used dating applications for a long-time are analyzing the script and the profile to determine the motives one has to go on the dating application *"It was quite fun at some point to kind of go through the profiles and kind of pick on things like this person has probably been cheated on quite a few times or things like that."* (Blue, 125-127) and "*Because a message is like, hi, how are you doing? They're not interesting as well, they're not catching your eye. I don't feel like this is a good way to start a conversation with a*

person that you've never met before. So I was trying to pay attention. I was trying to read their profiles. I was trying to find something that is in common that we can discuss or that I can use as a starter point, something like that. If there was an empty profile, I would have been like, oh gosh, why did I even do that? What do I ask?" (Blue, 187-192).

Furthermore, Peach says that not only the script itself but how they express themselves can also indicate their intention. She can better identify whether the person she is talking to is only interested in having a sexual relationship with her or if they are interested in something more substantial, like dates. Red has described using specific language to encourage the woman he is talking to meet up in person *"I was selectively using words. Try to persuade them to come and meet me and see who I am and then tell them what I'm really into. And if they agree, we move forward."* (Red, 121-123).

All the above demonstrate a common understanding between most users on expressing themselves. Although this is not a precise language and there are many nuances to this sort of communication, it indicates that asking for what you want straightforwardly is seen as being something outside of the dating application way of doing things - unless it is of a sexual nature.

C. From Words to Images: The Art of Visual Storytelling in Dating

When discussing dating, multiple analogies came up. Some were related to dating online, some related to the self-exploration necessary to date, and others were about understanding romance. However, the ones most related to dating application use followed a more capitalistic mindset, indicating a Western Culture influence.

Advertisement Analogy

Red gave this analogy *"It's an advertisement. Dating is advertising yourself into the dating scene. You have a shop. If it's on a random street, you'll never find it. You'll never find*

a diamond, a secret diamond that hides in a weird street. But if you take that shop and take it to the mall, which is the mall is Tinder. Everyone goes to the mall. Every guy goes to the Tinder. You'll find that diamond in there, this special person, this special shop that matches your interests and your likes. You might get lost in the mold holes and the floors, but there are more possibilities of finding the one." (Red, 788-794).

In this way, his profile on the dating application is seen as an open advertisement to anyone interested in looking. To make an advertisement appealing, many things need to be made: a good picture of the product should be present, a favorable description, and maybe a nice slogan. Additionally, it presents the person on the profile as the product. When it comes to selling a product, one is likely to avoid discussing all the disadvantages and present only the good parts in a bid to sell. Additionally, he describes himself as a diamond. This diamond is more likely to be noticed in a space where more people go rather than on an off chance someone takes an off-road. This further indicates that a dating application is a space where people, even diamonds, search for diamonds. It is a space where selecting what looks best is.

Changing Shirts Analogy

Peach provided the following analogy "*Maybe it could be a reason because it would make it more accessible to like change shirts. There's another one, there's another one. So you would have the options to kind of like go here, go there.*" (Peach, 328-329).

In this analogy, she describes how people use dating applications to replace someone easily. For example, if someone experiences a conflict or a disagreement with the person they have met on a dating application, it is easy for them to open the dating application again and start swiping to find a new one. This view sees people on dating applications as objects, such as t-shirts. People are not usually emotionally attached to them, so they are easily replaced. The motion of the swiping on the dating application left and right could also be depicted in

how she describes swiping between the shirts until she finds one she likes. She further links the ease of changing the shirt to people's speed and desire for easier relationships, such as hook-ups. If we consider changing shirts to be equal to a hook-up, it can be seen as something quick, easy, non-committal, and depending on the cleanliness of the shirt that was depicted in the person's head – dirty.

Clothes Catalogue Analogy

Blue described the following analogy *". It's as if I'm just going through, like, catalog of dresses or something and be like, oh, this looks nice. They will fit me. Like, oh, that doesn't look nice. It's like the fabric is off or something."* (Blue, 88-89).

Blue could clearly describe the moment she realized that through the extended use of dating applications, she started to experience a dehumanizing event. In this case, she described swiping through the potential partners and experienced it as if she was swiping through a catalog of dresses. She analyzed many details like the "fabric", which could be thought of as the visual appearance of the people. She even noticed that the thoughts were automatically judgmental and evaluative rather than open-minded. Additionally, the people's biographies made little change to her decision-making, as deciding whether the "dress" looked good was the most important. Just as it was with Peach's analogy, the people stopped being people and became objects. However, as with the advertisement analogy, there is an essence of value for money, yet, in this case, the money spent can be considered to be the effort she puts into matching and talking to someone.

Fast Food Analogy

Yellow gave an analogy based on food: "*Of course, I haven't met anyone who has stayed in my life. Not just romantically, even as a person. It's more like fast food."* (Yellow, 89-90).

He described his experience with dating applications and romance as similar to fast food. Nothing stayed too long; it is fast, unhealthy, easy, cheap, but at times deeply craved. This analogy can also demonstrate the depth at which romance is craved in the way fast food can be. On the other hand, the negative connotations of this analogy are pretty evident, especially the notion that someone is not meant to have a lot of it. He was further supporting the experience of the repeating cycle of on and off being observed. Additionally, there tends to be an experience of guilt once fast food is eaten, which might also represent the guilt someone has when talking to someone when there is no fruitful result.

The following analogies relate to what it is like to self-develop to find what one needs in a partner on a dating application, and the second one relates to romance is understood in that order.

Traveling Analogy

Red described a travelling analogy: "*If you don't experience something else, how will you know what it feels like to accept or deny that feeling? Yeah, it's like traveling. I enjoy Greece, but until I lived, I experienced what European countries feel like. I will always be here and say, oh, our roads are perfect. Our bumps are like just one olive bump and then I go to the German streets. I'm not even driving, I'm floating. You have to experience things so you can accept more. You can value more until your soul is completed, fulfilled."* (Red, 656-661).

He describes in detail what it is like to be content with one thing but experience something else and to end up preferring it. The place one is right now can be considered "Greece". The process of traveling can be anything from trying new things and going through therapy to communicating with one's partner. In this case, "Germany" would be the point of realization or acceptance of the truth. When dating and using dating applications, there may

be a tendency to stick to what one knows or are comfortable with, but as Red suggests, it might be worth exploring to see what is out there.

Fairy-tale Analogy

Red depicts the image of romance: "*It's considered the fairy tale from the guy trying to save the princess and doing everything in his power to provide. But as all the fairy tales, it's not always roses and happiness. It has ups and downs. Maybe the guy, the prince is fucked up mentally. He has traumas that need attention, and he doesn't have anywhere to go to seek help. And probably one person, usually the closest one to him, is trying to help him in her own way, whatever. And that's something rare. Even if the partner doesn't succeed in helping the prince. The act of trying, it's something and I hope the the people that need the help realize the other person is trying to help and something this is something I'm not very good at. I deny help because I don't know, I have issues. It's like I don't want help, I want to do it on my own.*" (Red, 377-385).

In this analogy, the beginning is very classic; the male character saves the princess and sacrifices all his resources to provide for the princess. However, his "fairy tale" takes a non-traditional turn into something he describes as no longer a fairy tale because it is not perfect. Fairy tales tend to have an everything will work out in the end attitude.

In his story, the prince is not mentally well and cannot trust anyone but himself to deal with it. Even the people closest to him, like the princess, attempt to help but cannot because the prince will not let anyone in. This demonstrates the apparent struggle that someone might face in a relationship in which they wish they could surpass all their struggles in the name of a perfect fairy-tale romance, and yet for personal reasons; they are unable to.

Even describing the fairy tale requires other analogies, such as the notion of happily ever after. However, our lives do not end happily after; we must deal with the rest of the story, and in this case, it seems that the prince has difficulty doing so.

III. Subjective Notions of Amourness: When it comes to the perfect experience of something as personal as a relationship, there are bound to be many different opinions and experiences. Many factors can influence someone's approach to their romantic life ranging from understanding the self, views on romance and what a perfect relationship can look like, and how they suspect others to behave. These notions are ones that we might not articulate daily, yet they are our intrinsic guiding forces, and looking at them may clarify why we make the choices we do.

A. Knowing Oneself

When discussing what someone may want from a relationship, there is a focus on what the future partner will bring into the relationship. It is an integral part of the relationship, but it takes two to tango. The participants provided clear descriptions of their values and expectations that are important to identify before discussing their beliefs and understanding of romance and relationships. These values and expectations will be provided for every individual separately. However, before addressing those, important common ideas came up, and those were: Building Yourself and Challenging Yourself.

Building Yourself

Most of the participants agreed on the notion that it is crucial to understand themselves and to build a solid foundation of who they are and want. Once a satisfactory version of themselves is achieved, then it is possible to find a person that will be a more fulfilling relationship with a person who is a better match. So much so that some participants expressed waiting or wanting to develop themselves before they enter a relationship *"I have*

to leave some things in the past and to restart it. And that's the difficult part with me." (Grey, 63). Otherwise, the person who aligns best with that version of themselves will not be a good match in the long run. Not only that, but this feeling may not leave even for those in relationships they are still worried about working on their things as Red expressed, *"It's more like I don't want to waste your time into something that doesn't get fixed. I feel that I won't get fixed by words or trying to solve me the problem because most probably I've already know the solution, I'm just not doing it."* (Red, 390-393).

