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College Student Utilizing Dating Apps During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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College Students Utilizing Dating Apps During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The following study explores the effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the initiation and development of human relationships. During the early days of the pandemic, governments forced shutdowns of businesses and workplaces, and public health officials created social-distancing and facial covering mandates to protect the health of citizens. However, long periods of isolation can foster negative emotions and feelings, such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, humans have an innate need for love and belonging, but the health risks of contracting the virus and social-distancing enforcements significantly threatened the "normal" methods of satisfying this necessary motivation. At this time, dating apps experienced a surge in activity and achieved the most users the platforms had ever seen in history. While online dating is nothing new, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the dual-modality aspect of the relational process. Thus, the processes of virtual dating are new to society with adapted concepts of computer-mediated communication. An online survey was conducted to collect qualitative data offering user insights into these innovative methods of relationship formation, such as any differences in self-presentation, impression management, and self-disclosure strategies. The survey also sought to discover new tactics in risk negotiation, as switching to face-to-face communication was paired with the possibility of contracting the virus. At the time this survey was conducted, the number of positive Covid-19 cases significantly decreased, and mandates had been lifted, so questions also explored the possibility of the continuation of virtual dating despite public spaces reopening and the ability to build relationships in person again.

KEY WORDS

Impression management, self-presentation, self-disclosure, dual-modality, computer-mediated communication, face-to-face communication, social connection, COVID-19 pandemic

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world in many ways. Because of the virus's extreme contagion, severe symptoms, and serious health risks, countries disrupted the lives of civilians for their own protection. Nationwide mandates were advised by public health corporations and enforced by governing bodies to keep people at home or to wear facial protection if they leave. Schools, offices, restaurants, and entertainment venues transformed the common home into a place of work, entertainment, and relaxation.

With practices of social distancing strongly advised, the world slowly adjusted and transitioned to virtual life. Videoconferencing technologies allowed people to attend school classes, work meetings, doctors' appointments, and more in the leisure of their own homes through platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. People uncomfortable leaving their homes and risking themselves to exposure could have their groceries dropped off at their front door by new delivery service companies through digital apps. Other companies implemented options of contactless shopping and curbside pickup to preserve the jobs of staff and the customer's ability to purchase items while protecting and limiting exposure to both groups. These adjustments helped communities continue to meet their basic physiological and safety needs while staying safe during a global pandemic.

However, long periods of isolation left many feeling lonely and longing for socialization. According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, humans are fundamentally motivated to attain certain needs, but some needs are more important than others. At the lowest level, humans need the basic biological requirements for survival to fulfill physiological needs. Next, safety needs are fulfilled by financial security, health, emotional

stability, and more. Once these needs are achieved, humans seek love and belonging. At the core, humans need social connection, intimacy, and love.

The numerous effects of COVID-19 significantly threaten all our most basic human motivations, especially the need for relational intimacy. Yet, social distancing created challenges for achieving this need. Face-to-face interaction involves the risk of contraction of the COVID-19 virus. Along with most popular date spots closed and facing social peer pressure to isolate, people were forced to find different ways to socially connect. Before the pandemic, online dating already was riding the negative stigma of desperateness associated with it. However, mobile dating apps reached an all-time high of users in 2020. People turned to virtual dating to fulfill their human need for love and belonging.

While more research about how the COVID-19 virus impacts physical and mental health is presented weekly, research lacks in areas involving the impact of the virus on human relationships (Widerhold, 2021). The present study investigates the use of mobile dating apps during the pandemic. The goal of the research was to find answers to how individuals conduct their self-presentation, impression management, and self-disclosure through computer-mediated communication on dating apps. College students were surveyed to provide insights into virtual dating. Survey results showed that many individuals have different motivations for using dating apps, which makes finding partners for specific goals challenging. While establishing meaningful relationships can be hard through dating apps, many still attempt to do so from others' success stories. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic comes to an end, the likelihood of the continuing surge in the use of dating apps and virtual dating is not promising.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

As previously mentioned, it is psychologically proven that humans have a deep-rooted

hunger for love and belonging after basic psychological and safety needs are met. The danger of

the COVID-19 outbreak caused nations to close places of public gathering and encourage social

distancing to protect against the virus's threat to civilians' health. Consequently, these

restrictions put in place because of COVID-19 also greatly threatened the important need for

human connection. This connection is defined by "a person's subjective sense of having close

and positively experienced relationships with others in the social world" (Sepalla et al., 2013).

The ability to form these connections is jeopardized by societal pressures to self-isolate for long

periods of time. Without these social connections, people are unable to meet their emotional

needs for intimacy, which gives rise to negative feelings of loneliness, alienation, and

depression.

Mental Health.

Research shows COVID-19 significantly affects mental health as requirements to stay

home and separate from coworkers, family, and friends are enforced, directly threatening the

ability to connect physically and emotionally with others (Hagerty & Williams, 2020). To care

for mental health by satisfying these needs, people must decide between risking their physical

health with the strong possibility of contracting the virus with physical meetings or adapting and

attempting to fulfill these needs virtually. Therefore, to improve mental health while in isolation

during the pandemic, many people gravitated toward dating apps to fulfill their needs for

connection.

Dating Apps

The world of online dating changed when dating apps were created. In 2012, Tinder shook the dating scene with its new swipe concept for finding partners. Today, there are dozens of different dating app options for singles. In 2019, Tinder led the dating app world with the largest audience of 7.86 million users in the United States, with Bumble in second place with an audience of 5.03 million users (Statista Research Department, 2022). Surveys show that 75% of adults ages 18-24 have used Tinder at least once, and that Tinder is the preferred app of students in college (Rheaves, 2021). While online dating once was associated with a negative stigma of desperateness, most Americans now view online dating and mobile apps as a good method to meet new people (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

Benefits. In some ways, dating apps make the dating process easier and more efficient. For instance, app users benefit from browsing the app's database for potential partners in the comfort of their own home without having to go out to a bar or another public place with the hope of meeting someone compatible. Also, dating apps allow users to adjust their geographical scope when searching for partners, so individuals can narrow the search to their current location or search the entire country if desired. While engaging in long-distance relationships through apps is less common because of the absence of the physical aspects of relationships, the geographical search tool changes the dating game by allowing users to meet new people beyond their local social circles (Dibble & McDaniel, 2021). In addition, the mobility of smartphones allows users to browse partners in different geographic locations when they travel.

Consequences. However, online dating introduced new problems into the dating process as well. People have different motivations for downloading a dating app, which means communication is especially critical when messaging potential partners. If the motivations of

partners do not align, the relationship will not be successful. Motivations of using dating apps can include, but are not limited to, looking for a soulmate, casual dating, seeking sex, or easing boredom (Sheldon, 2017). As with in-person dating, if the motivations of one partner are purposely mislead to the other, such as presenting the interest in a relationship but, only looking for sex, dating can become discouraging.

Dating app disillusionment comes from repeated unmet expectations. Computer-mediated communication through dating apps can come with unwanted, unpleasant, and uncomfortable experiences that can build up to overall resentment towards online dating (Niehuis et al., 2019). First, receiving unsolicited sexually explicit images and text can be a traumatizing experience. Besides negatively impacting one's opinions of online dating, an individual can become disillusioned with oneself when users send unsolicited pictures or make degrading requests (Niehuis et al., 2019). This trauma from dating on mobile apps can increase depression and anxiety. Research shows that users who repeatedly have negative experiences on dating apps will feel regret toward the decision to join dating apps in the first place (Vogels. 2020).

After downloading a dating app, the first step is to build a profile. This novelty allows users to choose how they are seen by other users on the app. Dating apps give users tremendous control over their self-presentation, but users only have the option to work with a few photos and text compared to dating websites. The importance of the profile and the immense focus users exert when building their own can make it hard to find matches based on more than physical appearances.

While most people prefer the control over their self-presentation, this control can become skewed or abused. Users have the luxury of editing photos making themselves appear more attractive, and users are not required to choose current photos. This slippery slope of

misrepresentation can lead to trust issues. In fact, users can be deceived purposely by others who have no intention of finding love. Catfishing is a major problem within online dating and causes many trust issues, as well as why many hesitate to date online. Some individuals create fake profiles they believe users will find attractive. Then, they attempt to establish trust through direct messages for various amounts of time, such as weeks, months, or years. After they feel they have gained the users' trust, they attempt to manipulate the users into doing what they want, usually giving them money.

Pandemic Spike

Dating apps encountered a huge surge of activity during the pandemic. In March 2020, Tinder experienced three billion swipes in a single day reaching a record high. In addition, OkCupid and Bumble saw an increase in video calls and messaging by 700% in the following three months (Fortune Editors, 2021). A survey conducted in April 2020 showed that 31% of millennials responded they currently were using dating apps more often than before the pandemic (Statista Research Department, 2022). While this rise in dating app usage may seem surprising, this result can be explained by the increased outside pressure from public health officials to stay home despite the human need for connection. Thousands of people sought out dating apps to combat the feeling of isolation. Thus, the era of the virtual date began.

Virtual Dates

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the start of virtual dating, different from online dating. The term "online dating" now refers to the older dating web services available before mobile dating on apps. The term "virtual dating" encompasses new understandings, practices, and technologies brought on by the pandemic. The purpose of online dating was to establish an initial

connection for users to later meet face to face, but with virtual dating, interactions remain non-physical after the initial encounter (Duguay et al., 2022).

Dating apps began making software changes enhancing the experience of virtual dating allowing for better virtual dates during the pandemic. App functionality was altered to integrate video communication and same-time audio calls facilitating a deeper medium of communication for virtual dates. For example, Bumble and Match introduced new in-app audio and video call components to keep users on the app. However, other dating apps took a different approach with modality weaving. Dating apps not making these changes or lacking the capability to support communication beyond texting, encouraged users to move to other services, such as Zoom, Facetime, or Google Hangout, after initial contact on the app (Duguay et al., 2022). In April 2020, Tinder changed the Passport feature on the app making it free to all users allowing them to search for potential partners without geographic limitations.

While the new video call features confirmed the identity of potential partners, dating apps also made new software changes helping the new growth of users feel even safer on the platforms by creating better verification processes for establishing the authenticity of users. These processes included social verification by ensuring one's social media accounts matched their profile information. In addition, some apps imported friend networks from other platforms to verify consistent self-presentation (Duguay et al., 2022).

As dating practices continued during the height of the pandemic, dating apps received backlash in the media. Controversy arose around the apps as some people claimed they endangered public health by leading users eventually to begin face to face interactions and risking further spread of the virus. To combat the negative attention from the media, dating apps used various communication methods to encourage virtual dating. In-app pop-up messages were

utilized to communicate with users the importance of staying virtual, the health risks of in-person dating, and ideas for virtual dates (Duguay et al., 2022). In addition, with the new features, dating apps were intended to make the transition to virtual dating easy for users, and ultimately making virtual dating the new normal. While these messages showed that dating apps showed concern about the safety of their users, apps went even further with their communication to maintain good, positive relationships with their users. Apps used empathic messages to relate with users by acknowledging the range of emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, that users were suffering with alone due to the pandemic (Duguay et al., 2022). Communication technologies, including dating apps, are cited to be one of the leading solutions to isolation during COVID-19.

Computer-Mediated Communication

Even though dating apps implemented new technologies making virtual dating as similar to in-person dating as possible, communication strategies used when dating still differ. Studies of the different methods of face-to-face (FTF) communication and computer-mediated (CMC) communication date to the start of online dating in the early 2000s. However, to see if CMC strategies have adapted even further with virtual dating, we must first examine the methods and benefits of FTF and CMC communication.

