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ONLINE DATING APPLICATIONS AND THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

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ONLINE DATING APPLICATIONS AND
THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

A thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree

Master of Science in Communication Studies

By

Lindsey T. Bryden

Spring 2017

THESIS OF LINDSEY BRYDEN APPROVED BY

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

Online dating has become an intricate part of today's society, especially for the younger generation. Now, more than ever, it is accessible by the click of a button because online dating has gone through an evolution and is now readily available on a person's mobile device. The most popular online dating applications are Tinder and Bumble, both strictly on mobile devices. This thesis seeks to examine how the Uses and Gratifications theory can be applied to online dating. This is to understand why 1) the Uses and Gratifications theory is a common theme, and 2) the representation differences amongst genders on online dating. For this purposes an online survey was created based around this theory. The survey was administered to 190 respondents aged 18 to older from the Northwest regions surrounding Eastern Washington University. The results from the survey displayed three common themes in regards to why individuals utilize online dating applications, these themes are: seeking attention, gaining self confidence, and passing time. The implications of this research were to better understand what the future of social interactions can look like, and how online dating applications hinder or enhance how individuals express themselves.

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Terms

1. **Tinder** - Tinder is a free, location-based mobile dating app that simplifies the process most dating websites required.
2. **Bumble** - Bumble is a location-based social and dating application which facilitates communication between interested users. The app permits only women to start a chat with their matches.
3. **Representation** - The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature.
4. **Gratification** - Pleasure, especially when gained from the satisfaction of a desire.
5. **Online Dating** - The practice of searching for a romantic or sexual partner on the Internet, typically via a dedicated website.
6. **Online Dating Application** - Mobile dating services, also known as cell dating, cellular dating, or cell phone dating, allow individuals to chat, flirt, meet, and possibly become romantically involved by means of text messaging, mobile chatting, and the mobile web.
7. **Millennial** - A person reaching young adulthood around the year 2000; a Generation Year.
8. **Gender Identity** - A person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex.
9. **Hook-up Culture** - Accepts and encourages casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, which focus on physical pleasure without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment.

10. **Uses and Gratifications Theory** - An approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication.

11. **Autoethnography** - Is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Interest in the Subject

Online dating applications are constantly evolving, changing the way individuals pursue dating. In such a technology-centered era, online dating applications are practically unavoidable and have impacted the dating lives of many. What drives people to use these applications and the differences in representation that take place are truly captivating. Essentially, online dating “has fundamentally altered the process of finding romance” (James, 2015, p.1). My personal interest in this topic is solely because I am a millennial living in this technological era and I have been exposed to the realm of online dating applications.

As a single female living in this era, online dating applications and online dating in general is especially fascinating to me. Not only is the whole premise of online dating applications interesting, but the application of the communications theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory in particular, to the subject is compelling. A plethora of research has been done on this theory in relation to mass media (television, radio, etc.), but in comparison little has been done when applying the theory to online dating. It is important to understand the effect online dating can have on society because it has become such a prominent way to engage in conversation and social interaction, especially amongst 25-34 year olds who account for the frequent users of online dating applications. Evidence has found that adults who use social media as a way of maintaining relationships use social media more often. There are many different motivations behind why people use social media and online dating, but “qualitative research suggests that users who use dating apps because of physical gratification more frequently meet dating app partners offline to have casual sex as compared to users who are not motivated to use the app for physical gratification” (Ligtenberg, Sumter, & Vandenbosch, 2016, p. 69).

Online dating has progressed tremendously from its 1995 start with match.com being the trailblazer in the online dating realm (*History of internet*, n.d.). The rate at which online dating has progressed and its transformation into online dating applications has been over two decades in the making, but continues to provide people with more opportunities to seek companionship. For example, there are now online dating websites and applications that are specifically directed towards certain groups of people, such as Jewish people, vegetarians, and even farmers. This allows users to be more specific to their wants and needs which can lead to their gratification. However, amongst the most popular of the online dating applications are two – Tinder and Bumble. Tinder has roughly 50 million users on the application and 1.8 million premium users, users who pay monthly to use more features of the application (unlimited swiping, rewinding swipes, and the ability to change your location and see other users from around the world). Bumble, a newer dating app than Tinder, has 3.5 million active users. In comparison to other applications and dating sites, such as eHarmony who has 750,000 paid subscribers, it is clear to see that these new applications are dominating (Weller, 2017).

Tinder's basic premise is the swiping method, "Tinder finds users who match with your selection criteria, and presents them to you in a seemingly random order. Then you simply 'swipe left' on those you do not like, or 'swipe right' on those you do like" (Ward, n.d., p. 83). Tinder was created in 2012 and has seemingly progressed from a dating application in to a hook up application, which can be considered mediated intimacy. Users will do this primarily by posting images of themselves to draw attention from another user, which creates intimacy and tensions online (Cambre & David, 2016). The potential matches one could find on Tinder are based exclusively off of proximity, with a range of 0-100 miles. You are also able to choose the

age range which you are seeking on the application and once both users have swiped right the application sends a notification stating “It is a match!” (Keijser & Khiri, 2013).