For other participants, like Blue, self-development was not only vital but also something she did not see as something that she could do while dating as it pulled focus away from herself. *"When you stop searching for something and going to pay attention to your own interests and your education and your growth and like take up hobbies, you will inevitably become a more interesting person anyway."* (Blue, 256-258).

Challenging Yourself

As part of building yourself, you must challenge yourself to learn more. "*The kid will not sit by itself to think, I need to jump in the situation, and I need to contribute in any way. Go find a job, study harder so I can finish earlier, so my partners don't need to spend all this money. They will not do it.".* (Green, 361-363). These challenges not only the participants' eyes to what they want in life, what they do not want, but also who they want to be. They further support the understanding that this is best to do before dating or getting into a relationship to save themselves and their partner from hurt.

Two ways were described as effective when it comes to challenging oneself. The first way, as Red suggests, "*Yeah, words are not enough. Sometimes what is enough? You need a shock in your life to start changing."* (Red, 402-403). In this case, the circumstances are such

that how life plays out forced him to introspect. Sometimes that shocking realization will allow someone to admit to themselves their truest desires and build on those.

The second way is, as per Blue's experience, through therapy. The therapeutic environment fosters an air of self-development. This self-development usually occurs not only through realizations but also through challenges that therapists bring on. Both methods converge at the same point – developing oneself through challenges. As mentioned previously, this self-development will factor into how they approach their romantic life.

Individual Differences

Personal values are part of the lens through which one views relationships, and below are the summaries of some of the values each participant holds that impact all their other beliefs regarding their romantic life.

Red

Red has expressed a desire to better himself and attempt to reach his best version. He holds this value so firmly that he also believes that everyone should strive to achieve that for themselves. His current method is as follows *"The flexibility helps me find see perspectives from other people, what they like so I can either adapt or deny their view if I don't like them. Being flexible is very useful."* (Red, 509-511), he purposely puts himself into situations which either allow him to explore something new or test his current limits. This requires a sense of flexibility and being able to adjust to others. Even though he has this fluidity within himself, he has expressed a few faults that may be hindering him in his romantic pursuits. Firstly, he expressed difficulty in commitment and difficulty in accepting help. Both notions indicate that there may be difficulty in committing and a struggle to accept help from others, suggesting that the lens through which he views any future partners may be hindered by his

self-acceptance. He believes it is essential to remain flexible and open-minded when it comes to relationships and not to waste time on unfruitful dating endeavors.

Finally, Red admits that he is facing a dilemma because he is experiencing some pressure due to societal and family standards of what kind of man he must be at his age "*Start moving towards family. And in my perspective, I'm a bit late for that.*" (Red, 164).

Green

Green describes himself as calm and romantic *"I'm a very calm, romantic person. I'm not the type of guy that will do the one night stands and stuff like that. So usually my main goal when I start to date somebody is to make them feel comfortable and safe."* (Green, 78-80). This means that his approach differs from those who might not focus so much on the romantic aspect of a relationship. A significant development of his happened as a result of a problematic relationship and having to move abroad. This experience forced him to mend his broken heart, but it also taught him how to behave better in future relationships. From this perspective, he carries the lessons he has learned from his past into his future. Therefore, the lens through which he views any potential partner is one of maturity and how well they know themselves.

He is ready to date someone communicative and who will stay longer than a one-night stand. In addition, this person should be able to match his rhythm, especially considering he has a challenging work schedule. Furthermore, he suggests that it is less about the demographical status of the person that matters to him but rather the mental stage of where they are at and the stage of their life that they are living.

Blue

Blue was specific with some of her standards, for example, she outright stated that dating at work is and was never an option for her. Additionally, she expressed, "*And I kind of*

felt like my partner should be even more career driven, even more successful, achieved even more than I did. Which like, not to brag, but at some point became a bit of an issue because I am an achiever in general and in career perspective and I used to pay a lot of attention to what the person is doing career wise and where they are and what their plans are, what their aspirations. And I used to judge people based on that as if I was dating their career and not themselves. So I'm happy to report that I'm actually liberated from that now." (Blue, 301-306); she looked for someone like herself, a successful overachiever, yet she still struggled to settle into those relationships. She believes that they were too similar, not allowing her to find a nice balance, as such, her current relationship is more fulfilling because they are different enough in a complementary manner.

When she was using dating applications, she noticed that she was not as malleable as when dating in person. It was a period for her to explore herself and others, based on that experience, she remarks, "*So I think in general it would help if people be more upfront about their intentions and yeah, a bit more kind of open and accepting their true selves to be put out there rather than making it up, making up the personalities that would work out.*" (Blue, 430-432).

Her values heavily dictated her experience on dating applications as they acted as a checklist they had to meet before any dating could proceed. As a result, Blue has established a belief that people evolve, and so do relationships, they are an addition to her life rather than something that completes it.

Grey

Grey was very critical of himself, especially when discussing his current view on his romantic life "*But I told you before, I am the mistake.*" (Grey, 439). This belief, compounded with his struggles to understand dating while using a dating application, further made it

difficult for him to be optimistic about any romantic prospects in his future. He described himself as someone who becomes paralyzed by overthinking as such, any potential bloom in the romance department is out of the question. However, through his experience, it was much easier to explore which parts do not work regarding romance, relationships, and dating applications.

When he was younger, he found it easier to date; however, nowadays, he even finds it tedious to build a connection with strangers.

Yellow

Yellow was open about his desire to be in a relationship, he has struggled with finding people who not only equally want to be in a relationship but do not disappear once a relationship is mentioned. As a result*, "It seems like dating sometimes is more of a convenience and momentary fulfillment of intimacy desires rather than focus for you at the moment."* (Yellow, 398-399), indicating that with enough disappointing experiences, it seems to be challenging to overcome them in any future contact. Additionally, Yellow expresses that he is not so much sex-focused, creating yet another barrier when it comes to using dating applications as many users will be, if not looking only for sex but also very sex minded, which he does not like so much.

Peach

Peach has had many years of experience using dating applications and has come to understand that clear communication of intentions is a big necessity for her. She values being open and honest about what she expects from her potential partner and what they expect from her. She finds such a clear expression to be a baseline necessity for compatibility.

Additionally, she admitted, "*I could have left someone that I'm like. No, but then actually, what I was thinking when I had real relationships, I was like, would I even swipe*

right on this person? You don't give them the chance to actually see how it works. It could be something else that attracts you to them. So I think that's one reason why the apps in general are missing." (Peach, 274-277), indicating that she might forego a connection that will have a more positive outcome for her in favor of someone she finds more attractive. These perspectives may lead someone to have a more critical approach to romance and relationships as such, guide their beliefs in that direction. Although she has suggested that her expectations of what she wants in a relationship have changed, the means have not.

B. The Perfect Romance - "The One" vs "The One Right Now"

Before one can begin explaining what "The One" might look like to them, it is important to place this person within a context - romance. Although there was some variation in the way the participants viewed romance, there were also common elements.

To begin with, many positive descriptions of what it feels like to experience romance "*I think an ideal image in my mind is like waking up next to someone naked on a bed and just by cuddling under the morning."* (Yellow, 265-266). Yellow presented an image of comfort and an intimate connection with their partner. Others describe elements of safety and protection, *"...it's important to feel safe with the partner and have the trust and have this kind of space between you where you can be stupid and be yourself and don't be afraid of sharing what's in your mind*" (Blue, 286-288) and *"...in an environment with somebody that I feel safe and true to myself, that I can really express myself however I want."* (Green, 207-208). Being able to release the boundaries of who they are with the outside world and be a more authentic version of themselves. A commonly repeating idea of someone being romantic, is able to foster a sense of understanding and trust "*So I think the perfect one would be someone who is mostly who can understand me. And we can have relationships for both benefit of they grow together, they give the best versions of themselves."* (Peach, 356-358).

These clearly demonstrate the importance of being emotionally intelligent and expressive with someone who matches on an emotional level. Although this belief was not shared by all the participants, implying that romance also takes effort to be created and exist.

Other than the emotional aspect of romance, a practical part of romance was also described, *"It's not necessary at the moment, but it's nice to have it's a pleasant way of acting, doing romantic things."* (Red, 367-368) in which the observed behaviors can also demonstrate romance. Although these actions are ones that many people associate romance with, it requires being able to understand what the other person wants and to provide it for them. As a participant suggested, being able to match the expectations and desires of partners requires flexibility on his part.

When discussing how the participants formed their understanding of romance, it was said there was a combination of media, observing their family or friends, and personal experiences. As Yellow describes, "`*It's Disney, Hollywood. I learned about it from pop culture."* (Yellow, 338); these images that are settled through the popular media create step-by-step guidance on how to behave. They depict what these acts should look like and how the other person will feel when receiving them. However, as Grey says, "*When you are a kid and you learn in romance about the souls that you see as a child from Disney, from all these companies with cartoons and all this stuff, with Princesses and Kings and stuff. But when you get older, I believe that you feel more you realize that it's not that easy. As you were watching as a kid. You are always recreating your mindset with this because when you are a teenager, you believe that romance is something that you have to prove to girls that you are strong and you are able, and you can do everything for her. And you make a lot of bullshits in order to make a girl like you. And when you get older, you realize that this is not the real meaning. It's something else. So I think it's changing through the years."* (Grey, 338-345), indicating that this is not the only way to learn about romance, in fact, this may cause some confusion when

real-life experiences are had. He further clarifies that he can no longer understand his view of romance versus what he learned from the screen, suggesting a distinct difference between the two. One may have a stronger emotional connection to their desires, yet it cannot be realistically experienced. Peach also experienced a similar conflict *"I feel like there's a lot of emotional immaturity, but it could also be because what romance is portrayed off by social media and stuff, it's like, kind of too good, and it doesn't really show the reality as it happens with a lot of things in the movies, they don't show how to solve conflict"* (Peach, 311-314). Expecting a perfect person, a knight in shining armor, that will not cause difficulty in the life of their partner is an impossible standard to set.