Simply stated, there are two key parts of CMC: reduced communication cues and the potential for asynchronous communication. In contrast to FTF communication, CMC has more control over verbal and linguistic cues without the presence of any nonverbal communication cues. On dating apps, users must navigate in a reduced cue environment (Ward, 2016). Because of this, self-presentation strategies in CMC are more deliberate and flexible due to the ability to self-critique and review your profile before starting the process of online dating. However, while

dating apps have similarities to dating websites, self-presentation cues are reduced even further on dating apps as only a limited amount of information can be added to the user's profile (Ward, 2016).

The asynchronous nature of CMC allows online dating users to take a longer time to consciously think of and construct messages than FTF communication (Gibbs et al., 2006). This luxury is extended throughout the entire messaging process online through CMC as users have unlimited time to reflect on texts sent from partners and craft a new reply (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). This also is beneficial as nonverbal cues in FTF communication are harder to control, so along with the asynchrony of communication on dating apps, users have more control over their self-presentation (Ward, 2016).

Dual-Modality. As mentioned previously, the goal of online dating is to begin dating in-person after an initial connection is made online. Thus, online dating, before the pandemic and virtual dating, involved modality switching. These mixed-mode relationships differ from single-mode relationships by self-disclosure, self-presentation, and impression management strategies. With online dating, the anticipation of FTF communication is extremely important in influencing the development of these strategies. The modality switching perspective states that online partners deciding to meet in person might experience different results depending on the amount of time between the initial online connection and physical meeting and the quality of communication online before the physical meeting (Ramirez et al., 2014). One study shows that 65% of online daters arranged face-to-face meetings within one week of meeting online (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Another study indicates that partners meeting online and switching to face-to-face meetings after three weeks show signs of enhanced relational results, while partners meeting online and switching after six weeks show signs of dampened relational results (Ramirez et al.,

2014). The outcomes of these studies reveal how critical is the time frame between the initial online connection and the initial face-to-face meeting in the success of a relationship.

   The amount of time between initial contact and the physical meeting along with the decision to meet in person in general heavily is motivated by one's goals. Before the pandemic, online dating websites and mobile apps were tools for establishing initial communication between romantic partners. After this initial connection, it is up to the partners to decide whether to continue the relationship through other forms of communication outside of the app. For best relational success, partners must communicate this desire to the other. The inability to do so can lead to drawn-out processes of mediated courtship on the dating websites or apps and even an end to the relationship (Ramirez et al., 2014). Users desiring to interact with a partner later in person are more likely to partake in information-seeking processes. However, users who do not desire future contact with their online match are more unlikely to put effort toward developing the relationship further (Ramirez et al., 2014). This demonstrates that if partners do not have a mutual desire to eventually meet face-to-face, the outcome of the relationship is highly unlikely to be successful.

   Self-Presentation. Before users decide to meet their match in person, they must first decide how they want to present themselves online through their profiles. Self-presentation can be defined as "the conscious or unconscious process through which people try to control the impressions other people form of them" (Nickerson, 2022). Self-presentation strategies especially are critical at the initiation of a relationship because other users decide whether to pursue a relationship based on the information presented (Ellison et al., 2006). Research shows individuals create intentional and specific self-presentation to offer similarity to their desired

partners (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). By establishing similarity through portraying certain characteristics or lifestyles, this strategy fosters intimacy among preferred romantic partners.

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model of online communication states that CMC can develop higher levels of affection in comparison to FTF communication. This theory frequently is used to examine self-presentation in CMC environments. The hyperpersonal perspective explains that individuals communicating online can use the reduced cues and asynchrony of CMC for developing specific messages portraying themselves in a positive manner (Ramirez et al., 2014). The limited cues in CMC can also lead to "overattribution and exaggerated or idealized perceptions of others" (Gibbs et al., 2006, p 156). Dating app users can use the limited cues to their advantage to manipulate their self-presentation as they please. Consequently, online communicators are more likely to evolve hyperpersonal relationships with increased intimacy in contrast to those communicating face-to-face. Compared to FTF communication, hyperpersonal communication can inflate the perception of satisfaction within a relationship in romantic environments (Dibble & McDaniel, 2021).

Impression Management. Self-presentation success largely is like impression management. The process of impression management can be broken down into two different parts: impression motivation and impression construction. First, impression motivation is "the degree of which people are motivated to control how others see them" (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021, p. 3). At this stage, dating app users are very motivated by the impression they make in CMC environments. For example, research shows that most women lie about their weight and most men lie about their height in their profiles (Ward, 2016).

Next, the following step of impression construction is the process in which people build the impression they wish to make (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). At this moment, individuals

specifically choose which impression they want to give off and determine which methods are best for creating it. There are various impression construction methods including: self-descriptions, attitude statements, social associations, and deception (Ward, 2016). In addition, individuals must utilize text and photo-based communication to express themselves to others online (Ramirez et al., 2014).

Dating app users first partake in the impression construction process when they begin creating their profile. The management of one's profile is a critical phase in constructing their impression, for the profile is the first impression other daters will receive of the user (Ramirez et al., 2014). When users choose which pictures and text description to include on their profile, they are engaging in impression construction. Impression management implementation on dating app profiles is a significant determining factor of the users with whom one will match (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). For example, an individual who prides themselves on their professionality and wants to take the online dating process seriously might choose pictures in appropriate clothing with an honest text description declaring what kind of relationship they are seeking. In contrast, more laid-back and free-spirited individuals might choose a variety of images in different settings with a short, simple text description declaring they are not looking for particular characteristics. This bio is more inclusive allowing these individuals more options for matches than others who declare specific wants. Individuals crafting their profiles giving the impression of a partier, such as choosing pictures at clubs, concerts, or bars with alcohol or marijuana and writing descriptions like "It's always a fun time with me", can lose the potential to match with various groups; individuals who do not drink or use recreational drugs along with individuals favoring different hobbies for fun will not match with this user. All in all, profile construction is

another process that can be manipulated by users on dating apps to craft a desired impression and attract preferred romantic partners.

However, individuals participating in online dating must be cautious of the thin line between slightly enhanced impression management and dishonest representation (Ramirez et al., 2014). Profiles on dating apps are designed to promote positive characteristics and qualities, but as previously mentioned, users have lied on their profiles to make themselves seem more attractive to others. Research shows that people in romantic relationships online are more likely to engage in misrepresentation of themselves than people in face-to-face relationships (Ellison et al., 2006). Most users of dating apps account for this dishonestly by assuming other users exaggerate or specifically exclude certain information (Ramirez et al., 2014). For example, describing one's body as "curvy" in text descriptions is an honest, yet flattering portrayal of larger body sizes understood by most.

After constructing a personal profile, a user is ready to begin browsing for potential romantic partners. Like self-presentation and impression management strategies, individuals use a minimal filtering process for screening prospective matches. Simply stated, users create profiles, observe how others create their profiles, then choose their prospective partners based on the content included in the profile. This filtering process can be described as "simple assessments of attractiveness, physical proximity, personality, sexual preferences, and risk management" (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008, p. 273). Certain dating apps give users some control over editing their filtering process. For example, on Tinder, users can choose an age range and sexual preference, while dating websites can have more detailed filtering options. Tinder also only provides users with positive reinforcement when they are notified of a mutual match, but users

are never notified when they are rejected (Ward, 2016). However, the impression management process does not only occur in the match selection phase of online dating.

       <u>Self-Disclosure</u>. The impression management continues after the profile construction and filtering processes into online conversation. Along with the previous communication strategies mentioned, online conversation also is a critical phase in keeping a romantic partner after the initial match in dating on apps. In this phase, online daters must decide to continue getting to know one another, to meet in person, or to end communication entirely (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). Self-disclosure is "any message about the self-one communicates to another," and disclosure of extremely personal information is necessary for successful romantic relationships (Gibbs et al., 2006, p. 155). Anticipation of future FTF communication heavily influences self-disclosure decisions as individuals more closely monitor their messages as the likelihood of physical interaction becomes more probable (Ellison et al., 2006). In addition, their self-disclosure becomes more intentional and deliberate as the in-person meeting approaches.

       However, due to the limited verbal cues in CMC and the possibility of misrepresentation, self-disclosure online can be less honest than face-to-face interactions, but contradicting research notes that the anonymous nature of online dating can have could encourage some users to be more honest and intimate (Gibbs, et al., 2006). This is known as the "passing stranger" phenomenon. On most dating apps, profiles only show the first name of the individual to other users. This provides a sense of security and anonymity that might make users comfortable with disclosing more information than they would in face-to-face interactions (Ramirez et al., 2014). Therefore, intimacy can be accelerated in CMC relationships quicker than FTF relationships as partners feel secure to ask and answer deeper questions earlier in the development of the relationship under the protection of anonymity (Gibbs, et al., 2006).

Self-disclosure can become especially difficult when battling the decision to be authentic or maintain positive impression management. After self-presenting a certain way through their profiles, individuals can feel pressure on whether to hide one's true self when developing a deeper relationship with a potential partner through online conversation. When choosing what to self-disclose, people frequently struggle to reconcile contrasting motivations like openness and autonomy (Ellison et al., 2006).

Perceived Success

The evaluation of success of dating apps is determined by one's motivations. An individual who uses Hinge to find hookups and an individual who uses Hinge to find a soulmate will have success that looks differently. Therefore, success is unique to the individual and their relational goals. Intimacy, reciprocated affection and effort, and similarity among partners are determinant factors in CMC success (Sagita & Irwansyah, 2021). In addition, social penetration theory suggests that disclosure intimacy is a key contributing factor to the satisfaction of interpersonal relationships (Gibbs et al., 2006). Research also shows that there is a direct relationship between more experience with online dating and overall success (Gibbs et al., 2006).

Risk Negotiation

Partaking in online dating through mobile apps already came with risks before the COVID-19 virus, but the pandemic brought on new risks to consider when virtual dating. Dating apps helped cure loneliness during isolation by allowing people to form new connections and participate in the conversation from the comfort and safety of their own homes. Yet, as discussed earlier, the length of the time frame between initial contact online and the first face-to-face interaction is extremely crucial in the development and success of the relationship. Thus, individuals seeking serious, committed relationships must negotiate the risks of physical

interaction among themselves. Individuals face the decision of whether the risk contracting the COVID-19 virus is worth the physical interaction (Williams et al., 2021).

It is important to note again that not everyone has the same motivations for using dating apps, so individuals might weigh different reasons to various degrees to risk virus contamination. Communication scholars favor the Uses and Gratifications model to comprehend what motivations dating app users have for interacting with others online (Williams et al., 2021). These motivations can include, but are not limited to, companionship, entertainment, fun, romance, sex, affection, and love. Furthermore, individuals must self-negotiate the risk of endangering their physical health to support their mental health by physically engaging with romantic partners.

The Future

Today, almost all restrictions and mandates have eased and are gone due to the increased number of vaccinated citizens. As public places open again, scholars wonder if the high number of users on dating apps virtually dating will stay or decrease as individuals return to face-to-face interactions. According to experts, this will not affect the growth of dating apps, for most people who use dating apps during the pandemic value and have become accustomed to the convenience virtual dating provides (Wiederhold, 2021). Virtual dates are more conducive to busy schedules, so individuals can save time and energy by one or more virtual dates through video calls before in-person dates. Also, the increased use of dating apps during the pandemic helped diminish the negative stigma of dating online making it more appealing now than ever (Wiederhold, 2021). The pandemic changed how new relationships are formed and how existing relationships are maintained but dating app software changed as well to help people stay connected. Even though the pandemic is coming to an end, dating apps will retain these adjustments that were made.