Bumble is similar in the concept of swiping, however only the females are able to start the initial conversation. *Cosmopolitan* magazine conducted an experiment where they had three females who had never used online dating applications use Bumble for two weeks. The girls had different experiences while being active users on the applications, one of which was extremely optimistic. She states: “I think the moral of the story is that you need to be certain of what you want before signing up for a dating app. Dating is not easy whether it is in person or online, but it is a good way to get out of your comfort zone, meet new people, and learn more about yourself than anyone else.” The second participant had a similar experience during her time using the application. She felt like Bumble opened an abundance of possibilities in the dating world because women were taking the lead and she felt it was exhilarating. The final participant did not have the same experience as the first two girls. This participant would message men on the application and occasionally would not receive a response, which lead to a lack of self confidence (*What happens when*, 2016, para. 27).

So, ultimately this interest in the subject of online dating comes from the fact that it is ever growing and practically unstoppable. It also comes from the fact that I am a part of the millennial generation, aged 18 to about 35, that has been associated with this “hook up culture” (Murphy, 2015). There are not many millenials today who have not, at one point, participated in online dating or been exposed to online dating. Now, online dating is even more transparent than it was during it is early stages of eHarmony and match.com. And, with 93% of people in the age range of 18-34 using smartphones it is also more accessible (Sterling, 2016).

Purpose

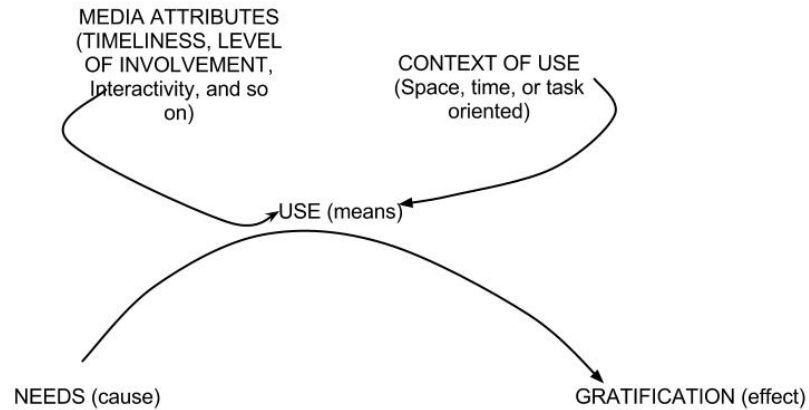
Our society is currently focused and centered around technology. Many people living today do not know what it is like to live in a time without computers, cable television, cell phones, and the internet - especially the millennial generation. Sometimes the millennial generation is labeled as “digital natives” – people born in the years since 1980 who have confidence in using new technologies and tools of the digital age (Selwyn, 2009). We are constantly being exposed to new and different communication technologies because they are always changing and evolving. In this evolution of technology, a new phenomenon has emerged; online dating. Specifically, even more recently, online dating applications. Online dating applications make dating much more convenient because you can meet more people at a faster rate.

Some of the most popular dating applications today are Tinder, Bumble, OK Cupid, and Grindr. Any person can pull up these apps within a matter of seconds and potentially be matched with dozens of suitors in minutes. Today, “Tinder has arguably become the most notable mobile dating application,” and can be used to meet males or females, but can also be filtered to cater to different sexual orientations (James, 2015, p. 1). Bumble has followed in Tinder’s path becoming really notable in today’s online dating realm. Whitney Wolfe, the founder of Bumble, took part in helping establish Tinder, but after was sexually harassed by another co-founder which prompted her to leave the company and create her own start up dating application (Alter, 2015).

Bumble is the dating application that has women message the man first. This is unlike Tinder because on Tinder the males and females have the option of messaging each other, but more often than not women wait for men to message them first. What Bumble essentially does is make women the power players in the dating realm. Wolfe stated that Bumble is not a dating

application, but a movement that could change the way men and women treat each other, date each other, and it could change the way women feel about themselves (Alter, 2015). When it comes to representation on different online dating applications today male and female representation differ tremendously. In studies, it has been shown that men and women present themselves in their personal advertisements on dating applications differently because men sell their financial gains while women sell their personality traits and attraction (Tommasi, 2004). Essentially, online dating applications can promote shallowness. This is because while using these interfaces, users are exposed to a singular user at a time which forces the user to immediately express their opinion based off the little information they have (Diaz Sanchez, 2016). So why are people drawn to these applications? A portion of this research is to examine the motivations that drive individuals to use these applications, specifically this will be done by using the Uses and Gratifications Theory as guidance.