These stories told in our childhoods are part of a romance blueprint that requires copious effort to change and can cause a negative dating experience if not appropriately acknowledged. If the expectations are set too high, then the real-life experience that does not match up creates a sense of disappointment as Yellow expresses, *"It's not that we are part of this romantic idea. Like we're looking for our behalf. It's made up, it's not real. I'm trying to put this in order in my mind there's many people with whom you can connect with on a deep level, but with every one of them there's going to be aspects that you don't like. If you see them realistically and you don't idolize them, I don't think that's a concept that's possible."* (Yellow, 288-292), creating a sense that romance is not only rare but also something that cannot be found in real life.

Another part of the romance blueprint is observations about friends and family. Peach describes an impression her parents left on her, *"That's the only one I can just think on top of my head because we haven't had any I don't have any memories of arguments and stuff in like an intense way, of course."* (Peach, 362-364), once again tapping into the notion of respect and joy within their experience. Additionally, Blue suggests that observing the different values that work for other long-term couples around her allows her to be less strict with her

requirements *"Most of my friends now are coupled like they're either married or they're preparing to get married or something. Their relationships are very different. Well, I can interact with different couples and I can see the couple's dynamic and think they're all very different in their interactions and in their values."* (Blue, 282-284). Both participants expressed that combining a more practical or realistic perspective with their preconceived notions makes for a much better experience in their romantic life by being more logical, practical, and realistic. It is still to be presumed that there will be some desires that are more idealistic and high-reach, like a helium balloon, but a grounded solid rock of realistic expectations will allow people to enjoy that balloon for longer.

Having set the scene where one will place a partner, it is vital to describe what "The One" is expected to be. When asked to describe what "The One" meant to the participants, many positive ideas were given:

"And then I would put definitely a good character. So like good communicators for sure. And then I would factor in appearance. But mostly the emotional maturity I think would be the one." (Peach, 351-352);

"Maybe the person who you will be able to navigate through different situations in life because I wanted to say different hardships, but then I realized that not everyone can survive through the partner's success as well. Surprisingly. Yeah. So I would say, like ups and downs." (Blue, 331-333);

"I say that if I jump, she jumps. If she jumps, I jump Trust and love, because love behind it has respect. And with respect and love, the trust is unbreakable." (Green, 484-486).;

And even if one of these three things is out of the equation, no one cannot save it. So love, respect, and trust. All of these indicate a positive connotation that the words inherently

come within the Western culture as being the perfect partner. There are preconceived

expectations of what lovely things a person identified as "The One" can bring into their lives.

They can also be someone to surrender to, someone who is met when one is content with

themself, someone who fits in with exactly what one needs, evolving in tandem.

However, "The One" does not exist in reality as it does in our minds. The participants

clearly described the existence of "The One Right Now". Therefore, the concept that

someone comes at the perfect time and is perfect in all ways for someone is seen as naïve,

imaginary, and non-pragmatic.

"The One Right Now" is someone you chose and fits well with you are right now *"…*

It depends on what we mean by the one. If we mean by the person that you choose to spend

the rest of your life with, then, yeah, of course you have to shape that relationship and make

compromises and agree on things you wouldn't normally agree for the sake of that

relationship to survive. But that's a realistic scenario" (Yellow, 323-326) they require work

and effort to maintain that position. Sometimes it can create a sense of idealization, almost

ignoring the bad parts to maintain that status. This person will not come at the perfect time *"I*

think that most of the people are trying to find the perfect for them, but that's not true. I mean

it needs time to create the relationship." (Grey, 43) because it takes time to create the perfect

circumstance because perfect is an option and not a person. As Blue understood after her

divorce that there can be multiple "The One's" in someone's life, it's a matter of when you

ask them about it. People may have experienced multiple times the sense of someone being

"The One" further supporting the idea suggested by Grey that everyone has the potential to

be "The One" *"Yeah, I believe it exists. But you don't have someone perfect. Because I*

believe everyone is perfect." (Grey, 381).

As people grow, their expectations change alongside their experience and understanding of the world. From a more practical perspective, Yellow suggests, *"There's many people with whom you can have a meaningful relationship, but it's almost like 6 billion people in the earth or something like that. There's more than one."* (Yellow, 282-283). In agreement with this perspective was Green, who suggests, *"if you take it statistically, no, like there's almost 8 billion people in the world. Yeah, I think there are more than one person that can love you truly and devote to you."* (Green, 472-473), this demonstrates that mathematically we can love more than one person so there is the potential to experience what it is to be with someone who is "The One" but it is just a title and not the real-life definition of what it is. Red clarifies "The One" is built and is not inherent, to find what you need, you must experiment to find. "The One" who will be there forever is unrealistic, but "The One Right Now" is someone who can maintain that status as people evolve.

C. Tradeoff between expectations and reality of dating

To look at the experience of using dating applications alone, without addressing the participants' beliefs about dating, would not capture the essence of the cycle in its total capacity. When discussing these beliefs, it is essential to understand that they are partially genuine experiences and partially theoretical ideas.

When it comes to dating in person, most participants expressed the notion that is in line with what Red said, *"Actually spending time with another for an amount of time, a period of time, not just a day, not just two days. You need to spend a lot of time together. That's dating. Going out, meeting up, talking while everything happens, then texting with that person is in part of is a part of dating."* (Red, 577-580), in which physical presence is very important because you can face them in person and better understand them. This eliminates any concerns about deceit.

Additionally, Red suggests, "*Because you speak with a machine. You speak I don't consider it dating. If you don't ever meet long distance relationship that comes from these texts, it's imaginary. It's everything your partner serves says, as I said before, is filtered.*" (Red, 584-586) indicating that the physical presence crosses the boundary of what is a mental experience into something tangible. Although there was no consensus on whether a long-distance relationship would be considered something that falls under the umbrella of in-person dating, most participants agreed it would be difficult to maintain due to the absence of physical contact.

On another note, Green suggests, *"I think it's the effort, because in Tinder, you're just sitting in the bed, swiping, swiping, swiping, typing. You need to stand up. You need to find the courage and build the courage inside of you to say, hello, how are you? Where a lot of people, for example, Tinder is the best for introverts. But if an introvert needs to go and speak to somebody outside, they would be like, he-he-hello. That's why I think this is one of the reasons that it hurts more in real life."* (Green, 376-380), this may explain why there has been such a desire to push for online dating. A conversation creates a sense of connection with someone who is essentially a stranger. Although Blue suggests that maybe meeting someone while doing a hobby is better because looking to match someone who is simply in their vicinity may cause more trouble in the long run, but for introverts, that might not be the best option.

Regarding how the participants viewed online dating, there was a noticeable difference in how they discussed it and dating applications. Although there is much overlap, participants were more critical of dating applications so that they will be discussed separately.

Some participants expressed ease with communicating online and flirting online even if they were not on a dating site making online dating an exciting option. However, as

mentioned previously, in-person dating is more than texting, so it would explain why dating applications are seen as easy because an individual can send a meme and arrange to meet up; thus, the only perfect online relationship starts online but ends up with people meeting in person. The irony here is that once they meet in person, the relationship stops being considered online *"If I see your mind, then, okay, we all have our lives, so we just thought it would be the same as having just SMS or like, I wouldn't consider that online dating unless you meet with someone. But if you just like, in the past, there were no ways to kind of see yourself because there were no cameras. So that could be applied then, like, just never meeting up. So if you meet up, I think that breaks it for me."* (Peach, 512-516).

Towards the end of the discussion, it was evident that two main ideological camps had formed. One believed that online dating is their only option, in which the beginning was online, and they had to sense a connection being formed to move forward *"Well, the online would start with easy communication. Like easy human. A way that you're not stressed about oh God. What I'm going to do right now? How would I get into his mind? Whatever it happened to me like to talk to someone on Tinder and spend 3 hours for no reason, just talking easily. Because we connect in the way we write, in the easiest things. We say bullshit, which is funny. It's very nice when it happens and it's cute."* (Yellow, 423-427). The other camp believed that online dating was just the current means to an end and struggled to enjoy the online portion of the communication *"Yes, because also, my intuition doesn't work from a phone. My intuition works if I see the other person and I can feel how they feel if they're bored, they're sad, they're happy, they're horny, they're this or that from a phone."* (Green, 422-424). However, both sides agreed that people who date online will not be as honest with what they want. They all approach online dating with a semi-trust in their partners, they hope for the best but expect the worst.

This mentality carries over to the way dating applications are viewed as well. For Green, his experience supported his negative prejudice against dating applications *"I was super against dating apps, super against. I still am because I had a very bad experience."* (Green, 98), further explaining why he no longer uses them. Additionally, Grey believes that his age plays a role in why he does not like dating applications, in which, as he gets older, there is less patience within him. In contrast, Green adds that it could be less an age thing but rather a life stage that changes the way one uses and thus experiences dating applications.