Conducting the Research

I wish to build on the above research to explore the new and best communication methods associated with virtual dating. Also, I seek to evaluate the success of virtual dating through the experience of others to determine if virtual dating will last post-pandemic. This includes taking a deeper look into how individuals navigate on a dating app and if there are patterns of preferred dating apps for different outcomes. To fulfill this task, I will survey college students, adults ages 18-25, about their use of dating apps during the pandemic. The results of the survey will offer insights into different self-presentation, impression management, and self-disclosure strategies used when partaking in virtual dating, along with honest responses of the risk negotiation process. In addition, results will show whether statistics of the survey population who participated in virtual dating through dating apps align with national statistics.

RQ1: How have college students used dating apps since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What message strategies and impression management skills are most used when communicating with potential dating partners on dating apps?

RQ3: Which communication strategies are perceived as the most effective in achieving users' motivations and goals when communicating on dating apps?

RQ4: How likely are users to continue communicating with potential dating partners through virtual dating apps in the future?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

I determined that the proposed research questions would best be studied using a qualitative method of inquiry because the use of open-ended questions would present deeper insights into how users of dating apps conduct their self-presentations, impression management, and self-disclosure strategies. Open-ended questions also allow users to further elaborate on their overall experiences with dating apps when explaining why they feel a certain way by providing specific, personal examples. Since success on dating apps is determined by an individual's motivations, open-ended responses offer greater clarification than a simple "yes" or "no" when evaluating one's experience. However, quantitative data was collected to discover the demographics of the surveyed population and basic statistics of the participants' experiences with dating apps.

Participants

To explore any new communication strategies used in virtual dating, I surveyed adult men and women who downloaded any dating app within the past five years. Participants did not have to be currently using a dating app but had recent experience. In addition, participants could be single and actively dating, single and not actively dating, or in a relationship if they had previous experience with a dating app. Adults from ages 18-25 were desired because they use dating apps the most compared to other age groups (Statista Research Department, 2022). I created an online survey and used a snowball sampling method to find participants. My thesis director and I shared the survey with students at the University of Arkansas that we know and encouraged them to share the survey with others. At the time the survey was closed, answers were collected from 43 individuals. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 25. Of the 43

respondents, nine identified their gender as masculine, and 34 identified their gender identity as feminine.

Measures

The online survey asked participants to complete 12 multiple choice and 19 open-ended questions about their personal experience using dating apps (See Appendix B). Multiple choice questions recorded basic demographic information and gauged the participants' use of dating apps, such as if they are currently using a dating app, if they have ever used multiple dating apps, and if they used dating apps during the pandemic.

Open-ended questions were used to assess the participants' feelings toward dating apps, including any preferences of any particular dating apps over others. In addition, open-ended questions dove into how participants construct their profile on dating apps and how they wish to be seen by potential partners. Similarly, questions asked respondents what they desire in another user's profile, including listing their own turn-offs. These questions explored the individuals' motivations for using dating apps and how they evaluated their own success. To discover how CMC evolves with virtual dating, participants were asked questions to describe positive and negative conversations on dating apps to analyze self-disclosure strategies. Final open-ended questions were asked to determine the likelihood of virtual dating continuing in the future post-pandemic.

Procedures

Before sending out the survey, I obtained approval from the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board to collect responses from human participants. Once approval was received, I compiled an online survey through Survey Monkey with 32 intentional and thought-out questions answering my research questions. Once the online survey was created, it was

immediately shared for snowball sampling. After five days, the survey was closed for any further answers, and the responses collected were analyzed. The survey was only open for five days due to time restraints caused by the Institutional Review Board.

Analyzing the Data

When analyzing the responses to the survey, each question was evaluated independently. Answers were read three times per question. The first reading was to obtain a general understanding of the overall responses to each question. The second reading was to identify prominent themes within a set of responses to a question. During the third reading, specific examples for each theme were coded. Thus, each respondent's answer to each question was thoroughly studied to discover any trends or patterns in the answers. If similar answers appeared two or more times, it was considered a "theme". When multiple themes arose, I began the coding process to label and organize the qualitative data noting any relationships between answers. Once the codes were identified, tables were created for each question to identify and organize the theme. The tables included three columns. In the first column, codes were named. In the second column, a description of the theme was given. In the third column, quotes from respondents were included as examples to further illustrate the themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The first research question asked, "How have college students used dating apps since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?". The purpose of this question was to explore the frequency of use of dating apps, dating app preferences, and their purpose for use. To answer this first research question, 12 questions were asked on the survey. The first series of questions were asked to investigate when participants have used dating apps and the frequency to which they use them. When participants were asked if they used dating apps prior to 2020, 24 participants responded that they had used dating apps before 2020 and 20 participants responded that they had not [see Appendix C, Figure 1.1]. Participants were then asked if they have used dating apps within the past two years, to which 70.45% of participants responded they had and 29.55% of participants responded they had not [see Appendix C, Figure 1.2]. This indicates that most respondents were using dating apps during the pandemic. However, when participants were asked if they have used dating apps more frequently in the past two years, 61.36% of participants responded that they had not and 38.64% of participants responded that they had [see Appendix C, Figure 1.3].

Then, participants who are currently using a dating app were asked how often they log into the dating app. The results show that 75% of participants are not currently using a dating app, despite 70.45% of participants responding previously that they had used dating apps in the past two years [see Appendix C, Figure 1.4]. When asked if participants have used multiple dating apps at one time, 54.27% of participants responded that they have and 47.73% of participants responded that they have not [see Appendix C, Figure 1.5] A following question was asked to gauge how many dating apps participants have used at one time. Results show 47.73%

of participants have not used multiple dating apps at once, 45.45% of participants have used two dating apps at a time, and 6.82% of participants have used three dating apps at a time. No participants have used three or more dating apps at a time [see Appendix C, Figure 1.6].

The next series of questions explored participants' preferences of dating apps. When asked what dating apps participants used, they listed all apps they have ever used before in their experience. Results showed that 33 participants have used Tinder, 17 have used Bumble, and 10 have used Hinge [see Appendix C, Table 1.0]. Then, participants were asked which dating apps they preferred over others. The leading result was Tinder, with 19 responses. In addition, 9 participants explained they had no preference, 8 participants preferred Bumble, and 6 participants preferred Hinge [see Appendix C, Table 1.1a]. When comparing the responses of this question to the responses of the participants who listed the use of multiple dating apps in the previous question, three patterns were discovered. Of the participants who listed the use of both Bumble and Tinder, six participants preferred Bumble over Tinder. Of the participants who responded that they used both Hinge and Tinder, five participants preferred Hinge over Tinder. Finally, of the participants who listed the use of Tinder and Bumble or Hinge, eight participants responded they preferred Tinder over both [see Appendix C, Table 1.1b].

When participants were asked to list which dating apps they personally dislike or have chosen not to use, the leading results were tied with Tinder and Bumble each having 11 responses from participants. Then, eight participants responded that they have not disliked any dating apps, five participants responded Hinge, four participants responded Grindr, and two responded Christian Mingle [see Appendix C, Table 1.2]. A following question was asked for participants to explain why they disliked or have chosen not to use the previously listed apps. From the responses, four major themes arose. The leading response was participants did not like

the dating app's design. Each dating app has a different method of how users find matches on the app, and some methods are preferred, and others are not [see Appendix C, Table 1.3].

When exploring this theme further, I looked to see if there was a pattern of why participants did not like certain apps. Tinder is disliked by participants because of the people on the app and their only desire for sex. For example, Respondent #14 said, "No one on tinder is looking for anything and the options aren't good". Bumble was only disliked by participants because of its design. On Bumble, after a match is made, only girls can initiate conversation. Six female participants disliked Bumble for this reason, including Respondent #38 who said, "I dislike Bumble because the girl has to message first, and I just think that is weird in my opinion. I feel like both should have the opportunity to message first."

Other major themes discovered from the participants' responses to why they dislike dating apps were other users only looking for hookups and the other users on the app in general. Nine participants agreed with Respondent #35 who said, "Feel like it was more for hookups which wasn't my thing". Seven participants felt that the other users on the dating app were not their "target audience" (Respondent #37). Eight participants did not dislike any dating apps, but just preferred other methods to date. Minor themes that arose from this question were the dating app was not user-friendly and participants felt there were a limited amount of people on the app [see Appendix C, Table 1.3].

Next, participants were asked to explain their motivations for using dating apps. From analyzing the answers, eight themes were determined. The top response was 16 participants recorded they used dating apps to go on dates and find someone to start a relationship with. Twelve participants recorded using dating apps to meet new people, seven participants recorded using dating apps to relieve feelings of boredom, and five participants recorded using dating apps

to find hookups. The three minor themes of motivation for using dating apps were curiosity, validation, and the participant has just gotten out of a long-term relationship [see Appendix C, Table 1.4].

Next, participants were asked to describe how successful their use of dating apps was in fulfilling their motivations. First, the general answers were tallied. Twelve participants found their experience "not successful" for fulfilling their motivations, eight participants found their experience "pretty successful", seven participants found their experience "successful", seven participants found their experience "somewhat successful", and four participants found their experience "not very successful" [see Appendix C, Table 1.5]. It is important to remember that success is determined by the dating app user and their personal motivations, as the motivations differ among many.

When comparing these responses to the participants' motivations listed in the previous question, two patterns were found. 100% of participants who said their motivations were sexual found their experience on dating apps successful in fulfilling this motivation. 100% of participants who listed they were seeking validation from dating apps mentioned that their success was only "short-term fulfilling" (Respondent #41).

The second research question asked college students "what message strategies and impression management skills are most used when communicating with potential dating partners?". The survey asked six questions to answer this question. A series of questions were asked to discover the thought process behind participants building their dating app profiles. First, participants were asked to describe their own profile and to specify any information about photos and text they include. When analyzing participants' responses about photos, five themes were found. 28 participants use photos of themselves on their profile, including "selfies" and "solo

shots". Twelve participants specified they include photos of themselves with their friends. Six participants prefer to choose photos of themselves traveling, hiking, and other various adventure activities. For instance, Respondent #39 said, "I share pics of me from traveling and that make me look fun on my profile". Four participants specified they chose sexy photos of themselves, such as Respondent #13 who said, "one that showed off my body". Lastly, three participants included photos of their pets [see Appendix C, Table 2.1a].

When reviewing the responses of participants to these questions, I made note of participants who specifically mentioned they only included photos of themselves and participants who included a combination of both photos of themselves and themselves with their friends. Twenty participants only included photos of themselves, and 13 participants included photos of themselves as well as photos of them with their friends. For instance, Respondent #27 said, "I included one or two selfies, along with several group pictures with my friends" [see Appendix C, Table 2.1b].

Next, 10 themes were noted when analyzing participants' responses of the kind of text they include in their dating app profile bio. Participants including their interest and hobbies and jokes or witty lines were tied as the top response with 12 participants each. Respondent #17 shared that they include "I love to go get canes and go bowling" in their bio. Respondent #34 shared that they include "funny jokes or funny opinions that might cause people to debate over it" as a way for other users to initiate conversation. The third second most occurring theme was the inclusion of their school or university in their bio, which 10 participants responded. Seven participants included their age, but six participants were specific in their answers that they do not wish to disclosure too much personal information in the bios. For example, Respondent #38 said, "I think it is very important to not share too much information". Minor themes that were also

discovered were that participants included their name, hometown, height, occupation, and political view [see Appendix C, Table 2.2].