In the past, the Uses and Gratification theory has provided a theoretical approach in the initial stages of mass communications such as newspapers, radio, television, and now the internet (Ruggiero, 2000). The theories earliest conceptualizations came from Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz, who suggested that individuals mix and match uses of media with specific goals and needs. However, the most important nuance was introduced later specifically by Katz claiming that uses and gratifications are both connected to human needs (Matei, 2010). The core concepts of the theory are displayed below in a visual representation found in the article, *What can Uses and Gratification Theory tell us About Social Media*, by Sorin Matei (2010).



The assumption of the theory is that “individuals seek out media that fulfill their needs and lead to ultimate gratification” (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 362). Users of online dating may be seeking fulfillment of, but not limited to, love, companionship, and attention. The application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory to online dating applications is important to this research because it will provide insights to the specific motivations behind online dating applications. Each application has certain stereotypes surrounding them, such as Tinder being more of a “hook-up” application and bumble being more female friendly (Ligtenberg, 2015).

Thus, the purpose of this research is to study how the Uses and Gratifications Theory corresponds with online dating applications as well as discuss the difference in representation between the genders on online dating applications. The two applications that will be focused on the most are Tinder and Bumble, however other applications such as Ok Cupid, Zoosk, Plenty of Fish, and Grindr will be mentioned. This is because after conducting the online survey for this research many participants stated that they engaged in online dating applications other than Tinder and Bumble. Ultimately, I hope to answer the questions of:

1. What are the main reasons people use online dating applications?
2. How does the Uses and Gratifications Theory factor in to online dating?
3. How does representation differ in presentation on online dating applications?

This is important because online dating's evolution is not slowing down, it is evolving at a rapid rate.

People Affected

A significant amount of people is directly affected by online dating. On average, “16 million Americans report having used online dating services, 3 million of whom have entered long-term relationships with their online dating partners, including marriage” (Ellison, Gibbs & Heino, 2006, p. 415). The popularity of online dating has grown because dating websites and applications allow users to create mediated profiles of themselves, engage in conversation with others, and have made it easier to engage in romantic relationships. However, deception and self presentation are one in the same in relation to online dating. Users will often misrepresent themselves by manipulating photos and exaggerating status (Ellison, Gibbs & Heino, 2006).

Possibilities are endless in this digital world, especially with applications catered to specific wants and needs. Examples of applications catered to certain preferences are:

- Feeld, an app for those who are looking to engage in sexual encounters that involve three people.
- Sappio, an app marketed towards Sappiosexuals – a person who is sexually attracted to intelligence before appearance.
- Sizzl, an app catered to bacon lovers (Manning, 2017).

Another example of a catered online dating application is Grindr. Grindr is an application that was created for gay and bisexual men. The app “allows men who are logged in to meet other men by their exact location for an instant connection” (Kennedy, 2010, para. 7). This specific application is directed towards one sexual orientation creating a setting where like minded individuals are the only users they are coming in contact with. Applications catered to specific wants and needs creates less room for uncertainty which, presumably, can entice more individuals to become a member of at least one online dating application.

The comparison of online dating to dating in the real world is very much in sync regardless of the doubts some who are against online dating may have. Online dating can be compared to a typical interaction a person may have at a bar while trying to pursue someone, “you first assess the picture, then you gauge interest and only then you decide to start a (rudimentary) conversation” (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014, para. 11). It is the same interaction on online dating applications, except the person of interest is present instead of a picture that is in front of a user on a mobile device. This popularity of a mediated relationship stems from, “ubiquitous access to the internet, the diminished social stigma associated with online dating, and the affordable cost of Internet matchmaking services contribute to the increasingly common perception that online dating is a viable, efficient way to meet dating or long-term relationship partners” (Ellison, Gibbs, & Heino, 2006, p. 416).

Thus, a large amount people that are a part of society today are affected by online dating applications. An individual might not be effected directly, but more than likely even if they personally do not use online dating their friends, siblings, and peers might. This exposes them to online dating without actively participating, but can engage them in the sense of being curious about online dating and its nature. To reiterate a main point from above, this growth of online

dating that we have seen in recent years is going to lead to more people being exposed and affected than there is now.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Methods

To find relevant articles, research, and information on online dating applications and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, searches included terms and phrases such as “Online Dating”, “Dating Applications”, and “The Uses and Gratifications Theory”. These searches provided generic information that was relevant to my research, but did not provide adequate information in relation to specific dating applications. I refined my search to include the names of specific applications such as: “Tinder”, “Bumble”, “Dating Applications and Identity”. With this refinement I was able to locate a variety of sources that focused specifically on online dating applications and the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Literature Review

Online dating has gone through a big transition in recent years with the rise of mobile device usage, which now accounts for 65% of digital media time (Sterling, 2016). Mobile device usage includes the use of cell phones, iPad’s, tablets, and laptop computers while standard online activity usually occurs on a desktop computer that is essentially not mobile. The new realm of online dating is called mobile dating, or online dating applications. It is not the standard profile matching people used to access on computers, it is dating that is accessible with a single click on a mobile device. What these applications are doing is making meeting people more convenient and at a faster rate.