What is of interesting note is that the belief that hook-up culture is being fostered on dating applications is shared by some, but most participants expressed using the applications for various reasons such as sex, "fun", and relationships. Nevertheless, they did not do that when it came to expressing their intentions on dating applications through their descriptions.

These personal descriptions are designed to let people know who you are and potentially what you want from this experience, but not many express their true desires. This could have been because they did not know what they wanted, or as Yellow suggests, *"When you go on a date with someone new, no one says, oh, I'm not actually looking to have sex, only I'm looking to maybe have something more. Like, it's not easy to say that and almost like, no one says that. The most common thing is that, oh, I'm not in the most political relationship, or I'm not looking for anything serious. I just want to have sex."* (Yellow, 240-243). Being vulnerable enough to admit you want a relationship may cause people to stop talking to you. Such an experience further supports the notion that dating applications are merely introducing sites rather than dating sites *"If I would use Tinder and I got a match and I started speaking with them, that would be my approach. I'm not going to date. I'm going to an introducing date."* (Green, 430-431).

Another perception the participants had about dating applications is that they are not something to take seriously. Either people feel like they do not need Tinder to have a dating life, or because it is on their phone, they do not take it seriously. Although Peach suggests that Tinder may be considered robotic but not a game, others, like Red, used language that could suggest that it can be viewed as a game *"Because you don't need me to drag me back in. I know where to find the application, and if I'm in the mood to start playing the application, I will."* (Red, 285-286).

Having said all of that, there are also a few positive preconceived perceptions about dating applications. Blue described feeling empowered by Bumble's structure of making women start the conversation*, "And I found the Bumble app, which, like, what was kind of a catch for me in Bumble, that it is kind of female first. So as a female, you are respected to message first. And that kind of gave me the it kind of relieved me from the expectations of, oh, he should message first if we match. So I was like, okay, if we match, I think about it. If I really want to message a person, I will. If I don't, I just don't match and keep going. So it kind of gave me a bit of, in my mind, a bit of control over the situation, because in Tinder, I kind of said I felt like I should be the other way around."* (Blue, 68-73). She suggested that the expectation that a man should be the one to start a conversation never interested her but also created a strange dynamic where she felt obliged to wait for them. Here she has the opportunity to take control of her dating more effectively.

Dating applications also allowed those who wanted to explore outside their norm to do precisely just that *"First of all, just to widen my horizon into which people I could meet and maybe I'll find something interesting."* (Red, 64-65) and *"He's not just like your average guy you know. He has something interesting, something quirky, something that's like a bit out of the norm, stuff like that."* (Yellow, 156-158). As mentioned, some participants found it vital to challenge themselves to grow. These applications allow for such a possibility.

D. Are we different from others?

In the previous sections, the presentation of the results focused on what the participants believed applied to them and their personal experiences. This section focuses on what the participants believe about others in terms of reasons why the opposite gender operates on dating applications and other beliefs people might hold.

Regarding differences in the two genders discussed by the heteronormative sample, Red describes women as being more interested in relationships and not "fun". *"Certainly the gender difference plays a big role in dating apps because most men want sex and most women want something more. And that's misunderstanding between us...*

...I think it's not communicated. Certainly from our side, we're trying to be the one you want, so we get what we want. But I think also women know that, and I think so you close your eyes for us just in case they match." (Red, 725-726; 730-732), which demonstrates that, in his opinion, men tend to be more interested in having a sexual relationship, whereas women would ignore that and proceed with talking with them, hoping that that desire would change with time. Peach also described men as being more sexual and less emotional. In her opinion, men are more likely to view dating applications as games and thus do not take them as seriously.

Regarding how others view dating, Blue summarized her thoughts in the following way "*Like, everyone has their own struggles because we all have our unique set of past experiences and traumas that shaped us."* (Blue, 394-395). In this vein of thought, it would explain the different observations made by the other participants, such as Green, who suggested that younger people struggle to express their emotions due to the overconsumption of popular media. On the other hand, Red suggested that because people spend a decent amount of time on dating applications with fruitless results, they may lower their expectations

to the point that once they succeed in getting a relationship with someone, they are not as satisfied.

Having said that, Blue summarizes for all to answer the real question of whether we are that different from others. Although no one is fully ever consistent in their beliefs, summarizing the experiences into one solid thought can and is challenging.

IV. Technology: How technology is experienced in our daily lives dramatically affects how anything, including dating applications, is viewed. Experiences have influenced the participants in ways that a dating application does not necessarily control. As such, addressing them is important` as they impact how one interacts with dating applications.

A. Technology as an Enrichment, Not a Replacement, of Life

When discussing dating applications, it is important to note that how people view technology, in general, will impact their perception of the quality of their experience. A significant pattern emerged when participants expressed their desire to distance themselves from technology. More specifically, Grey stated, *"I feel better because I deleted everything. So you only have, in fact, Facebook with something to delete it as well. But I will not…*

…Because I don't want to feel like the monk in Athens." (Grey, 248-249; 254), this demonstrates the push and pull he experiences, just that he is not cut off from society as a whole. He ultimately wishes to return to a time in which technology is not necessary and has the option to be as distant as he wants without the expectation of contact. The effort of communication would be placed on Grey's and the other person's shoulders, yet he feels he must tether himself to his phone to maintain a relationship. On top of that, Grey struggles to understand the world of social media in which he is barely a tourist; he only occasionally glances which can cause a sense of alienation to build, consequently cursing the existence of it in the first place. It is true that once people start using technology and join the vast realm of

social media, they may start to rely on it. However, the truth may lie in how people use technology rather than the existence of technology itself. Green states *"They are so absorbed by their devices that they don't experience real life. Young people were always around, but the circumstances were different. I'm not blaming technology. I'm blaming the usage that they give to you because you can do so many things right now. But no, I'm only focusing on Instagram. And that's because of the culture that they've created throughout through the years."* (Green, 324-329). The distance that is observed is valid because people fall victim to trends set by famous people that may guide the impressionable masses. This includes women of younger ages using Instagram to document many their lives and relying on an "image" to move across through life. From this perspective, individuals may focus away from learning about someone on a deeper level and focus more on outward beauty. However, this is not true for all but has been something many participants inadvertently touched upon.

However, something that has been understood by all but expressed best by Red is that technology is viewed as an additive to their life, it is able to fill certain gaps in their lives *"Let's say you can develop more through messaging. Yeah. It's not a maintenance. It's a bonus. It's help from technology to provide a gap into our relationships."* (Red, 609-610) in essence, that is what technology was always designed to be. A technological advancement that could help our lives be better, still, it seems that somehow it has evolved in the minds of people. Of course, it is important to discuss how different world circumstances affect the impact of this additive on our lives. Although the researcher did not directly address this topic, two participants brought up their experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Blue and Grey acknowledged that due to the lockdowns that the government enforced during the epidemic, many people shifted their daily in-person interactions to online.

That being said, Blue and Grey expressed opposing opinions on this matter. Blue describes an apparent comfort with shifting to online means. Although she did not feel the

need to connect with people online mainly because she was using this time to work on herself rather than develop a relationship with others. Her ability to use technology was not tied to her desire to connect. Instead, it seems her comfort with technology is translating into her comfort with dating applications.

On the other hand, Grey suggests that the pandemic forced people to go more online *"This last year, I believe that we have to start creating time with persons in real life than mobile screens. Pandemic creates different kind of life. Most of this doesn't exist right now. Yeah, pandemic played the role of this."* (Grey, 100-103). This negative perception was exacerbated by the fact that Grey had no other option to break up the monotony. This further pushed his distaste for anything technology related.

B. Safeguarding Love in Dating Apps: Algorithms, Structure, and Safety

When it comes to addressing the technological aspects of dating applications, its safety should be addressed, but it seems that the participants were rather literate in computer safety. As mentioned earlier, everyone seemed to expect people to be slightly different from who they truly are, but this does not mean that they ideally avoid issues. Green describes an incident he had *"When we decided to meet up, first of all, she was completely different in the picture, like a proper catfish, because I was kind enough. Also, she was younger than me when she said that she had the same age as me."* (Green, 103-105). Not only was there a concern for the fact that he got "catfished" in which someone does not look like the pictures that they presented online but also that the woman with whom he went out on a date did not have a sense of personal safety.

Nevertheless, in general, this does not mean that participants would resort to not going to online dating sites they become better able to identify different types of profiles. For example, Blue describes what makes a bad profile *"You know, a group picture is a very big*

thing. And I'm like, which one are you exactly? Do I take one of you and just message you saying, I want this? How does it work?.And then there were some very hateful profiles as well. They were written in a way like, you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't be like that, you shouldn't say that. Those are the things that a person shouldn't do. And, you know, they were written in a very aggressive way as well." (Blue, 139-144), thus, it is important to understand that each person safeguards themselves through different behavior patterns. They are less likely to meet in person if they use more aggressive language or contain hateful information. The participants admitted that they would expect to be talking to versions of people who do not exist because they are only presenting the most positive version of themselves *"There's definitely a different persona there. I'm not the real me. I'm trying to show the best of me, to show off, to be more intriguing, to be more attractive. I won't go out there and say I'm a lazy bum. I want to sit home every fucking day. I'm going to say I work hard, I want to be happy, I want to enjoy life, I want to travel. Every positive aspect of our norm in society, if I can provide it, I will show it on the internet."* (Red, 553-557). Thus, there is an expectation that the people they are talking to are also not the most representative versions of themselves. This highlights the level of technological literacy that they have because this is the expected behavior of people who are online. There are multiple filters through which people are experienced, and one is through the filter of the dating application through the list of requirements that are set and through the filter that people use to express themselves.