After participants were asked how they construct their own dating app profiles, participants were asked to describe how they wish to be perceived by others on the dating app through their profile. Thirteen themes were noted from analyzing the responses. Top responses were tied again with 12 participants each wishing to be seen by others as fun and funny. The next top response was that participants wished to be seen as attractive in a pretty or handsome manner. In contrast, only three participants wished to be seen as attractive in a sexy manner. The third highest theme was that six participants wished to be perceived as kind individuals [see Appendix C, Table 2.3].

Next, participants were asked to explain what qualities or characteristics they look for in the profile of other users on dating apps. When analyzing these responses, 11 themes emerged. Eighteen participants responded that they looked to see if the other user was attractive from the photos on their profile. Following, 14 participants responded that they read the other user's bio to see if it had a funny or clever caption. Then, seven participants described that they looked for similarity, such as common interests, hobbies, or qualities, in the profile of the other user. Research from the literature review showed that similarity among partners is a determining factor in relational success. Of the seven participants that listed they looked for similarity in the profile of others, 57.14% responded later that they had success with dating apps. Five participants responded that they looked at the other user's age, and five other participants looked at the other user's profile to determine if they seem genuine or not. Minor themes found were participants looked to see if the other user was kind, unique, what activities they enjoy, their occupation, if they seem talkative, and their height [see Appendix C, Table 2.4].

Participants were then asked to describe their turnoffs when looking at other users' profiles. Nine themes were identified from analyzing the responses to this question. Once again, the leading theme was tied with nine respondents each. Nine participants described that they were turned-off by other users when their profile expressed vanity. For example, Respondent #1 stated their turnoff is "when someone clearly has an ego, pictures only of themselves (no friends), a self-centered bio". Nine participants were also turned off by pictures of other users hunting and fishing. When studied further, all these participants identified their gender as feminine. Next, seven participants responded that they were turned off by an off-putting text in the user's profile, such as "if say something offensive in their bio" (Respondent #30). Five participants recorded they were turned off by shirtless pictures in the user's profile "because they're trying too hard" (Respondent #5) and they "seemed superficial and sexual, which wasn't exactly what I was solely seeking" (Respondent #11). Similarly, five participants disliked when other users included "mirror selfies", or images of themselves taken in the reflection of a mirror. Finally, minor themes that we found were participants being turned off from other users including images of themselves partying and showing off drugs and alcohol, users who expressed they were only looking for hookups in the bios, and users whose age range was not compatible with their own [see Appendix C, Table 2.5].

A series of questions were then asked to investigate how participants engage in conversation on dating apps with potential partners. First, a survey question was asked to gauge how many participants had ever initiated a conversation with another user on a dating app. Results showed that 63.64% of participants have initiated conversation with another user, and 36.36% of participants have not initiated conversation with another user [see Appendix C, Figure 2.1].

Following this question, participants were asked to describe how they have initiated conversation. Five themes arose from the responses. The most popular theme, with 14 respondents, was initiating conversation with simply a form of "hello". Then, nine respondents recorded that they initiated a conversation by making a comment about the user's profile. Respondent #10 offers insight into this theme by saying, "Typically I just go off of something that is put in their profile. So, if they say they enjoy movies, I ask about their favorite movie". Next, eight participants noted that they have never initiated a conversation on a dating app. Respondents elaborated further into this decision, such as Respondent #13 saying, "I didn't I was too scared" and Respondent #14 saying, "I make them dm me first". After further analysis, all eight respondents who recorded that they do not initiate conversation identified their gender as feminine. Lastly, four participants mentioned they used pick-up lines and three participants mentioned they used funny jokes to initiate conversation with other users [see Appendix C, Table 2.6].

The third research question asked participants "which communication strategies are perceived as the most effective in achieve users' motivations and goals when communicating on dating apps?". To answer this question, the survey asked participants seven questions. The first set of questions asked participants to reflect on conversations they have had on dating apps. Participants were asked to describe what a positive conversation on a dating app looks like in their opinion. This question generated nine themes from the responses. Fifteen participants described that a positive conversation would be both users engaged and interested in getting to know the other. For example, Respondent #11 said, "I would say a positive conversation includes genuine interest in one another. Like when they actually want to get to know you like your interests and hobbies." [see Appendix C, Table 3.1].

The second most populous theme was nine respondents explaining that a conversation is positive when humor is involved, such as "good banter and jokes" (Respondent #34). Next, seven participants recorded that a positive conversation include an invitation on a date. Respondent #8 shares, "A comfortable and respectful exchange between two people that would ideally end in plans for a date". Four respondents concluded a positive conversation is natural and "Easy going, doesn't feel like a struggle to find something to say" (Respondent #27). In addition, four respondents described a positive conversation as when both parties show respect toward one another, and four respondents described a positive conversation as one that immediately switches modes. Some participants mention exchanging cell-phone numbers and others mention video-conferencing apps, such as FaceTime. Lastly, minor themes included participants describing positive conversations when they are fun and flirty, when they include no outright sexual comments, and when parties discuss common interests [see Appendix C, Table 3.1].

In contrast, participants were then asked to describe what a negative conversation on a dating app would look like. Six themes arose from analyzing this set of responses. The most populous theme was other user's only wanting to have sex and are uninterested in getting to know the other user or dating, to which 15 participants responded. Respondent #27 offers insight into this theme by elaborating, "consider a conversation negative if the person only seemed interested in a hook-up and kept trying to pressure me into it.". Similarly, 13 respondents described a negative conversation as one with crude and sexual comments. I separated these themes because not all vulgar comments are invitations to have sex. Users can receive unsolicited "gross innuendos" from the inappropriateness of other users (Respondent #34) [see Appendix C, Table 3.2].

In following, six participants described a negative conversation when the other party suddenly stops replying, or "ghosts" them. For instance, Respondent #25 mentions what a negative conversation in their opinion looks like "If the person ghosts you even though they matched with you and you had a conversation going.". Finally, three participants described a negative conversation as one initiated with pick-up lines, and two participants described a negative conversation when the other users only wish to talk about themselves and are "self-praising" (Respondent #1) [see Appendix C, Table 3.2].

The next series of questions asked participants about virtual dating and any relationships established through dating apps. First, participants were asked if they met any user face to face that they met through a dating app in the past two years. Responses were an exact even response with 50% of participants responding that they had met in person with anyone they met through a dating app, and 50% of participants responding that they have not met in person with anyone they met through a dating app [see Appendix C, Figure 3.1]. Then, participants were asked if they had started a romantic relationship through using a dating app within the past two years. Results showed that only 22.73% of participants have started a romantic relationship through dating apps in the past two years, and 77.27% of participants have not started a romantic relationship through dating apps in the past two years [see Appendix C, Figure 3.2]. We must keep in mind the motivations previously listed by participants who never had any intention to start a relationship through their use of a dating app when studying this large split in data.

Next, participants were asked to describe how far the relationship evolved. General responses were tallied, and 20 participants stated that no relationships evolved. Eight participants recorded that they started a relationship. Of these eight participants, two participants were in a relationship for around a year, three participants were in a relationship for around five months,

only one participant was in a relationship for around four months, and two participants were in a relationship for around three months. Five participants listed that the relationship only evolved to a couple of dates, and four participants listed that the relationship only evolved on a physical level [see Appendix C, Table 3.3].

In addition, participants were asked if the relationship was completely virtual or if the couple met in person. Results showed that seven participants remained completely virtual throughout the relationship, 18 participants only met in person after the initial establishment of contact on the dating app, and only two participants remained virtual for a time before eventually meeting in person [see Appendix C, Table 3.4]. Finally, participants were asked to state the outcome of the relationship. As most users did not ever engage in a relationship through dating apps, responses were more limited compared to other questions. However, 10 participants listed that they no longer speak with the other member, five participants listed they are now only friends, three participants listed they are still dating, and three mentioned bad breakups [see Appendix C, Table 3.5].

Lastly, the fourth research question asked participants how likely they are to continue communicating with potential dating partners through virtual dating apps in the future. To answer this research question, the survey asked participants four questions. Participants were asked to describe their success overall in reaching relationship goals through using dating apps. Results show that 20 participants described their experience as "not successful". To elaborate, Respondent #17 shares frustrations saying, "Unsuccessful. I have a boyfriend now, but I definitely did not meet him on a dating app. In fact, the night we met we both sat and ranted about how we hated dating apps." Nine participants described their experience as "successful", as Respondent #24 says, "I met my boyfriend". Five participants described their experience as

"somewhat successful", in which Respondent #11 shares, "The experience of using dating apps helped me to know what I consider to be red flags and do/ do not look for a partner." [see Appendix C, Table 4.1].

To examine one's success on a dating app, participants were asked if they have ever been catfished on a dating app to see if their experience has been negatively affected. Results showed that 72.73% of participants have not been catfished on a dating app, and 27.27% of participants have been catfished on a dating app [see Figure 4.1]. Then, participants were asked a general question to describe the likelihood that you will use dating apps in the future. Overall, most participants say that they are unlikely to use dating apps again. Twelve participants responded that they will never use dating apps again, and another 12 participants responded that it is unlikely they will use dating apps again. In contrast, only seven participants listed they are likely to use dating apps again, and nine participants listed they are very likely to use dating apps again.

When analyzing the respondents' explanations to why they are likely or unlikely to use dating apps again, two trends were found. Seven participants recorded that they are only listed they are unlikely to use dating apps again because they are currently in a committed relationship, but if they were to break up in the future, they are likely to use them again. Two participants specifically listed that they are likely to use dating apps again because they are moving to a different city where they do not know anyone after graduation.

Lastly, participants were asked to describe their thoughts about the possibility of establishing a meaningful, romantic relationship after meeting on a dating app. After analyzing all the responses, five themes were identified. Eighteen participants responded that they believe it is possible to establish a meaningful, romantic relationship. Respondent #1 elaborates, ""I think it is possible and I've seen successful relationships and even marriages come from dating

apps.". In fact, seven participants base their opinion off the fact that they personally know a successful relationship that met through a dating app. Similarly, 11 participants believe it is possible, but unlikely to occur. Seven participants believe it is not possible to establish a meaningful relationship through the app. Four participants prefer to meet potential romantic partners elsewhere, such as in person. Three participants believe the success of relationships is dependent on the individuals involved, not the channel in which they meet. For example, Respondent #37 said, "I think it doesn't really matter how you meet - dating apps can lead to just as meaningful relationships as other ways of finding a partner" [see Appendix C, Table 4.2].

Chapter Five

Discussion

Interpretation of Results.

Survey results confirm findings from past research in CMC, but also contrasted some findings, and therefore, offer new insights into CMC on online dating platforms. For instance, over 70% of participants used dating apps during the pandemic aligning with the literature stating millions of people used dating apps during the pandemic to fulfill needs. However, 75% of participants were not currently using a dating app at the time of the survey, which shows that the use of dating apps and virtual dating is most likely in the decline. While dating apps will remain popular with large databases of users, they most likely will not retain the number of users they had during March 2020.

On the topic of dating app preferences, it appears Tinder and Bumble are the most popular dating apps, aligning with past national statistics. However, their popularity is due to the dating apps' design and not successful outcomes, as most users did not establish meaningful, romantic relationships. Yet, Tinder and Bumble are great tools to meet new people, relieve boredom, and have fun.