With online dating prior to applications the user would have to log on to their computer, access the website, log in to the website, and then check to see if they had any new prospects. Online dating applications, however, send a user a notification every time you get a new match

skipping three of those steps listed above. The difference in convenience is significant. So, to understand why the use of online dating applications has become the favored mode of dating, the focus of this literature review, and this thesis, is to understand online dating applications from a uses and gratifications perspective. This perspective revolves around the Uses and Gratification Theory, which is a theory centered on understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. Based on the findings discovered in the literature, people use online dating applications for a variety of reasons including; attention, satisfaction, and gratification.

Statement of problem and purpose

Online dating applications are location based mobile applications that offer people the chance to communicate easily about meeting up, flirting, chatting, and getting romantically involved with other people in their general proximity. Specifically, these applications are available on smart phones, not standard cell phones. The motivations one has for the using online dating applications instead of alternate forms of dating vary and quite often differ dramatically. Hence, the purpose of this review is to explore the different reasons as to why people use these applications and to answer the question of how the representation of the sexes differs on dating applications.

The importance of this review is to see how people date in today's society date and how dating on an online dating applications effects their lives and overall individual representation. This is important in the modern era because communication technology has become a huge focus of our everyday lives and mediated communication has become an epidemic of sorts where some people would rather communicate over a mediated channel than in person. With online dating is so easily accessible, it is changing the way people present themselves and it is changing the way

they interact with others. The resources examined in this review help answer the question above as well as explain why online dating applications and the Uses and gratifications Theory coincide. The way this paper will be organized to achieve my intended purpose is to first examine the different types of mobile dating applications and then move on to the Uses and Gratifications Theory and representation of the genders on online dating applications.

Methods/Procedures

The resources used for this literature review have come from scholarly sources, academic journals, and recent articles published in the media. Specifically, while searching for scholarly articles, I used ProQuest and Google Scholar databases. I felt it necessary to use articles recently published online and in magazines because they provided this research with experiments pertaining to online dating applications as well as insights from users on online dating applications. The terms and phrases that were put in to the search engines were Uses and Gratifications Theory, online dating applications, Tinder, Bumble, and representation. Some of the searches had adequate information in regards to my research, as mentioned above in the methods portion of this chapter. However, some searches did not have specific information that was needed in regards to representation, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and specific dating applications so made my search words and phrases more specific.

While looking for sources for this research I made sure to look for information that was not bias to my own beliefs so I could gather different points of view. For example, seeking articles written by men about online dating applications so my research was not limited to female-oriented literature. Finding a variety of articles on different types of mobile dating applications, such as Tinder and Bumble, was important to this research because it displays many

different views of online dating and shows how representation of an individual can differ on each one specific application.

Findings

Online Dating Applications

The literature provides an abundance of information on the different dating applications and the history of online dating/dating applications. Online dating began in 1995 with the first online dating service, match.com, being the trailblazer. It was very simple and only matched people based on likes and dislikes, but online dating has evolved and now there is virtually an online dating website for everyone (*History of Internet*, n.d.). This includes, but is not limited to, vegetarians, people who are Jewish, farmers, and even people who love bacon. One factor that caused online dating's fast pace growth was digital photography becoming readily available. Instead of reading simplistic profiles people could now put a face to a name. Sometimes, this even involved multiple pictures, but realistically what this did was create a space where people could use more creativity and deception. People could create this digital self that made them feel good about themselves and attract a different audience (Kennedy, 2010). Eventually, online dating progressed in to online dating applications: location based dating applications accessible on your mobile device, which are less complicated than standard online dating on a computer. The two I will focus on the most in this literature review are Tinder and Bumble. The reason I chose to focus on these specific dating applications is because they are the two most popular applications amongst the millennial generation, as mentioned on Page 10, which is the primary focus of this research.

Tinder is considered to be one of the most popular dating applications with over 10 million active users a day. It was one of the first dating applications that was not an extension of

a dating site and stood on its own as an application (Ligtenberg, Sumter, & Vadenbosch, 2016). The way the application works is when you sign up the application will ask to link to your Facebook account with a notification that lets you know that they will not post on your personal Facebook, it is strictly to obtain photos, a name, and age. Once you complete that step, Tinder allows you to select a limited number of images to display, approximately six, and 500 characters to present yourself. In order to match with someone both parties must swipe right on the application - if a match occurs a notification will pop up enabling the person to message the other party or continue swiping. If one party was not attracted or interested in the person, however, they are able to swipe left which would discard the profile and the application would move on to the next potential suitor. The reasons as to why people use this application differ, but it has been said that of all the dating applications, "...Tinder is the McDonalds for sex" (Cambre & David, 2016, p. 2).