Additionally, uploading group pictures in which it is difficult to identify who is who not only has the potential to be discouraged from finding someone else more attractive in the image but also acts as a safety concern. This is because one might not be able to understand who the owner of the profile is. Sometimes if someone is only interested in sex, then maybe they might forego any concerns that are safety related. That being said, Blue also identifies positive attributes for a profile such as good bio's that allow starting a conversation quickly.

When learning about someone else, a sense of safety is created. This is probably why Blue suggests a method to improve dating applications *"But maybe though, at least people used prompts to fill up their accounts. So that was an okay thing."* (Blue, 201) this not only increases the sense of safety but also increases the potential of finding a good match. Due to self-disclosure, people find more things to match on.

Generally, when it comes to the structure of dating applications, algorithms play a significant role. Therefore, improving the algorithm will also improve the experience, according to Blue. More specifically, *"But I think it really depends a lot on the users because even the most advanced algorithms cannot get through those masks as we discussed them. Because if you don't bring yourself as a true you out there, you will never get a match that you would be happy about. You were always going to get a match that would work with the personality that you thought like that you modeled and put out there. But no algorithm could work out what you actually are unless you're being upfront about it. So I don't know, maybe start with try to get the apps to prompt you to be more clear about your intentions…"* (Blue, 406-412), suggesting that the main limitation is that the users' needs are not satisfied with the current structure but also because the users are unclear about what they want. That is why previously existing prompts and biographies are helpful because they encourage the users to be more explicit with at least themselves if not the partners they are trying to match.

Discussion

To have a better understanding of the previously cyclical phenomena of dating application use it is important to place the previously discussed result into the context of previous literature.

When it comes to CMC, it was evident from the discussion with the participants that the experience of dating in person is preferred, especially for those who were able to commit to it. This is in line with the study presented by Monica et al. in 2020, in which dating in person gives a more profound emotional experience. The participants of this study explained their preference by emphasizing physical chemistry. This physical connection far outweighed any value that an emotional connection can have. Additionally, it was described that trusting someone off the internet is difficult, mainly because they can create an exaggerated persona of themselves, thus giving another explanation for the lack of natural connection development observed by Monica et al. in 2020.

Generally, the literature has a decent understanding of what it is like to use CMC. Just as Chesebro and Bonsall described in 1990, people did spend more time between responding to messages, allowing them to present themselves as the best version of themselves. Even though this is not something that is condemned by the participants, rather seen as a natural by-product of texting online. They are experienced when it comes to technology, so adjust their expectations accordingly. This is especially relevant when we are discussing self-disclosure. Although Laksmidewi Marghaputra (2022) found that easily accessible information would increase self-disclosure because a deeper understanding of each other is developed, this study discovered that additional information only allowed for more opportunities for conversations to start. The fact that people allow themselves to be open does not guarantee they will open up more emotional conversations online. There was a sense of

guardedness in the users, mainly because they stopped using the applications and came back, making them experience in the realm of self-disclosure online and would likely keep more to themselves not to get hurt again. Keeping their expectations a bit lower in contrast to the first time they met someone.

This brings us to the conversation about II's in which imagination dictates the way the person on the other end of the interviewee's phone is perceived. LeFebvre et al. (2020) described people engaging in the process of creating an imaginary version of people in their minds with whom we communicate. As the participants described, there was an essence of such a description, yet, unlike the description, it was not necessarily as unrealistic as we may think. Some participants did describe being catfished but only visually due to them posting pictures of themselves that were edited when it came to personalities that were never mentioned. Indicating that the participants consider the inherently exaggerated people may communicate online. These further contrast the results found by Schwartz and Velotta in 2018 because no one expects perfection. Given this knowledge, it can justify why some users who use dating applications, and cycle using them, get discouraged. They may be tired of not being surprised by the people they meet online.

Moreover, the inherent design of these online platforms insists that the user describe themself. Thus, one has the liberty of creating whatever version of themselves they wish to online. The hope is that the users will be as accurate as possible, yet no one does commit to one hundred percent authenticity. Meaning there could also be tiredness from performing as their best version and still not getting the validation one may wish for online.

Similarly straightforward was all the participant's perception of what constitutes online dating. This study used Finkel's (2012) definition in which anything outside the internet is considered offline dating, and online dating was considered the process of using

online means to encourage romantic connection. However, all the participants agreed that they did not view their process of using dating applications as online dating necessarily. They were also adamant about the fact that once they met someone from the dating applications in person, it became offline dating. This also applies in the case of long-distance relationships, even those who have yet to meet in person. Once again, it was related to physical presence having such an essential role in the way relationships are viewed.

In terms of stigma, although not discussed by the literature, some of the current participants mentioned that there seems to be a prejudice against admitting one might want to have a relationship. This is further explored as a possibility of being the result of fearing vulnerability and all that comes with it. Since the hook-up culture has had a place to thrive, this place being dating applications, it is not unreasonable to expect that a link has developed. However, a contradictory experience was observed, most of the participants engaged in a double life of sorts. They would, at times want to be in a more committed companionship and at others were only interested in sexual contact akin to a hook-up. However, when they were looking for committed companionship, they noticed too many people were looking for sexual encounters and were discouraged from using the application since it took so much effort to weed those people out.

As a result, it seems that users of dating applications have come up with language that allows for ambiguity to exist. For example, the words "fun" and "have a good time" allow for the existence of the possibility of a committed relationship being formed because that is the same experience you would like to have when you are out on a date but could also suggest the possibility of sexual intercourse because it too should be a positive experience. It is difficult to suggest the actual reasoning as to why the words are being used whether it is to shift blame in case communication wires get crossed, to describe vaguely but positively what one is looking for, or to express a desire that may be judged, thus protecting vulnerable

emotions. As the scope of the research was not in this domain, it is advised that other

researchers look further into exploring the words used in online dating and the meanings

behind them.

There are many ways in which people can meet both online and offline, but for some,

online dating is the only option. One of the reasons for this belief is that people do not have

the time to commit to meeting people outside or going to a matchmaker. At times it is even

seen as not an optimal strategy, in line with what Rosenfeld et al. suggested in 2019.

Additionally, the main limitation of time comes due to the amount of time individuals spend

working or relaxing from working. Especially considering dating within the work

environment is considered not to be a good option. Being that the free time that people have

is finite and precious to them, online dating seems like the only decent option they have, to

properly experience dating.

To place the result of this study more accurately within the context of the literature,

we need to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of online dating. For example, Van De Wiele

and Tong (2014) suggested that a benefit would be to widen their social and find people in

specific geographic locations as benefits of online dating, however, the study participants did

not experience those benefits. On the contrary, they attempted to use dating applications to

find something exciting and outside the norm for them, but they could not find it.

Furthermore, the algorithms of dating applications are thought to combine a means to

communicate and an interaction between what an individual may want and what they are able

to offer to another individual. However, it seems that is not enough; it is suggested that the

algorithms need to develop a better method of prompting its users to self-disclose in a way

that would encourage a better pairing. Additionally, some of the features, such as narrowing

down by preference, are behind a paywall, so they are not as accessible as it appears, putting

into context the potential results observed by Schwartz and Velotta in 2018.

Although not all participants discussed this matter, feeling control over their romantic

life was definitely experienced by some, aligning it with Hobbs, Owen, and Greber's (2016)

findings. This experience was mainly focused on the discussion around Bumble, precisely

because their application only allows for female users to start conversations which has led to

those users feeling more in control of their dating life.

Another positive aspect is the increased pool selection that dating applications have,

although that was the case for all the participants, as Finkel et al. (2012) discussed, the

outcome was not as successful. Most of the male participants discussed their difficulty with

being matched on the applications. However, due to the high number of people being present

and the applications being image-focused, all the participants addressed their struggle with

objectification. As Anzani et al. (2018) mention, potential partners start becoming objectified

due to the high focus on images and such a high volume of people to compared to. For some,

this realization has led them to stop using dating applications, for others it was a reminder to

observe their behavior and judgment of their potential partners.

Another aspect of dating applications that works effectively is the framing they offer

when it comes to focusing on the kind of connection they would like to build (Race, 2015).

The participants of this study described various reasons for using dating applications such as

looking for friendship, a relationship, or even a hook-up (Sumter et al., 2017). Even though

hook-ups have been allowed to flourish in this kind of environment, the users have become

more accustomed to it. They have naturally learned to either dabble in it or not as per their

desire. Although it does seem like it has become part of the new dating script, all the shows

are the tolerance the current cultural norms have for this kind of experience. It does not indicate the amount of hooking-up that the participants do.

As per the literature, there seemed to be a difference between the sexes, in which men were seen as those who pursue casual sex, and women were not. These beliefs were also observed in the participants of this study; however, when talking to the participants about what they actually did, there was no observed difference.