While Bumble remains one of the most popular dating apps, the app's design hinders conversation with many female users. On Bumble, only females can initiate conversation first once a match is made. Survey results showed that most female participants disliked Bumble for this feature, preventing the initiation of conversation to ever occur. Many female participants do not want to or are uncomfortable initiating conversation first. This is a theme on all dating apps, not just Bumble. Bumble just hinders the change of exchange of meaningful communication that relationships need by limiting initiation to women only.

Dating apps are highly disliked by some because of their fostering of the hookup culture. However, this dislike stems from users whose motivation for use is to find romantic partners and soulmates. Dating apps have extremely high success rates in establishing successful, physical relationships. Thus, individuals seeking sexual gratification should use dating apps to easily achieve their goals. While physical relationships have higher success on dating apps over meaningful, romantic relationships, the success is arguably easier to obtain than romantic relationships. Physical relationships do not require many similarities among partners or the need for the exchange of honest self-disclosure. Most individuals seeking a physical relationship only look for attractiveness in the other user. The duration of physical relationships is also not as important, while individuals seeking soulmates are looking for a romantic partner for life.

Even though individuals can find physical relational success on dating apps, a fraction of dating app users share in this motivation. Most participants were using dating apps to find someone to date and with whom to begin a relationship. Research shows the motivations of individuals aligning is necessary for a successful relationship. If motivations do not align and a conversation begins, it will most likely not be perceived as a positive exchange of information to at least one party. Most participants found sexual advances and vulgar comments in text exchanges over dating apps gross and inappropriate, most likely due to the difference in motivations.

Due to hookup culture, the challenge of navigating the many different motivations of users, and individuals struggling to find another who matches their interests physically and personality-wise, most participants found their experience on dating apps unsuccessful. A fraction of participants stopped using dating apps because it was not their preferred method of meeting people. However, most individuals still will try to find success on dating apps because

they personally know someone who has had success, and therefore know relationship success is possible. Although, many believe the chances of success are slim.

When building dating app profiles, results showed that individuals choose to include pictures of themselves and of them with their friends, but to be perceived as attractive is not the main goal. More participants responded that they wish to be seen as fun, funny, and then attractive. However, when viewing other users' profiles, the top response when asked what participants look for was attractiveness. This an interesting result because while individuals whose goal is to find a relationship wish to be perceived as an exciting and enjoyable person to date, they do not look for the same in other users' profiles.

When asked if they met with individuals on dating apps in-person or virtually, half of the participants surveyed responded that they met in person. This large percentage shows that the surveyed audience had little to no risk negotiation with the COVID-19 pandemic. In prime health and age, most of these individuals were not worried about the health risks and ignored public health advice to social distance.

Implications.

When participants were asked if they had used a dating app in the past two years, 70% of responses indicated yes. However, in a later survey question, participants were asked if they were currently using a dating app, of which 75% of participants responded that they were not. This is an extreme change in only a two-year time frame. This reason for this sudden stop can indicate that participants have begun meaningful, romantic relationships during this time. Because COVID-19 virus cases have decreased significantly and almost all mask mandates are over, this result could also indicate that participants are no longer engaging in virtual dating.

As shown in the results of the survey, all participants who do not or have never initiated a conversation on a dating app identified as female. This theme can indicate that females are typically less outgoing and courageous than men in dating. Instead of putting themselves out there and risking rejection, a fraction of women waits until men initiate conversation.

In addition, results showed that the most popular answers for how participants wish to be perceived from their dating app profile are fun and funny, followed by attractive. This outcome may be surprising but can be explained by an individual's motivations for using dating apps. Individuals who are seeking to date want to present themselves as someone who is fun to spend lots of time with, as well as someone who would be enjoyable to speak with. They want to present themselves as relationship material. Posting too many revealing photos could give other users the wrong idea. Instead of just trying to appear attractive, dating app users risk being perceived as only looking for a physical relationship. While self-presentation is important, results show that some participants believe sharing less personal information is better. This protects personal details from falling into the wrong hands and saves personal details as topics of discussion once a conversation starts with a match.

Limitations of Research.

There are a few limitations that should be noted. First, the survey only being open for five days greatly limited the number of participants. Time constraints limited the amount of time the survey was available for potential participants to complete. While college students specifically were chosen as the target audience for this survey because their age group uses dating apps the most, this decision could have led to weaknesses in the study. The literature review showed the surge in use of dating apps during the pandemic, but the survey showed only 38.64% of participants responded they had used dating apps more frequently in the past two years, which

does not align extant research. This result most likely can be explained because most participants already were using dating apps frequently before the pandemic. Also, the participants were not asked to identify their ethnicity. This put a restraint on results by limiting trends discovered solely to gender, instead of ethnicity as well.

Secondly, the purpose of the study was to explore virtual dating. While much data was collected on virtual connection making, only a few questions were asked in the survey about participants conducting virtual dates. However, the survey results showed only a few participants actually had a virtual date. In addition, the study explored dating during a global pandemic, yet no questions in the survey asked participants to disclose their vaccination status or vaccination preference in others. Some participants did indicate they included their vaccination status in their profile, but no participants indicated being interested in whether their dating partner was vaccinated. The unknown vaccination status of persons participants connected with through dating apps may have prevented possible face-to-face dates, however, the data do not reveal any such trends.

In the survey, only multiple choice and open-ended questions were used to collect data. However, upon reflection, using a few scale questions to measure the use of self-presentation, impression management, and self-disclosure strategies would have generated more succinct and specific answers. While the open-ended questions were mostly insightful, a few were worded too generally, in which they were then misunderstood by participants. Therefore, these questions were more difficult and time intensive to code.

Finally, response bias is commonly a limitation in research, but it can especially affect responses when discussing what can be uncomfortable topics, such as sexual behavior, due to social norms. Participants may lie or choose to not disclose their authentic experiences on dating

apps to prevent the researcher from forming negative perceptions about them. While this would not have occurred, the fear of this possible outcome could have motivated participants to conceal honest responses. Not only could inauthentic answers have been listed, but participants may have chosen to not take the survey at all due to the topic.

Strengths of the Study.

Despite the inherent weakness of the study, there are strengths outweighing the limitations. First, the selection of college students was an excellent choice as a target audience for the study, for they have the most experience of any other age group using dating apps. For this reason, the participants provided a plethora of responses showing great insight into the world of virtual dating through dating apps. Most participants elaborated reasonings behind their answers to the survey questions which shed light into the thought process of an individual constructing their image and engaging in virtual dating.

Also, the format and length of the survey were ideal in collecting many responses. An online format allowed individuals to take the survey at any moment in any location on their mobile cell phones. The length of the survey was long enough to collect substantial data to answer the research questions, yet the survey was short enough that it did not take up too much of the participants' time and discouraged them from finishing. Finally, the results of my research provide baseline insights into how individuals are currently carrying out the newest methods of dating amongst a global pandemic.

Future Directions.

Scholars interested in studying computer-mediated communication in association with virtual dating on dating apps or other related topics should expand from my research into specific directions. First, future researchers should survey an older target audience to generate new

statistics and possibly different responses. It would be interesting to survey an older age group who did not use dating apps until the pandemic.

In addition, future researchers should further explore individuals who virtually dated for greater periods of time before meeting in person, if ever. Research on this topic could go beyond messages inside dating apps and into studying the exchange of communication in video calls, audio calls, and on completely virtual dates. This could shed light on the experience of being part of a completely virtual relationship with no physical aspects. Possible areas of exploration could include frequency of communication, frequency of dates, and sexual fulfillment in a virtual relationship.

Finally, future studies should attempt to gain responses from wider and more varied geographical areas to explore whether trends in results would vary by regions. Also, surveying a wider age range, such as including graduate students would be beneficial to future studies. Lastly, this study can be taken further by gaining greater responses from participants of various sexual orientations and ethnic groups.

Conclusion

In all, dating apps can be an effective channel to find and begin meaningful, romantic relationships. Dating apps provide users with easy access to meeting new individuals they most likely never will meet otherwise. However, for relationships to occur through dating apps, it is necessary that the motivations of both partners align. Dating apps have proven track records for establishing relationships, as many participants know someone who is currently in a committed relationship from meeting on a dating app.

While success in finding a relationship with a dating app is possible, the chances are not very likely to occur. Most participants evaluated their experience on dating apps as unsuccessful.

The frequent rate of unsuccess is due to the physical appearance and behavior of other users not matching the individual's expectations or standards, as well as the high number of users on dating apps only seeking sexual fulfillment through physical relationships only. However, if seeking a physical relationship, dating apps have extremely high success rates for fulfilling this motivation.

In all, the purpose of this study was to investigate the evolution of computer-mediated communication through dating apps during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people were forced to live virtually. Results offered many insights into the communication strategies used with dating apps but showed that the pandemic did not heavily affect decision-making and normal dating tendencies among college students. As frequent users of dating apps pre-pandemic, the increased use of dating apps in this age group is less drastic than in others. The severe symptoms of the COVID-19 pandemic were not scary enough to keep college students from meeting in person with dating partners. Thus, risk-negotiation was mostly a skipped-over step in the virtual dating process of the surveyed audience.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

College Students' Use of Dating Apps

1. Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Principal Researcher: Sarah Boll
Faculty Supervisor: Patricia Amason

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
You are invited to participate in a research study about how you communicate using dating apps.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?
      Sarah Boll
      Honors Student
      Department of Communication
      University of Arkansas
      seboll@uark.edu
      1-314-650-9054

What is the purpose of this research study?
      I seek to find which dating apps are most popular among college students and discover trends of experiences of online dating, how persons communicate using these apps. Through my research, I plan to discover the success rate of college students using data apps, and the effects of poor experiences on use of these apps in seeking future relationships.

Who will participate in this study?
      College students using dating apps.

What am I being asked to do?
      Your participation will require the following: Complete an online survey discussing how you use dating apps and how you communicate with persons you meet using the apps.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
      The possible risks or discomforts would be potential fatigue associated with providing survey responses or answering the questions, and the potential to become emotional or agitated when describing your communication with potential dating partners.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
      Your comments will contribute to what is known about how and why persons use dating apps and their successes and failures using them.

How long will the study last?

The survey should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?

There will be no monetary compensation for participating. If you are a student of Dr. Amason's, you will receive extra credit in a course in which you are enrolled with her. If you do not wish to participate, you will be given an alternative opportunity to earn the same extra credit. Participation is this study is not your only option to earn extra credit. She will communicate those options to you.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No, there will be no cost associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
There will not be any penalties if you decide to not participate in the study. You will not be penalized for not participating by your professor.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law and University Policy. The researcher is legally required to report specific incidents which include, but may not limited to, incidents of abuse and risk of suicide. Pseudonyms will be used if any quotations appear in any resulting publications or reports. Responses are aggregated with those of all persons who complete the survey to identify common themes across all responses. Demographic data will be used to describe the total population of participants rather than to identify characteristics of a particular participant. Transcripts of survey responses will be stored in Kimpel Hall 517.

Will I know the results of the study?
You may ask for a summary of the results of the study once completed.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Supervisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Sarah Boll, Honors Student, seboll@uark.edu
Patricia Amason, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Communication. Pamason@uark.edu
You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below:

Ro Windwalker, CIP

Institutional Review Board Coordinator

Research Integrity & Compliance

University of Arkansas

105 MLKG Building

Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201

479-575-2208 irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research may be shared with the participant. By signing this consent form and completing the interview, you are agreeing your responses to be used in this research.