Bumble is essentially the same as Tinder in terms of how the application functions. Bumble has less active users than Tinder, around 3.5 million, but is considered one of the more popular applications amongst millennials (Weller, 2017). There is the swiping feature and the user is only allowed a certain amount of pictures and profile space. However, there is one major difference: women are the only ones who can send the first message. Another fundamental difference between the two applications is that the match on Bumble will disappear after 24 hours if the woman does not message her match. The creator of Bumble, Whitney Wolfe, says that Bumble is not a dating application, it is a movement that can change the way in which men and women treat each other, date, and can change the way in which women feel about themselves (Alter, 2016).

The literature that focuses on Tinder typically discusses the fact that it is part of something called the “hook up culture”, which typically relates to this generation of millennials (Murphy, 2015). This is discussed because Tinder, recently, has become associated with being a hook up application. People will post provocative pictures of themselves accompanied by little to no verbal information about themselves, so there is no opportunity to find similar ground or interests, but instead to be physically attracted enough to the other person to want to meet up and engage in sexual contact with them. This is not always the case, but in the comparisons made between Bumble and Tinder it has been stated by Whitney Wolfe, the creator of Bumble, that Bumble is free of the “sleaziness” that Tinder embodies (Alter, 2015). The dynamic is different, men will post pictures of themselves in business attire on Bumble and typically they have better jobs. The restriction of the male not being able to message the woman first adds more complexity to the matching routine, but also creates a space with less room where random hook ups can occur.

The literature states that both male and female participants use Bumble because “women are sick of waiting for me to make the first move, [and] some guys are sick of always having to come up with a line” (Alter, 2015, para. 14). This quote displays an example of a stereotype that is commonly associated with online dating applications where men are always expected to make the first move. Depending on the user, there is a range of reasons as to why both male and females are drawn to Bumble. “Dating is not easy whether it is in person or online, but it is a good way to get out of your comfort zone, meet new people, and learn more about yourself than anyone else” (*What happens when*, 2016, para. 36). The comfort zone that is mentioned is referring to a typical male-female interaction on online dating applications where women are viewed as more submissive.

In contrast to the above statements, there is also a sense of superficiality that goes along with the swiping culture. It becomes a mindless activity that people do to pass the time and to cure boredom. As online dating applications users, “we think we see everything – a person, that is – but then we so quickly swipe her or him away to the nether regions as if they were a pair of shoes on Zappos” (Murphy, 2015, para. 8). This swipe culture makes it easy to dehumanize someone because there is a lack of connection that corresponds with online dating. This has led to individuals experiencing a lack of ability to form anything of substance. For example, when a user on an application gets bored with a conversation it is easier to remove themselves from that situation and go back to swiping. There is not closure or an explanation because that is the nature of the swiping culture – on to the next (Woodward, 2017).

In my own experience using the two applications I can see validity in the findings of the literature, however I have also experienced the opposite of some of the statements that were made throughout. For example, Tinder is definitely more of a hook-up culture application than Bumble, however, I have seen the same profiles on Bumble as I have on Tinder. So, the hook up potential is not limited to strictly Tinder. Bumble does have less shirtless pictures and more potential for a long term relationship in the sense of suitors being more willing to express what their job is and more of their interests, but I know people who have also gained long term relationships from Tinder that have even resulted in marriage.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory revolves around the idea that individuals seek out media that fulfill their needs and that can lead to ultimate gratification (James, 2015). Typically, this theory has been applied to mass media and the consumption of television, radio, etc., but the

theory has also been related to social media. An example of this was a study that was conducted on why young adults use social networking sites, specifically Myspace and Facebook. The results were that individuals use social media sites to “experience selective, efficient, and immediate connection with other for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people” (Day, Dong, & Urista, 2009, p. 216). In regards to the application of the theory to online dating applications little research has been done, but it is applicable because mass media now includes elements of emerging technology (James, 2015). This is because the theory implies that users of media take an active role to fulfill an objective (Ligtenberg, 2015). The research that was found containing both online dating applications and the Uses and Gratifications Theory is discussed later in this review.

The Uses and Gratification Theory’s roots lie in Communication Studies and explicitly relate to social media because it is a communication mechanism that allows people to connect and communicate with thousands of people from all over the world (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In relation to online dating, what this technology can do for individuals is provide them with a plethora of people to potentially meet up with, hook up with, and engage in romantic relationships with. Essentially, it provides them with a platform to pursue their needs and wants. As mentioned before, Tinder has been called the “hook-up” application, but is not strictly for hooking up. There are, however, online dating applications that are specifically for hook up’s.