Overall, all the users were able to find all options on them, however, of interesting note, they did not change the look or description of their profile to accommodate for that. The only thing that changed was the type of discussions they had with the people they were talking to. This creates the perfect atmosphere for confusion to occur, leading to a generalization that only people who want to hook up go to dating applications when indeed, that may not be the case. Unfortunately, what this does mean is that it may require effort, on the part of the users, to communicate their intentions and to sift through all the people that they match with. This sifting will allow people to ensure that their desires match simultaneously.

The existence of dating applications on phones seems to be a double-edged sword. Although it has been able to provide much benefit in the sense that it fits comfortably into the daily routine of life, providing communication and entertainment. However, it seems that natural habits of using other applications on the phone seem to befall onto dating applications. More specifically, when people use Instagram for a long time, they may end up scrolling on it for hours mindlessly this can also be referred to as "doom scrolling". Equally, this dissociation can happen when using dating applications. Individuals begin to use them almost mechanically and swipe through people without much regard for who the people are. This is done as a source of entertainment and habit at times.

Once the expectations that the potential partners have match, then it is seems as vital to meet in person. This ensures that the connection that people may form online will lead to a sustainable connection between the partners. Many participants discussed the importance of physical chemistry, stating that even if everything else is great but physical chemistry is off, the relationship cannot proceed. At times it was seen as the final hurdle to cross when it came to online dating. Once that hurdle was crossed, the dating was no longer considered to be online, it has now evolved into in-person dating. Any communication to be had from now on, even if done online, is seen as maintenance of offline dating. This experience further explains what Schwartz and Velotta (2018) described dating applications. They described them as "introducing sites" rather than "dating sites", as it seems the participants would agree with this notion. Mainly because they would not accept the notion that they were genuinely dating until they met the person they were talking to in-person.

This brings us to the conversation about "digital dualism". Jurgenson in 2012, suggested that there is no point in separating "online" and "offline" environments as both are becoming more and more integrated, and separating them creates a sense of disengagement and invalidation from the "online" connections. This separation may be unnecessary when it comes to friendships, family connections, and even working relationships but it is not as easy to mix when it comes to romantic relationships. Physical presence is so vital that it creates a clear line of distinction for all users. This is the main reason long-distance relationships are so difficult for most people. This can further explain why not many of the participants discussed developing any emotional connections because to develop that, one must trust that the relationship that they have with the other person will last for the long term, and until you meet in person, there is no guarantee.

Even though there is a clear emotional separation between what it is to be online and offline dating, there seems to be a presence of and "augmented reality" mentality. In the

sense that finding the person who will eventually become the perfect one has been somehow cracked by technology. There are many reasons why the algorithms do not work, but there are also ways to use the tool in your favor. Knowing all the bugs and issues dating applications have does not always discourage people from using them. This is due to the fact that knowing about the issues can allow you to use the system, but you must do it mindfully, and when you do you can capitalize on what the tool offers you, which is is a mechanical way to meet a good match. Thus, the concept of assisted serendipity that was proposed by Quiroz in 2013 is somewhat valid, though the impact of the dating applications in being the assist is not as strong as previously presumed.

This is even more evident when looking at the kind of analogies the participants brought in when considering dating applications. There were five that pertained to dating applications: advertisement, changing shirts, clothes catalog, fast food, and travelling. All these analogies tackled one or more aspects of what the experience is like on dating applications. For example, Schwartz and Velotta (2018) found that individuals would likely find themselves in a situation of not being able to trust their decision making and so would not commit in fear of missing out on something better in the "marketplace". Huang et al. (2022) also found people describing online dating using shopping terms like "window shopping" as there is no element of touching when it comes to online dating. The analogies that the participants provided aligned with those ideas but also pushed them further, adding value to self-understanding, self-development, and speed of dating in mind. Although Huang et al. (2022) described that there may have been an understanding that it was the luck of the draw when it came to the narratives that described online dating, the participants of this study did not seem to describe such experiences, their stories told a more controlled story. It was a conscious pursuit of dating in a way that works for them and they are familiar with. They

know how to shop, what advertisement is, and the experience of fast food; these aren't

processes that involve much luck. There is not much randomness in the process.

In contrast, experiencing a classic romantic story carries a luck-of-the-draw element.

When discussing the analogy of a fairytale, it was evident that it was heavily influenced by

the romantic master plot, as discussed by Portolan and McAlister (2021). The story focused

on a prince and princess, but in contrast to the usual romance story, there was a conflict in the

story. Although this is not a usual occurrence, all the participants agreed that the media

portrayal of romance stories does not have harmful elements to it thus, when it comes to

dating online, disappointment is experienced until, eventually, they learn to add more

"realism" into their lives and attempt to find a happy medium for them.

A similar experience happened to the participants when they explained what "The

One" meant to them. Although some participants did joke about it responding to what "The

One" meant to them with "Calvin Klein", they did not agree that it can be found as is. "The

One" is a person that is created through time and effort, making it as Illouz (2008) claims,

"unique and irreplaceable". This, however, doesn't mean that it can only happen once in a

lifetime, in fact, the participants suggested that this belief can also disintegrate rather quickly,

thus feeling more comfortable with the belief of "The One Right Now".

Not only that, but meeting someone and having instantaneous chemistry is equally

unrealistic in the participants' experience, so they are more likely to attribute that belief to the

romantic master plot than to their real expectations. They were further adding to the pull-and-

push experience of dating. Having to constantly battle with the expectations in one's mind set

forth by culturally engrained stories and what is actually experienced has caused much of the

fatigue that they have experienced and is one of the reasons that they use the dating

applications in a cycle.

The cycle itself has both more overt reasons to exist and more covert reasons to exist. The more overt reasons being that people successfully found a partner, deleted the application, and returned after a predetermined time; or a user did not have enough time to commit to finding themselves a partner and returned at a later date; someone had a bad experience from meeting someone online and decided to delete the applications but later found the courage to return. More covert reasons seem to be someone struggling to find someone who is interested in a relationship, getting disappointed that the people they talk to are looking for casual sex, deleting the applications, and then wanting to experience the romance master plot come back to the dating applications and have a similar experience. In this poorly summarized timeline, the participants take a break and, at times, return with a different attitude, a more realistic, maybe even hopeful attitude. For the reasons as mentioned earlier, it isn't easy to come up with a clear-cut answer as to the experience of the cyclical use of dating applications, but these results give us some insight into the phenomenon.

Strengths and Limitations

Some many reasons and circumstances lead to people using a cyclical pattern when using dating applications. Exploring them through the romance dating plot's perspective adds to the gap in existing literature. Not only because the cultural master plot affects the way people date without everyone being heavily aware of it but also because, through this perspective, we are able to discuss in a more realistic way, how we can address these issues in psychotherapeutic contexts, which has yet to be explored in its depth. Additionally, the IPA approach, which heavily relies on making sense of the participant's experience, allows for a much more practical understanding of the experiences of each participant and, as a result, a portion of the population that uses dating applications.

Having said that the participants had a large variation in experience, it would not be fair to assume that they are representative of the whole, especially considering more than 80% of the participants identified as straight. The questions asked only scrapped the surface of the topic and would require additional research to clarify the experience of different areas, such as the reasons certain words like "fun" were used, require more exploration.

Further research should build on the limitations of this study by exploring other topics in such areas with a more varied sample. Additionally, a clearer understanding of online and in-person dating should be created, especially considering the experience and understanding of the current population was one that did not completely relate to the definitions initially approached in this study.

Conclusion

Although dating through online means has not been present for a long time it has impacted greatly how people consider dating. There is a clear understanding of what happens when people date in person and what happens when people date online, what is lacking is understanding the nuances between in person and online dating.

In this nuance exists the cycle in which people download, delete, and then re-download dating applications. The reasons to download and re-download the dating applications do not differ much but the experiences of the users do change the outcome overall. The users became very aware of how visually focused online dating is, making them discouraged in using the applications. Additionally, there was a dissatisfaction with the inconsistent behaviors of the partners versus the expectations that they have placed upon them. It further reminded the users that dating is not easy whether in person or online. Granted there were some positives, they were convenient to use, did at times give users the results they were after, and did boost confidence. Yet the positives do not always outweigh

the negative. This further identified the need for in person dating because sacrificing physical presence for convenience was not worthwhile.

When it comes to looking at how their view of romance affected their dating experience it was evident there was much variation due to each participants' lived experience. There was a general sense of "The One" not existing as is, that person needs to be created. Further justifying why, the users viewed dating applications through analogies like shopping because they were not looking for the person rather, they're looking for potential and that is a lot less pressuring.

This study only scratches the surface of what it means to use dating applications in a cyclical manner and more research needs to be done to explore more perspectives. With more voices to be heard a bigger pattern can continue to emerge. This would allow a better understanding of not just heterosexual experience.

Psychologists can use this pattern to further support their clients to better understand themselves. This study was limited in its participants but was enriched by the methodology due to its encouragement of open communication of feelings and concepts of understanding.

References

Abbott, H. P. (2008). *The cambridge introduction to narrative*. Cambridge University Press.

Antheunis, M. L., Schouten, A. P., & Walther, J. B. (2019). The hyperpersonal effect in

online dating: Effects of text-based CMC vs. videoconferencing before meeting face-

to-face. *Media Psychology*, *23*(6), 820–839.

https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1648217

Ashley Fetters, K. T. (2022, August 12). *The 'dating market' is getting worse*. The Atlantic.