_____

Appendix B

The Survey

1. What is your birthday?

2. With which gender do you identify?
   ● Masculine
   ● Feminine
   ● Both masculine and feminine
   ● Neither masculine nor feminine

3. Did you use dating apps prior to 2020?
   ● Yes
   ● No

4. Have you used dating apps within the past two years?
   ● Yes
   ● No

5. What dating apps do you use?

6. What dating apps do you prefer over others?

7. If currently using a dating app, how often do you log into dating apps? If you currently are not using a dating app, please answer that you are not using one.
   ● Multiple times a day
   ● Twice a day
   ● Once a day
   ● Several times a week, but once every day
   ● Once a week
   ● Infrequently
   ● Not currently using a dating app

8. Which dating apps do you dislike using or have not chosen to use?

9. Why do you dislike the app(s) or choose not to use?

10. Have you used dating apps more frequently in the past two years?
    ● Yes
    ● No

11. Have you used more than one dating app at a time?
   - Yes
   - No

12. If yes, how many apps have you used at the same time?
   - I have not used multiple apps at once
   - 2 at a time
   - 3 at a time
   - More than 3 at a time

13. What are/were your motivations for using dating apps?

14. Overall, describe how successful using dating apps for fulfilling your motivations for using them?

15. Overall, describe how successful you were reaching your relationship goals through the use of dating apps.

16. Describe your dating app profile. Include what information you share and whether you include photos. If you include photos, describe the types of photos you share.

17. Describe how you wish to be perceived by others through your profile.

18. What do you look for in the profiles of others?

19. What do you consider to be turn-offs in other users' profiles?

20. Have you initiated a conversation with another user on a dating app?
   - Yes
   - No

21. If yes, describe how you initiated conversation.

22. Describe what a positive conversation on a dating app would look like.

23. Describe what a negative conversation on a dating app would look like.

24. Within the past two years, did you meet someone face to face that you met through a dating app.
- Yes
- No

25. Within the past two years have you started a romantic relationship through the use of a dating app?
- Yes
- No

26. Describe how far the relationship evolved.

27. Was the relationship completely virtual or did you meet in person?

28. What was the outcome of the relationship?

29. Have you ever been catfished on a dating app?
- Yes
- No

30. Describe the likelihood that you will use dating apps in the future.

31. Describe your thoughts about the possibility of establishing a meaningful, romantic relationship after meeting on dating app.
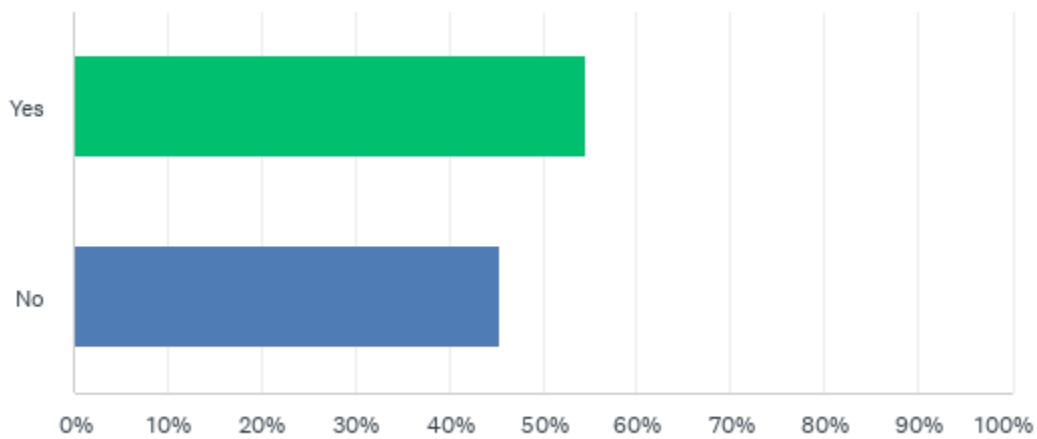
32. Please complete the following statement. Then copy and paste this statement into an email to your professor to indicate your completion of the above survey: I (your name) completed the survey in which I answered questions about using dating apps.
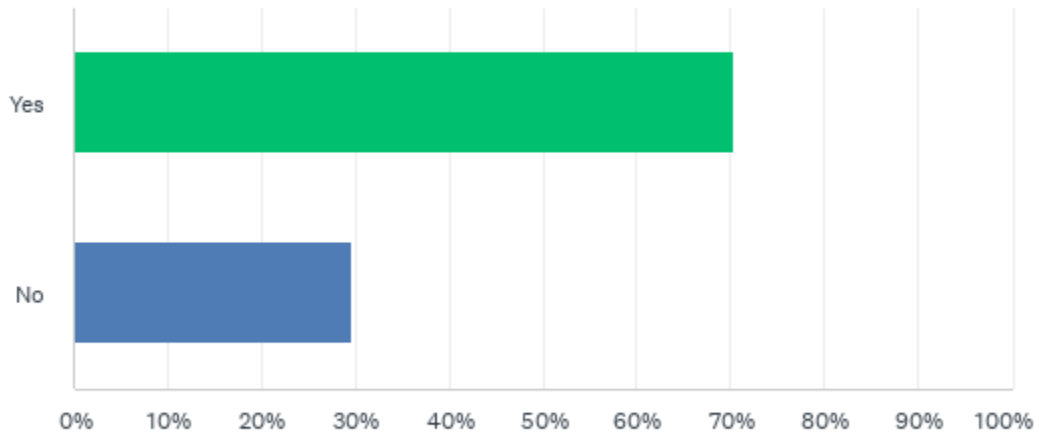
APPENDIX C

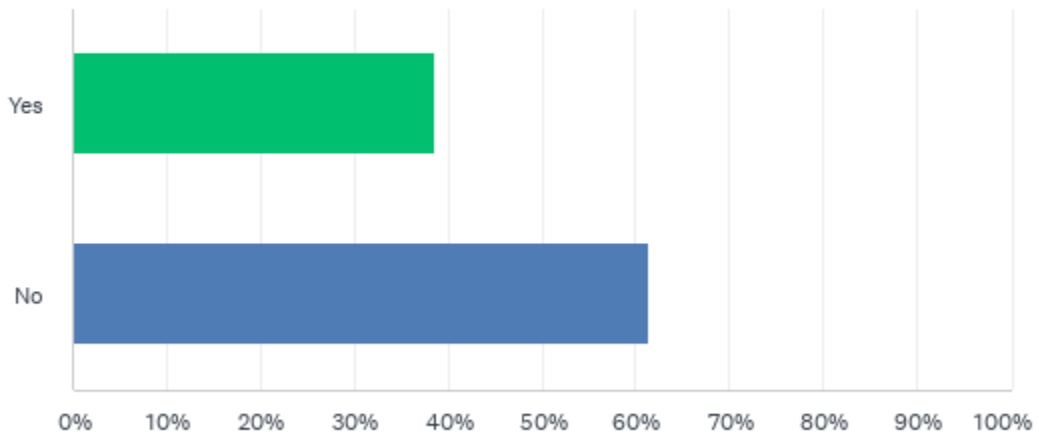**Figure 1.0**
Gender of Participants
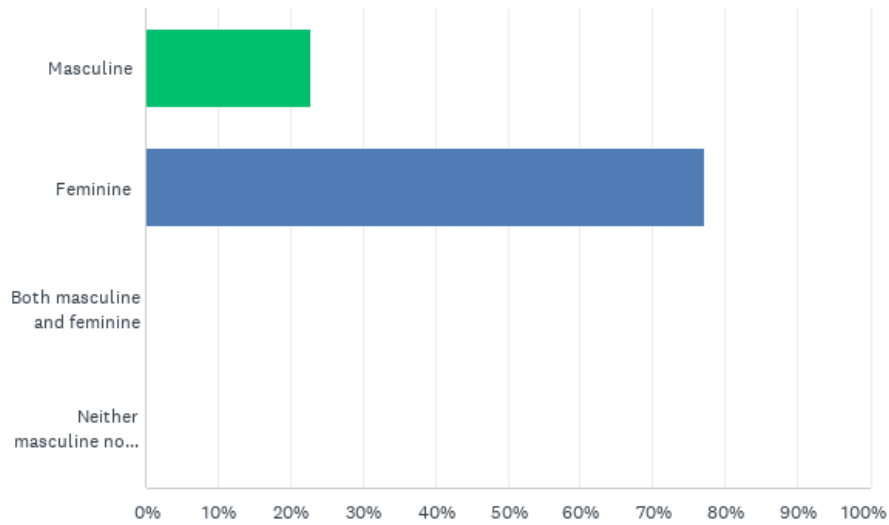
Figure 1.1
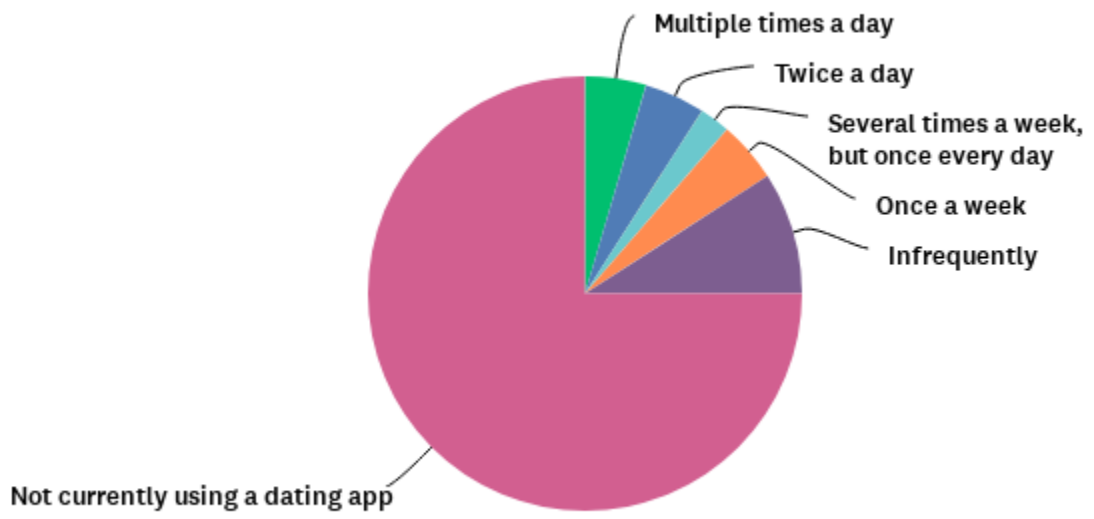Participants' Use of Dating Apps Before 2020