Grindr is another dating application that has recently gained popularity, and while this won’t be a focal point of this research, it is important to display the different gratifications one can seek from an application that is specifically for hook ups. Similar to Tinder and Bumble, Grindr is a location based dating application. This application was initially created for gay and

bisexual men, but there is talk about creating a Grindr for straight men and women (Kennedy, 2010). What this application essentially does is provide the user with information on a potential partner's desires and wants within a matter of seconds. This can include the nature of the relationship, the other party's body type, and even the sexual position they prefer (Kennedy, 2010). Clearly, the motive and gratification one seeks while using this specific dating application is to fulfill sexual desires. In my research I have found little evidence that would say different about the nature of Grindr. So, Grindr does differ from Tinder and Bumble in relation to the gratification one seeks in the sense that it is specific to hook-ups, not relationships (even though one might find themselves in a relationship with someone they met on Grindr).

In the literature, I found one study done by Loes Ligtenberg (2015) that is especially pertinent to my research and that applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to Tinder (2015). The researched conducted a survey with one hundred and forty participants and found ten motivations for the reasons as to why people use Tinder. They were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Companionship | 6. Passing time |
| 2. Intimacy | 7. Cool and new trend |
| 3. Boosting self-esteem | 8. Surveillance |
| 4. Casual sex | 9. Entertainment |
| 5. Excitement | 10. Relaxation |

These findings show that the motivations, the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way, for using online dating applications varies based on the situation. Relating to the hook up culture discussed above, casual sex is a large part of this culture as well as a large part of what occurs from Tinder. As seen above in the ten motivations for why people use Tinder, casual sex is directly mentioned and companionship, intimacy, and excitement can

all be considered subsections of that same category (Ligtenberg, 2015). This is because casual sex can involve all three of those motivations. Casual sex can also be related to the atmosphere of the hook up culture that is commonly associated with Tinder.

Another motivation seen in the list above is “boosting self esteem”. Tinder’s simple swipe left, swipe right nature makes it easy to shuffle through a variety of people in a short amount of time. However, since people are trying to portray themselves in a fashion that would intrigue someone, users will spend more time articulating the right profile pictures. Essentially, Tinder increases the average level of attractiveness compared to the real world. This is because people who engage in social media and online dating spend more time uploading their pictures from Instagram, where they can apply many filters, shape the photo, and change the coloring (Chamorro, 2014). So, an application user can alter the way they look and do it so they can use it to their advantage, which falls in line with obtaining their gratification.

Part of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and online dating is that the gratifications one seeks within the motivations listed above to use online dating is typically based on a users pre-existing needs, not necessarily the specific features of media and/or the application (James, 2010). With social media and dating applications users are given more opportunity to seek and fulfill their gratification because of the increased amount of interactivity and the simplicity of the applications. Unlike standard web based dating sites, online dating applications do not require users to fill out lengthy surveys. Other users within a general proximity are presented instantly upon opening the application which makes the process more appealing to the younger generation (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016). What online dating applications do, is create a space where a user can make instant changes to the content and change their overall online appearance within a matter of seconds (James, 2015). It is not uncommon to run in to profiles on dating applications

that are fake or do not portray the correct person on the profile. For example, in my own use of the application I have noticed that users will often put photos up that are not of themselves, they will put older photos up of themselves where they feel more confident and desirable, and people will even go as far as creating a fake profile to obtain credit card information from other users on Tinder. This corresponds with representation between genders on Tinder and how males and females can portray themselves differently in general, but also how they can portray themselves falsely to obtain information such as credit card numbers.

Representation and Identity

When signing up for Tinder, as mentioned above, the application will use an individual's Facebook information to create a profile. This typically involves stating whether the person is male or female and what specific gender they are seeking, if there is one, on Tinder. Since so many people use the internet now, this has changed. In the literature, Tessa de Keijser and Ihab Khiri (2013), state: "the internet is so widely used that the online population increasingly resembles the offline population. As a result, patterns that occur in the offline world also increasingly emerge in online life," (p.1). This could mean that people are becoming more reclusive in their everyday life because the internet has provided them with shelter, or it could mean that people are becoming more outgoing because the internet and online dating has provided them with a platform to become more outgoing. Since people can create these alter-ego's online, it is harder to find a true match because someone's online profile can differ heavily from their real life personality and appearance.

When a person creates an online persona they are performing impression management which is essentially the motivation behind an online impression, the degree to which they control

how others see them, and how people create their impression (Ward, n.d.). Sometimes, the user will exaggerate certain aspects of his/her life and their overall appearance. Ward (n.d.) states that a user of Tinder noted, “Your Tinder profile should be realistic. There is nothing more annoying than someone saying ‘I expected you to be different’ (p. 84). This reiterates the fact that on online dating profiles if a user has any desire to meet up with a potential match they must be truthful in order for the other person to want to continue the relationship. However, this is not always the case. Recently, while flipping through channels a showed called *Catfish* came on MTV. The show’s basic premise is to follow a online romance where the two people have never met. The two men who run the show fly out to one of the partners’ houses and virtually track down the person on the other end. More often than not the person is not who they say they are and have been using pictures they found from other profiles or pictures that they googled. However, one particular instance showed that this did in fact happen to the person that sought the shows help, but instead of rejecting the person who portrayed themselves as someone else, they ended up developing a relationship with them because they loved their personality, not their looks. So, individuals portraying themselves in a false manner is not always accurate.