Retrieved November 22, 2022, from

https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/02/modern-dating-odds-economy-

apps-tinder-math/606982/

Balasubraman, S., Peterson, R. A., & Jarvenpaa, S. L. (2002). Exploring the implications of

M-Commerce for markets and marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing

Science*, *30*(4), 348–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/009207002236910

Barraket, J., & Henry-Waring, M. S. (2008). Getting it on(line). *Journal of Sociology*, *44*(2),

149–165. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783308089167

Belsey, C. (1994). *Desire: Love stories in Western Culture*. Blackwell.

Beltran, V. (2021, June 30). *The benefits of dating apps*. OpenSIUC. Retrieved November 22,

2022, from https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/esh_2021/2/

Berkowitz, D., Tinkler, J., Peck, A., & Coto, L. (2021). Tinder: A game with gendered rules

and consequences. *Social Currents*, *8*(5), 491–509.

https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965211019486

Blumtritt, C. (2022, January 21). *Number of online users for dating services in Europe 2024*.

    Statista. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from

    https://www.statista.com/forecasts/891141/eservices-dating-services-online-user-by-

    segment-in-europe

Bryant, K. (2017). Cyber Dating in the Age of Mobile Apps : Understanding Motives ,

    Attitudes , and Characteristics of Users.

Carpenter, C. J., & McEwan, B. (2016). The players of micro-dating: Individual and gender

    differences in goal orientations toward micro-dating apps. *First Monday*.

    https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v21i5.6187

Carpenter, G. W. (2021). Imagine me and you, I do: Characteristics and functions of

    imagined interactions during online dating. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*,

    41(3), 323–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/02762366211050644

Chesebro, J. W., & Bonsall, D. G. (1990). *Computer-Mediated Communication: Human*

    relationships in a Computerized World. University of Alabama Press.

Dush, C. M., & Amato, P. R. (2005). Consequences of relationship status and quality for

    subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *22*(5), 607–627.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505056438

Eichenberg, C., Huss, J., & Küsel, C. (2017). From online dating to online divorce: An

    overview of couple and family relationships shaped through digital media.

    Contemporary Family Therapy, *39*(4), 249–260. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-017-

    9434-x

Finkel, E. J. (2012). *Online dating a critical analysis from the perspective of psychological science*. Sage Publ.

Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. (2017). Online dating. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *13*(1), 3–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612436522

Finkel, E., Eastwick, P., Karney, B., Reis, H., & Sprecher, S. (2012). Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science. *Psychological Science In The Public Interest*, *13*(1), 3-66.

Fitriani, H., Hidayanto, A. N., Budiardjo, E. K., Meyliana, N. A., & Phusavat, K. (2016). Factors influencing the intention to share knowledge in citizen media with stimulus-organismic-response framework. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *12*(4), 419. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijwbc.2016.080811

Fox, J., & Anderegg, C. (2014). Romantic relationship stages and social networking sites: Uncertainty reduction strategies and perceived relational norms on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *17*(11), 685–691. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0232

Ghose, A., & Han, S. P. (2011). User content generation and usage behavior on the mobile internet: An empirical analysis. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1669678

Griffin, E. A. (2006). *A first look at communication theory*. McGraw-Hill.

Hechter, C. (2022). Kissing in the Rain. *Intertext*, *30*.

Hobbs, M., Owen, S., & Gerber, L. (2016). Liquid love? dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy. *Journal of Sociology*, *53*(2), 271–284. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316662718

Honeycutt, J. M. (2003). Imagined interaction conflict-linkage theory: Explaining the persistence and resolution of interpersonal conflict in Everyday Life. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, *23*(1), 3–26. https://doi.org/10.2190/240j-1vpk-k86d-1jl8

Honeycutt, J. M. (2010). *Imagine that: Studies in imagined interactions*. Hampton Press.

Honeycutt, J. M. (2019). Imagined interactions and inner speech. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, *39*(4), 386–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276236619869163

Huang, S. A., Hancock, J., & Tong, S. T. (2022). Folk theories of online dating: Exploring people's beliefs about the online dating process and online dating algorithms. *Social Media + Society*, *8*(2), 205630512210895. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221089561

Illouz, E. (2008). *Consuming the romantic utopia: Love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism*. University of California Press.

Jung, J. H., Bapna, R., Ramaprasad, J., & Umyarov, A. (2019). Love unshackled: Identifying the effect of mobile app adoption in online dating. *MIS Quarterly*, *43*(1), 47–72. https://doi.org/10.25300/misq/2019/14289

Jurgenson, N. (2012). When atoms meet bits: Social media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution. *Future Internet*, *4*(1), 83–91. https://doi.org/10.3390/fi4010083

Kang, T., & Hoffman, L. H. (2011). Why would you decide to use an online dating site?

    factors that lead to online dating. *Communication Research Reports*, *28*(3), 205–213.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2011.566109

Kauflin, J. (2011, December 16). *How match.com's founder created the world's biggest*

    dating website-and walked away with just $50,000. Business Insider. Retrieved

    November 22, 2022, from https://www.businessinsider.com/match-gary-kremen-

    2011-12

Klinenberg, E., & Ansari, A. (2016). *Modern Romance*. Penguin Books.

Laksmidewi Marghaputra, P. A. (2022). Online Dating Application User Relationship

    Development in Finding a Life Partner (Phenomenological Study of Women Using

    Online Dating Applications in Jakarta). *Budapest International Research and Critics*

    Institute-Journal, *5*(4), 28863–28869.

    https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v5i4.7039

LeFebvre, L. E. (2017). Swiping me off my feet. *Journal of Social and Personal*

    Relationships, *35*(9), 1205–1229. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517706419

LeFebvre, L. E., LeFebvre, L., & Allen, M. (2020). "imagine all the people": Imagined

    interactions in virtual reality when public speaking. *Imagination, Cognition and*

    Personality, *40*(3), 189–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276236620938310

Lenhart, A., & Duggan, M. (2020, May 30). *Couples, the internet, and Social Media*. Pew

    Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Retrieved November 24, 2022, from

    https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/02/11/couples-the-internet-and-social-

    media/

Ling, R. (2004). *The mobile connection: The cell phone's impact on society.* San Francisco,

    CA: Kaufmann.

Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect:

    Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*(6), 803–855.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.803

McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory*. Sage Publ.

Merkle, E. R., & Richardson, R. A. (2000). Digital Dating and virtual relating:

    Conceptualizing computer mediated romantic relationships. *Family Relations*, *49*(2),

    187–192. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2000.00187.x

Monica, A., Turner, E., & Vogels, E. A. (2020, October 2). *The virtues and downsides of*

    online dating. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Retrieved November

    22, 2022, from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/02/06/the-virtues-and-

    downsides-of-online-dating/

Muusses, L. D., Finkenauer, C., Kerkhof, P., & Billedo, C. J. (2014). A longitudinal study of

    the association between compulsive internet use and wellbeing. *Computers in Human*

    Behavior, *36*, 21–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.035

Newett, L., Churchill, B., & Robards, B. (2017). Forming connections in the digital era:

    Tinder, a new tool in young Australian intimate life. *Journal of Sociology*, *54*(3),

    346–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783317728584

Ng, A. (2019, January 23). *Stalkers use dating apps to crowdsource danger for victims*.

    CNET. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from

https://www.cnet.com/culture/cyberstalkers-are-crowdsourcing-danger-to-victims-doorsteps-with-dating-apps/

Nusrat, F., Huang, Y., & Lamberton, C. (2022). Love at First Touch: How Swiping vs. Typing Changes Online Dating Decision-Making. *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings* . https://doi.org/10.17918/00001123

Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *3*(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1

Orchard, T. (2019, October). *(PDF) online dating sites - researchgate*. ResearchGate. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336495955_Online_Dating_Sites

Peng, K. (2020). To be attractive or to be authentic? how two competing motivations influence self-presentation in online dating. *Internet Research*, *30*(4), 1143–1165. https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-03-2019-0095

Portolan, L., & McAlister, J. (2021). Jagged love: Narratives of romance on dating apps during covid-19. *Sexuality & Culture*, *26*(1), 354–372. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09896-9

Purwaningtyas, G. S., Pawito, P., & Nurhaeni, I. D. (2021). Self potential development through computer mediated communication on Instagram application. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, *8*(8), 112. https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i8.2840

Quiroz, P. A. (2013). From finding the perfect love online to satellite dating and 'loving-the-one-you're near.' *Humanity & Society*, *37*(2), 181–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597613481727

Race, K. (2015). Speculative pragmatism and intimate arrangements: Online hook-up devices in Gay Life. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *17*(4), 496–511. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.930181

Ramirez Jr, A., & Zhang, S. (2007). When online meets offline: The effect of modality switching on relational communication. *Communication Monographs*, *74*(3), 287–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750701543493

Regis, P. (2007). *A natural history of the romance novel*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Roche, G., Maruyama, H., & Kroik, A. V. (2018). *Indigenous efflorescence beyond revitalisation in Sapmi and Ainu mosir*. ANU Press.