Figure 1.2
Participants' Use of Dating Apps in the Past Two Years

Figure 1.3
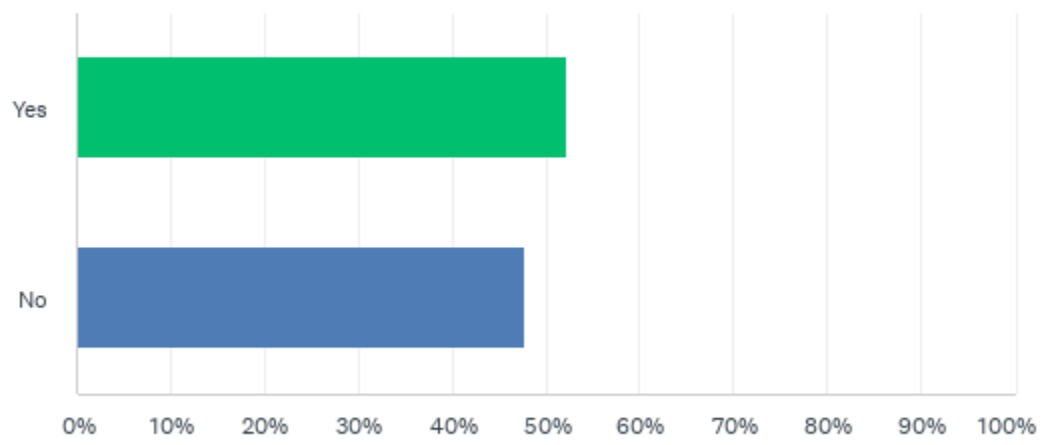Participants Who Have Used Dating Apps More Frequently in the Past Two Years

Figure 1.4

Percentage of Participants Currently Using Dating Apps

Figure 1.5

Participants Who Have Used Multiple Dating Apps at One Time
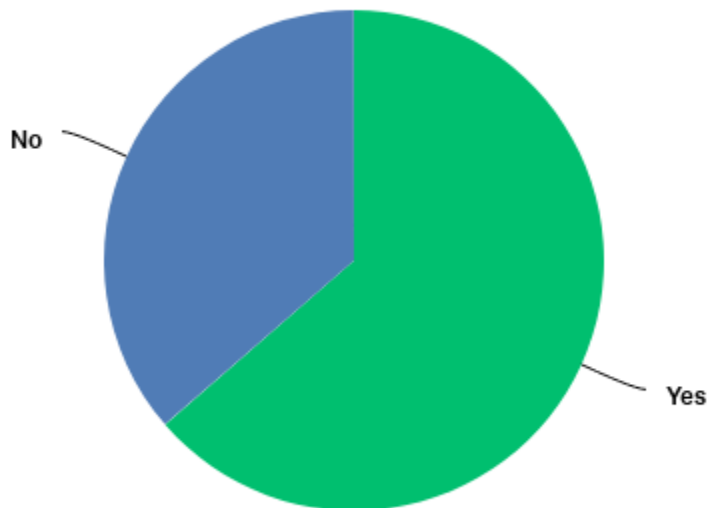
Figure 1.6

The Amount of Dating Apps Participants Have Used at One Time
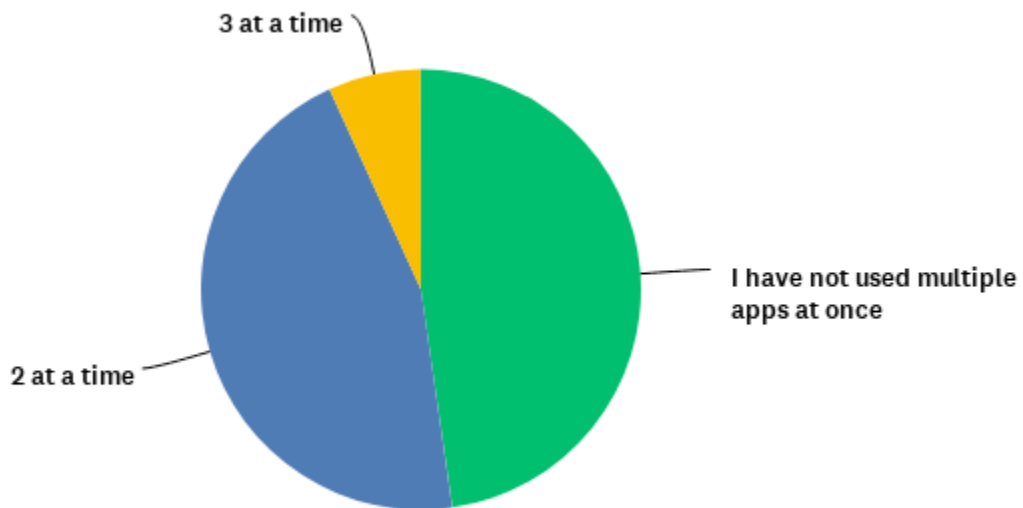
Figure 2.1

Percentage of Participants Who Have Initiated Conversation on Dating Apps

Figure 3.1
   Participants Who Met in Person With Potential Partners
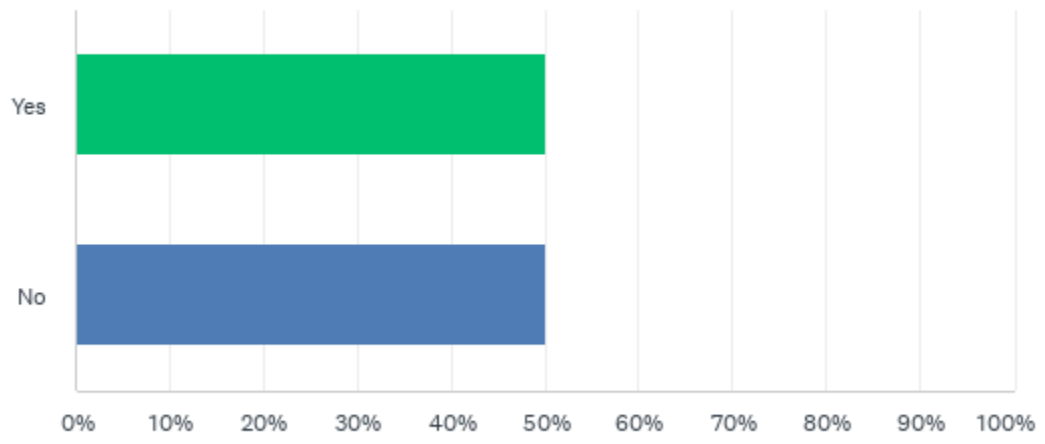
Figure 3.2
   Percentage of Participants Who Have Started Romantic Relationships on Dating Apps
   Within the Past Two Years
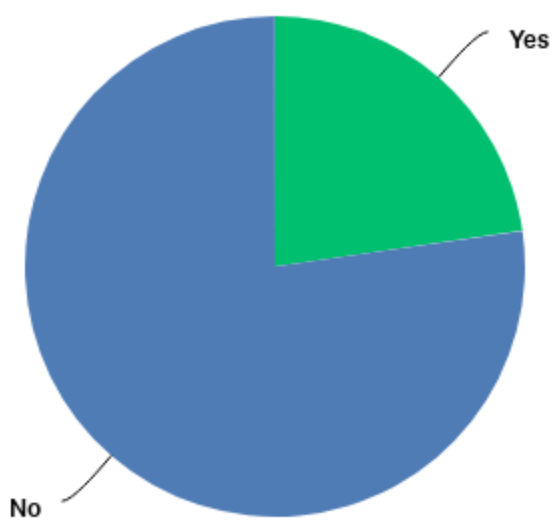
Figure 4.1
　　Participants Who Have Been Catfished on Dating Apps
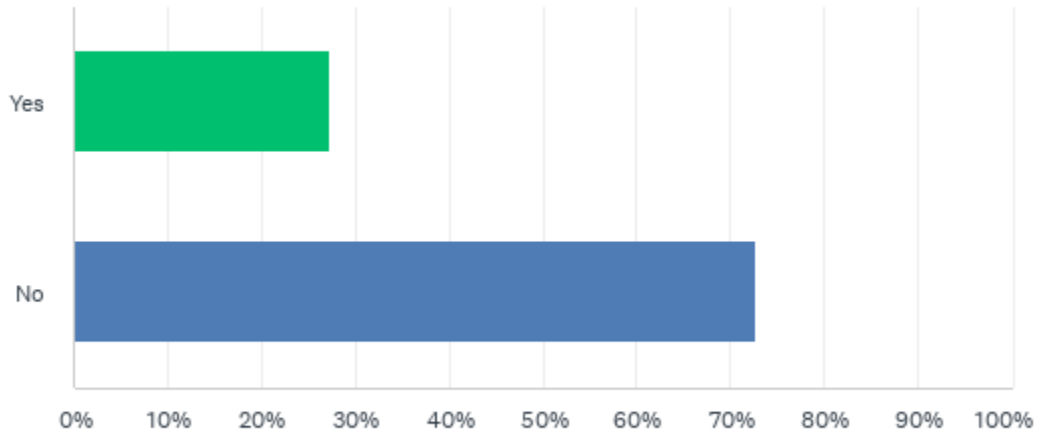
Table 1.0
　　Dating Apps Used by Participants

Dating App	Number of Respondents
Tinder	33
Bumble	17
Hinge	10

Table 1.1a
　　Dating App Preferences of Participants

Dating App	Number of Respondents
Tinder	19
No Preference	9
Bumble	8
Hinge	6

Table 1.1b

Dating App Preferences Trends

Dating App Preferences	Number of Respondents
Tinder > Bumble/Hinge	8
Bumble > Tinder	6
Hinge > Tinder	5

Table 1.2

Dating Apps Participants Dislike or Have Chosen Not to Use

Themes	Number of Respondents
Tinder	11
Bumble	11
None	8
Hinge	5
Grindr	4
Participants have only ever used one app & they do not dislike it.	4
Christian Mingle	2

Table 1.3

Reasons Why Participants Dislike or Have Not Chosen Apps

Themes	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
The App's Design	Respondents disliked the methods different dating apps use to find a match or start conversations.	11	*"I didn't check it enough and it was frustrating because I would miss the 24-hour window to respond"* Respondent #12 *"Scared having to reach out first as a girl"* Respondent #13
Only for Hookups	Respondents felt that	9	*"Feel like it was more for*

	others on the dating app were only looking for sex and not looking for serious relationships.		*hookups which wasn't my thing"* Respondent #35
Prefer other methods to date	Respondents have found better ways to meet people.	8	*"I think it is a sketchy way to meet someone you don't know"* Respondent #3 *"It is not an organic way to meet people"* Respondent #31 *"Seems scammy and less likely to lead to success."* Respondent #41
Other People on the App	Respondents disliked the other people on certain dating apps.	7	*"I guess it was the guys that showed up on my 'feed'. It didn't happen very often where I found someone I wanted to swipe right on."* Respondent #6 *"The people on there can be a little 'out there'."* Respondent #10
No purpose in multiple apps	Respondents have felt no need to try multiple dating apps.	4	"*Just haven't had the need for multiple apps"* Respondent #36
Limited amount of people on app	Respondents felt that there were not many other users on certain dating apps.	2	*"There did not seem like a lot of people in the area using the app."* Respondent #30
App was hard to use	Respondents found the app software hard to navigate.	2	*"not as user friendly"* Respondent #37

Table 1.4

Participants' Motivations for Using Dating Apps

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Wanting to date / start a relationship	Respondents used dating apps because they desire to go on dates and start a committed relationship with someone.	16	*"to talk to boys and hopefully get taken on a date"* Respondent #14 *"To find a significant other"* Respondent #15
Meet new people	Respondents used dating apps as a tool to meet new people in different areas and start friendships.	12	*"To meet people and make friends"* Respondent #26 *"Just to mingle and get to know people on campus"* Respondent #36
Boredom	Respondents used dating apps to relieve boredom.	7	*"I was bored and wanted to check it out"* Respondent #5
Entertainment	Respondents used dating apps as a source of entertainment and fun.	5	*"For fun and to flirt"* Respondent #32
Hookups	Respondents used dating apps to find partners for sex.	4	*"Finding a fuck buddy"* Respondent #34
Curiosity	Respondents used dating apps because they were curious about them.	2	*"Honestly just to see who i knew on there"* Respondent #28
Just got out of a relationship	Respondents used dating apps to meet new partners after getting out of long relationships.	2	*"Meeting boys and getting out there after a breakup of a long relationship"* Respondent #13
Validation	Respondents used dating apps to boost pride.	2	*"Meeting and Talking to others who find me attractive"* Respondent #39 *"needing self-esteem boosting"* Respondent #41