Another major aspect of online presentation is the difference of representation between the genders. There is a stigma surrounding heterosexual males on online dating as well as females. For example, a normative assumption was made that “male homosexuals tend to be perceived as promiscuous and, according to researchers like Kane Race, historically willing to bring sexual encounters to public spaces” (Diaz Sanchez, 2016, p. 5). However, it is unclear what the reason behind all of these differences is. There could be a variety of reasons as to why a female posts a seductive picture and a male posts a shirtless picture, but nevertheless there is a difference. The literature by Natalia Tommasi (2004) states that there is a theoretical perspective

as to why there are differences in the personal advertisements of each gender, evolutionary and social. Evolution comes in to play because of parental investment and qualities, how much more likely one person is to want children versus the other. Female fertility is another factor because if a male counterpart wanted to have biological children and the female was not able to or did not want children, they are more likely to peruse a female who can/will. Roles can be reversed in this situation as well, but the main reason for this study was to see if there was a difference between the preference between the genders. What they discovered was that men were expected to place more value on physical attractiveness and women are more expected to place a value on material wealth.

The most critical information obtained from this literature were the nine categories in which men and women differed in regards to presentation of self and qualities desired. These nine categories were:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Age | 6. Hobbies/Interests/Habits |
| 2. Physical Appearance | 7. Marital status/Children |
| 3. Economic Resources | 8. Personality Traits |
| 4. Education/Occupation | 9. Other/Miscellaneous' |
| 5. Religion/Spirituality | |

There was a significant difference in qualities desired between heterosexual males and females in age, economic resources, education, and other miscellaneous. All of the other categories were more equal in relation to those listed above. Therefore, this study showed that there was only a significant difference between the genders in relation to presentation of self in physical appearance, marital status/children, personality traits, and misc. In relation to qualities desired in a partner, the differences were: age, economic resources, education/occupation,

personality traits, and other misc. characteristics (Tommasi, 2004). The evidence from this research displays that males and females differ can in representation on online dating applications.

Conclusion

The reasons as to why people use online dating applications varies depending on the application and individual user. One study provided an excess of information as to why people use online dating, narrowing it down to 10 distinguished factors, discussed on page 25. Some of these 10 factors relate to each other in certain aspects becoming subsections of one another, but collectively they all make up an informed and credible reason as to why people use online dating.

Overall online dating has become a natural part of the daily life of an individual living in this day in age. The need to cure loneliness is not something that is going to go away, if anything, it is going to progress because of the rise in technology usage as well as the desire to be involved in a mediated relationship. The need to be entertained by technology is also not going to fade away because, again, technology is only advancing. All of the reasons displayed in the literature as to why people use online dating and the differences in representation make sense and are completely justified by statistical evidence. So, in retrospect, online dating applications have begun and a new era of online dating is soon upon us where it is going to be even more accessible to access relationships and companionship. The reasons could differ in coming years, but as of right now our technology based society is finding mediated platforms to engage in relationships.

In regards to how representation differs on online dating, there is a difference between how male and female participants portray themselves on social media. The validity behind the

differences is somewhat superficial which creates a gap in the literature. However, the biggest gap in the literature was not the superficiality found in relation to gender differences, but the application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory to online dating. While the research provided critical insights in to the realm of online dating there was a lack of substance regarding the gratification one seeks when using online dating applications. This is presumably because online dating applications and online dating are more recent than other mediated platforms such as television and radio, where you can commonly see the theory applied. Much of the literature that was found for this research was from resources that are not considered academic, however they provided valuable insights to the motivations one has for using online dating applications.

Chapter 3: Data

Methods

For my research I used mixed methodology - surveys and interviews. This provided both quantitative and qualitative data, the surveys with both numerical (quantitative) and descriptive data and the interviews with strictly descriptive data (qualitative). I chose to use surveys as a method because of their ability to reach a large population at once. The questions that were on the survey were short, direct, and often only required a simple response. However, there were open ended questions on the survey as well which provided further insights and room to elaborate. Interviews were used to gain a more personal response from interviewee's. This gave respondents more room to elaborate and allowed me as the interviewer to use probing questions to get a more in depth response.

Aside from surveys and interviews, I also made myself an active participant in online dating applications to obtain more useful information and to understand how the applications worked in depth. Thus, another method that will be used is autoethnography. The applications I became a member of were strictly Tinder and Bumble. The information gathered by immersing myself in these applications was used throughout the research and throughout this thesis without using specific names and conversations to avoid exposing individual opinions. For the male perspective, I obtained information from a third party (a male seeking a female on an online dating application) so that I could see what the other side of the spectrum looked like without creating a fake profile for myself because that would be conflicting to my research. Below is my research plan that was conducted and executed to obtain information for this thesis as well as auto ethnography.