Roese, N. J., Pennington, G. L., Coleman, J., Janicki, M., Li, N. P., & Kenrick, D. T. (2006). Sex differences in regret: All for Love or some for lust? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*(6), 770–780. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167206286709

Rosenfeld, M. J., Thomas, R. J., & Hausen, S. (2019). Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(36), 17753–17758. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908630116

Rosenfeld, M.J. and R.J. Thomas (2012) 'Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary', American Sociological Review 77(4): 523–47.

Schwartz, P., & Velotta, N. (2018). Online dating: Changing intimacy one swipe at a Time?

National Symposium on Family Issues, 57–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-

95540-7_4

Selterman, D., & Gideon, S. (2022). Experiences of romantic attraction are similar across

dating apps and offline dates in Young Adults. *Journal of Social Psychology*

Research, 145–163. https://doi.org/10.37256/jspr.1220221542

Sharabi, L. L. (2020). Exploring how beliefs about algorithms shape (offline) success in

online dating: A two-wave longitudinal investigation. *Communication Research*,

48(7), 931–952. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650219896936

Sharabi, L. L., & Dykstra-DeVette, T. A. (2019). From first email to first date: Strategies for

initiating relationships in online dating. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*,

36(11-12), 3389–3407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518822780

Shen, H., Zhang, M., & Krishna, A. (2016). Computer interfaces and the "direct-touch"

effect: Can ipads increase the choice of hedonic food? *Journal of Marketing*

Research, *53*(5), 745–758. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.14.0563

Sukardani, P. S., Huda, A. M., Pribadi, F., Sueb, S., & Anggaunitakiranantika, A. (2022).

Sexual self-disclosure: A study on communication behaviors among users in online

dating applications. *The Journal of Society and Media*, *6*(1), 84–103.

https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v6n1.p84-103

Sumter, S. R., Vandenbosch, L., & Ligtenberg, L. (2017). Love me tinder: Untangling

emerging adults' motivations for using the dating Application Tinder. *Telematics and*

Informatics, *34*(1), 67–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.04.009

Sundar, S. S. (2015). *The handbook of the psychology of communication technology*. John

    Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Tidwell, L. C., & Walther, J. B. (2002). Computer-mediated communication effects on

    disclosure, impressions, and interpersonal evaluations: Getting to know one another a

    bit at a time. *Human Communication Research*, *28*(3), 317–348.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00811.x

Timmermans, E., & Courtois, C. (2018). From swiping to casual sex and/or committed

    relationships: Exploring the experiences of tinder users. *The Information Society*,

    34(2), 59–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2017.1414093

Timmermans, E., & De Caluwé, E. (2017). Development and validation of the Tinder

    Motives Scale (TMS). *Computers in Human Behavior*, *70*, 341–350.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.028

Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An

    examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and

    Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*(8), 1023–1036.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208318067

Van De Wiele, C., & Tong, S. T. (2014). Breaking boundaries. *Proceedings of the 2014 ACM

    International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing*.

    https://doi.org/10.1145/2632048.2636070

Walther, J. B., & Whitty, M. T. (2020). Language, psychology, and New New Media: The

    hyperpersonal model of Mediated Communication at twenty-five years. *Journal of*

Language and Social Psychology, *40*(1), 120–135.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x20967703

Watson, R. T., Pitt, L. F., Berthon, P., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2002). U-commerce: Expanding the universe of Marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *30*(4), 333–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/009207002236909

Yeo, T. E., & Fung, T. H. (2017). "Mr right now": Temporality of relationship formation on gay mobile dating apps. *Mobile Media & Communication*, *6*(1), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157917718601

Appendix A

The American College of Greece
Informed Consent Form for Human Research Subjects

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study called "Do You Want to Ride Again? Understanding the Cycle of Dating Application Use", conducted by Mariya Cherepanova, psychology department. This project will be supervised by Dr. Remos Armaos, a professor in the psychology department. The purpose of the research is to explore the way dating applications use is experienced by individuals.

As a participant, you will be asked to provide an interview which will last from 45 - 60 minutes, at the location, date, and time that both you and the interviewer are available and agree upon. Participation in this study does not entail any known risks. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that the results may provide information of value for the field of psychology.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in any forms, questionnaires, etc. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant in this study; it will be stored securely in a secured drawer in the office of the investigator. This document is only available only to the investigator and Dr. Remos Armaos. Data collected will be destroyed at the end of three years. Results will be reported only in the form of a case study with confidentiality.

If you are interested in seeing these results, you may contact the principal investigator Mariya Cherepanova at the following email: m.cherepanova@acg.edu.
Identifiers might be removed and the information/biospecimens might be shared for future research or distributed to another investigator without additional consent.

Appendix A continued

If you have questions about the research, you may contact the student investigator, Mariya Cherepanova, m.cherepanova@acg.edu, the faculty advisor Dr. Remos Armaos, rarmaos@acg.edu

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate (or discontinue participation) will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Investigator

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix B

The American College of Greece
Institutional Review Board
Example of Video/Audio Release Form

I voluntarily agree to be videotaped/ audio recorded during the experiment/ study being conducted by Mariya Cherepanova. I understand that the tapes will be used only for the purpose of accurate transcription of the interview. These tapes will be identified by code names e.g. A001. The tapes will be kept for 2 months. After data is collected the tapes will be erased.

_____
Signature of the Participant   Date

_____
Signature of Investigator   Date

Refusal to be Taped

I do not agree to be videotaped during this experiment conducted by
_____. I understand I (will/will not) receive compensation by such a
refusal. By refusing to be videotaped, I understand that I (may/may not) continue to
participate in the study.

_____
Signature of the Participant   Date

Appendix C

**The American College of Greece
Debriefing Statement**

Do You Want to Ride Again? Understanding the Cycle of Dating Application Use

Thank you for taking part in this study. This research project is aiming to explore the cyclical pattern of dating application use.

The findings of the present study may be of importance, as they have the potential to further our knowledge about dating which can further guide the way we understand our society and technology.

In the event that you experience a negative reaction to participating in this research, you may contact mental health professional at Psy-Diktyo (Ψ-Δίκτυο) https://psy-diktyo.gr/

If you have any further information regarding this study or you would like a copy of the results of the study once completed, you may contact: the primary research student investigator, Mariya Cherepanova, m.cherepanova@acg.edu, the faculty advisor Dr. Remos Armaos, rarmaos@acg.edu.

Thank you again for taking part in this study!

Keep in mind that the major benefit that most of our research participants get from participating in studies is the experience of being in a study. The more background you give them about the basis for the study, the more they will learn from the experience.

Appendix D

Master Table of Themes

I.   The Good, The Bad, and The Cycle

App on the Loop: Understanding the Cycle	Blue, 3/66-69 Red, 12/345-346
Positive Perspectives on Dating Applications	Blue, 13/436-437 Blue, 13/432-435 Peach, 3/93-96
Negative Perspectives on Dating Applications	Blue, 3/86-87 Grey, 10/297-299 Yellow, 8/249-251 Blue, 7/236-240 Yellow, 7/212-213 Red, 27/804-805 Blue, 13/422-424 Yellow, 8/227-231

II.   The Language of Dating

Understanding "Good Times" and "Fun"	Peach, 13-14/442-445
The Tinder Script	Green, 5/182-183 Yellow, 5/102-104 Blue, 4/125-127 Blue, 6/187-192

	Red, 5/121-123
From Words to Images: The Art of Visual Storytelling in Dating	Red, 27/788-794
	Peach, 10/328-329
	Blue, 3/88-89
	Yellow, 3/89-90
	Red, 22/656-661
	Red, 13/377-385

III.   Subjective Notions of Amourness

Knowing Oneself	Grey, 3/63
	Red, 14/390-393
	Blue, 8/256-258
	Green, 10/361-363
	Red, 14/402-403
	Red, 17/509-511
	Red, 6/164
	Green, 3/78-80
	Blue, 9/301-306
	Blue, 13/430-432
	Grey, 15/439
	Yellow, 13/398-399
	Peach, 9/274-277

The Perfect Romance - "The One" vs "The One Right Now"	Yellow, 9/265-266
	Blue, 9/286-288
	Green, 6/207-208
	Peach, 11/356-358
	Red, 13/367-368
	Yellow, 11/338
	Grey, 11/338-345
	Peach, 10/311-314
	Yellow, 10/288-292
	Peach, 11/362-364
	Blue, 9/282-284
	Peach, 11/351-352
	Blue, 10/331-333
	Green, 14/484-486
	Yellow, 11/323-326
	Grey, 2/43
	Grey, 13/381
	Yellow, 9/282-283
	Green, 13/472-473
Tradeoff between expectations and reality of dating	Red, 20/577-580
	Red, 20/584-586
	Green, 10/376-380
	Peach, 15-16/512-516
	Yellow, 14/423-427
	Green, 12/422-424

	Green, 3/98
	Yellow, 8/240-243
	Green, 3/430-431
	Red, 10/285-286
	Blue, 3/68-73
Are we different from others?	Red, 725-726; 730-732
	Blue, 12/394-395

IV.   Technology

Technology as an Enrichment, Not a Replacement, of Life	Grey, 9/248-249; 10/254
	Green, 9/324-329
	Red, 21/609-610
	Grey, 4/100-103
Safeguarding Love in Dating Apps: Algorithms, Structure, and Safety	Green, 3/103-105
	Blue, 5/139-144
	Red, 19/553-557
	Blue, 7/201
	Blue, 12/406-412