Table 1.5

General Responses of Participants Describing Their Success for Fulfilling Motivations on Dating Apps

Perceived Success	Number of Respondents
Not Successful	12
Pretty Successful	8
Successful	7
Somewhat Successful	7
Not Very Successful	4

Table 2.1a

Photos Participants Include in Their Dating Profile

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Photos of Oneself	Respondents include photos of themselves, including selfies and "solo shots".	28	*"I do include what I consider to be good photos of myself."* Respondent #8
Photos with Friends	Respondents include photos of themselves with their friends.	12	*"many group photos with friends"* Respondent #11
Adventure Photos	Respondents include photos of themselves traveling and doing various other activities.	6	*"a couple of selfies doing outdoorsy things"* Respondent #6 *"mostly picture of me doing stuff I enjoy doing"* Respondent #10 *"pictures of myself on vacation"* respondent #9 *"share pics of me from traveling and that make me look fun on my profile"*

			Respondent #39
Sexy Photos	Respondents include revealing pictures baring skin to be sexy.	4	*"one that showed off my body"* Respondent #13
Pet Photos	Respondents include photos of their pets.	3	*"pictures with my dogs"* Respondent #9

Table 2.1b

Participants Who Include Photos of Themselves in Their Profile

Only Oneself	Oneself & Oneself with Friends
20 Respondents	13 Respondents Quote: *"I included one or two selfies, along with several group pictures with my friends"* Respondent #27

Table 2.2

Text Participants Choose to Include in Their Dating App Profile Bios

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Interests/Hobbies	Respondents include information about their personal interest and hobbies they enjoy.	12	*"I love to go get canes and go bowling."* Respondent #17
Jokes	Respondents include jokes and cheesy pickup lines to appear funny.	12	*"funny jokes or funny opinions that might cause people to debate over it"* Respondent #34
School	If in college, respondents specify where they go to school	10	*"I shared that I attended the UofA"* Respondent #11
Age	Respondents include how old they are.	7	*N/A*

Choose not to share personal information	Respondents do not wish to include too much personal information in their profile.	6	*"I think it is very important to not share too much information"* Respondent #38
Name	Respondents include their first name.	6	*N/A*
Hometown	Respondents include where they are originally from.	5	*N/A*
Height	Respondents list how tall they are.	2	*N/A*
Occupation	Respondents include where they work.	2	*N/A*
Political View	Respondents include their political stance.	2	*N/A*

Table 2.3

Characteristics in which Participants Wish to be Perceived Through Their Profile

Themes	Number of Respondents
Fun	12
Funny	12
Pretty/Handsome	10
Kind	6
Social	4
Easy-Going	3
Happy	3
Personable	3
Sexy	3

Interested in a relationship	3
Mature	2
Interesting	2
Adventurous	2

Table 2.4

Qualities Participants Look for in the Profile of Others

Themes	Number of Respondents
Attractive (Photos)	18
Funny (Bios)	14
Similarity	7
Age	5
Genuine	5
Kind	3
Their Activities	3
Unique	3
Jobs	2
Talkative	2
Height	2

Table 2.5

The Turnoffs of Participants

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Ego/Vanity	Respondents found other users unattractive when they were vain and conceited.	9	*"When someone clearly has an ego, pictures only of themselves (no friends), a self-centered bio"* Respondent #1

			"When profiles are ALL about themselves" Respondent #9
Hunting/Fishing Pictures	Respondents found other users unattractive when they included pictures hunting and fishing.	9	*"pictures hunting or with fish"* Respondent #39
Rude/Weird Bios	Respondents found other users attractive when their bios came across rude, weird, or sketchy.	7	*"If say something offensive in their bio"* Respondent #30 *"cringey bio's"* Respondent #37
Shirtless Pictures	Respondents found other users attractive when they included photos of themselves without a shirt.	5	*"shirtless pictures bc they're trying too hard"* Respondent #5 *"I did not like shirtless photo one after another. It seemed superficial and sexual, which wasn't exactly what I was solely seeking."* Respondent #11
Different Political Views	Respondents found other users unattractive when their political views differed from their own.	5	*"clear signs that they're conservative"* Respondent #21
Mirror Selfies	Respondents found other users unattractive when they included photos of themselves in the reflection of a mirror.	5	*N/A*

Partying Pictures	Respondents found other users unattractive when they included photos that showed off alcohol and drugs.	4	*"I recall seeing a lot of pictures where the person was drinking and/or smoking. Especially for smoking, that did not come across well to me."* Respondent #27 *"blacked out wasted"* Respondent #38
Players	Respondents found other users unattractive when they seemed they only wanted to hookup from their profile.	3	*"Dtf"* Respondent #24 *"people blatantly looking for hook ups"* Respondent #32
Age	Respondents found other users unattractive when their age is too different from their own.	2	*"way older than me"* Respondent #31

Table 2.6

Participants' Methods to Initiate Conversation on Dating Apps

Theme	**Description**	**Number of Respondents**	**Quote(s)**
Simple "Hello"	Respondents initiated conversation just with a variation of "hello".	14	*"I just said something like 'hey:)'"* Respondent #6
Comment About One's Profile	Respondents initiated conversation by making a comment on the user's profile.	9	*"Typically, I just go off of something that is put in their profile. So, if they say they enjoy movies, I ask about their favorite movie"* Respondent #10 *"I tried to specifically reference something on their profile (like mention a celebrity I thought they looked like, comment on*

			something they liked in their bio)" Respondent #30
Did Not Initiate Conversation	Respondents did not want to initiate conversation and waited for their match to initiate it.	8	*"I didn't I was too scared"* Respondent #13 *"i make them dm me first"* Respondent #14
Pick-Up Line	Respondents initiated conversation with a flirty pick-up line.	4	*"cheesy pick up lines"* Respondent #32
Joke	Respondents initiated conversation by telling a joke.	3	*"Funny dad joke"* Respondent #23

Table 3.1

Participants' Description of Positive Conversations on Dating Apps

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Getting to Know Each Other	Respondents view a positive conversation as both parties being engaged and interested in getting to know the other.	15	*"I would say a positive conversation includes genuine interest in one another. Like when they actually want to get to know you like your interests and hobbies."* Respondent #11
Humor	Respondents view a positive conversation when humor is involved.	8	*"Making each other laugh"* Respondent #25 *"good banter and jokes"* Respondent #34
Date Invitation	Respondents see a conversation as positive when it leads to being asked on a date or meeting in person.	7	*"A comfortable and respectful exchange between two people that would ideally end in plans for a date"* Respondent #8

Light & Natural	Respondents see the conversation as positive when it is light and easy-going.	4	"*Easy going, doesn't feel like a struggle to find something to say"* Respondent #27
Respectful	Respondents see a conversation as positive when both parties show each other respect.	4	*"It would be respectful on both ends"* Respondent #6
Switching Modes	Respondents see a conversation as positive when users immediately carry conversation onto other platforms (texting, Facetime).	4	"*no texting only ft"* Respondent #29 *"it would end in exchanging numbers and talking more outside of the app"* Respondent #31
Fun & Flirty	Respondents see a conversation as positive when it is playful and fun.	3	*"Lighthearted, fun, and playful flirting"* Respondent #17
Nothing Sexual	Respondents see a conversation as positive when it does not involve any sexual comments.	3	*"no pressure whatsoever to do anything sexual"* Respondent #6" *"I hate when they only talk about sexual stuff"* Respondent #13
Common Interests	Respondents see a conversation as positive when they discuss their similar interests.	2	*"We say hello and talk about common interests"* Respondent #2

Table 3.2

Participants' Description of Negative Conversations on Dating Apps

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Only Wanting to Hook Up	Respondents see a conversation as negative when the other user only wants sex.	15	*"people that just wanna fuck are very gross"* Respondent #24

			"If they just ask to sleep w me" Respondent #26 *"I would definitely consider a conversation negative if the person only seemed interested in a hook-up and kept trying to pressure me into it."* Respondent #27
Crude/Sexual Comments	Respondents see a conversation as negative when the other user makes vulgar and sexual comments.	13	*"Only talking about sexual gross stuff"* Respondent #13 *"Someone being crass, inappropriate or disgusting"* Respondent #17 *"gross innuendos"* Respondent #34
Rude Comments	Respondents see a conversation as negative when the other user makes offensive and mean comments.	8	*"Rude comments about one another's appearance"* Respondent #7
Left on Read	Respondents see a conversation as negative when the other user never replies or "ghosts" them.	6	*"If the person ghosts you even though they matched with you, and you had a conversation going."* Respondent #25 *"Either not responding or them taking forever to respond"* Respondent #42
Pick-Up Lines	Respondents see a conversation as negative when other users initiate with pick-up lines.	3	*"them using a stupid pickup line"* Respondent #21

Ego	Respondents viewed the conversation as negative when the other user only speaks about themselves.	2	*"self praising"* Respondent #1

Table 3.3

The Evolution of Relationships Described by Participants

Theme	Number of Respondents
The relationship did not evolve.	20
Respondents started a relationship.	8
Respondents went on a few dates.	5
The relationship only evolved physically.	4

Table 3.4

Number of Participants who Met Virtually or In Person

Completely Virtual	Completely In-Person	Stayed Virtual for a While, Then Met in Person
7 Respondents	18 Respondents	2 Respondents

Table 3.5

Outcome of Relationships as Described by Participants

Themes	Number of Respondents
Don't Talk Anymore	10
Friends	5
Still Dating	3
Dumped	3
Only Physical	2

Table 4.1

Overall Relational Success Through Dating Apps as Described by Participants

Theme	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
Not Successful	20	"Not successful I haven't met anyone I actually liked" Respondent #5 "Unsuccessful. I have a boyfriend now, but I definitely did not meet him on a dating app. In fact, the night we met we both sat and ranted about how we hated dating apps." Respondent #17
Successful	9	"I did not have intent of forming an actual relationship so successful" Respondent #1 "I met my boyfriend" Respondent #24
Somewhat Successful	5	"Somewhat successful. The experience of using dating apps helped me to know what I consider to be red flags and do/ do not look for a partner." Respondent #11

Table 4.2

Participants' Belief in the Possibility of Establishing Meaningful, Romantic Relationships on Dating Apps

Theme	Number of Respondents	Quote(s)
It's possible.	18	*"I think it is possible and I've seen successful relationships and even marriages come from dating apps."* Respondent #1 *"I definitely think it's possible, I have a lot of friends who have met their partners through dating apps, many of which have been dating for years"* Respondent #30
It's possible, but unlikely.	11	*"The chance of this happening is very slim."* Respondent #16
It's not possible.	7	*"Not a chance"* Respondent #18

Prefer to meet people elsewhere.	4	*"I don't hate the idea but I prefer to meet someone naturally!"* Respondent #26
The relationship depends on the people involved, not how you meet them.	3	*"I think it depends on the people."* Respondent #36 *"I think it doesn't really matter how you meet - dating apps can lead to just as meaningful relationships as other ways of finding a partner"* Respondent #37