Rationale: In order to answer my research questions both multiple choice and open ended questions were used in the survey for this research. Some multiple choice questions included the option to choose “other” instead of one of the listed responses which provided the respondent with the opportunity to elaborate. Surveys can produce a large amount of data in a small amount of time, making it the preferred method for this research.

Interviews were used as a method because they can provide information pertaining to people’s emotions and motivations. All interview questions used for this research were open-ended and called for elaboration. The hope was to obtain information from respondents that was not originally part of the research questions that could help develop the research further.

Process: A ten question survey on surveymonkey.com. This specific website was chosen because of the way it is set up as well as the way it produces its data, graphs, etc. After creating the survey, I posted it on my personal Facebook and asked peers to share my post on their personal Facebook. I also asked my peers to take my survey, went and spoke to multiple classes about my survey and asked them to voluntarily participate. The survey remained anonymous so that way individuals would feel more comfortable sharing their honest thoughts and opinions. For the interviews I approached colleagues and peers and asked them to participate in a short interview. This led to snowball effect from my peers who recommended individuals they thought would be interested in participating in my research. I did not use incentives for people to participate in my survey and interviews because I felt like this topic applied to many people in the population I was seeking, therefore I would not have an issue finding respondents.

Population: Male and female's ages 18 and older. All surveys and interviews were administered to 190 individuals from the Northwest regions surrounding Eastern Washington University.

Setting: The setting for my research often took place in classrooms, homes, and public places with access to Wi-Fi. Survey participants took the survey at their earliest convenience at a time and place which suited them. For interviews, I met with the participants at a location which was appropriate and comfortable for the both of us in a setting where noise would not disrupt the process. Typically, this was an office setting. When conducting my own research, I was typically at home in an environment where there were few distractions.

After conducting and analyzing all survey and interview responses the decision was made to eliminate interviews from this research. The open-ended survey responses provided more information than the responses that were gathered from the interviews. Therefore, the data analysis following the autoethnography will be based strictly off of survey results.

Autoethnography

I felt it was important to make myself a participant on two of the main online dating applications I would be covering in my thesis, Tinder and Bumble. So, I signed up for both of the applications prior to conducting most of my research so I could be more knowledgeable about the nature of both of these applications. My initial thoughts when I joined Tinder were that it seemed fairly simple to navigate and was fairly specific to users wants and needs. I added five profile pictures and a short bio that said I was interested in whales, Blink 182, and dogs. A

couple of the pictures included friends, but were mostly of myself. I then stated that I was interested in men aged 24-31 and that I wanted them to be in the proximity of up to 50 miles.

After the initial set up I swiped left and right to users which indicated whether or not I was interested. If I swiped right and the other user did as well, we matched. Most of the bios on Tinder were short or the user did not have one at all. This made the process somewhat superficial since you were basing your decision as to whether or not you liked the person solely off of physical attraction. Throughout the entire process of using the application I never initiated conversation. I left this to the other user so I could see how males approached females on online dating applications. More often than not I was greeted with a pick up line, sometimes inappropriate – other times comical. However, other than pick up lines I was greeted with a simple “Hey” or “What’s up”. The lack of interest stemming from both of those greeting indicated that those users were not looking for anything serious. To fully grasp what these users on the other end wanted I would engage in conversation with them and see where it went.

My experience mostly consisted of being asked to get together in person rather than carry on a conversation via Tinder message. However, this was asked very early on in the conversation which, again, indicated to me that there was a lack of interest in anything substantial. So, my experience on Tinder displayed that the hook-up culture that was discussed in the literature in relation to this specific application is true. I did have some in depth conversations with other users on there, but they never turned in to anything substantial.

My experience on Bumble was much different than it was on Tinder. This application forces the female participant to initiate the conversation, the male counterpart does not even have the option to. So, unlike Tinder where I did not message any user first, on Bumble I messaged every user first. Bumble allowed users virtually the same amount of photos, bio space, and had

the same swiping method as Tinder. However, in my experience the profiles on Bumble seemed to contain larger biography's with more information about the person.

As a user this intrigued me because I was getting to know more about the person before deciding if I was interested in them based off of looks alone. This helped with the initiation of conversation, since I knew more about what my counterpart was interested in I could easily start a conversation based off of something we had in common or something I found interesting about them. After you first message someone on Bumble they have 24 hours to respond – if they do not respond then the match disappears. This feature of the application is bittersweet because in one sense you could message someone, have them read the message and choose not to reply. However, you could also message someone and have them not see the message because they did not check their application that day so both participants missed out on the opportunity to converse.

Often I would message another user and not receive a reply. If a user did respond to my message, the conversation carried on longer than my conversations on Tinder. They were more in depth because they initially started with talking about our mutual interests and/or topics we found interesting about each other. At no point during my use of this application did I feel like it was centered around hook-ups. I felt like most of the people that used this application were looking for long term relationships or friendships, but unsurprisingly I would often see users on both Tinder and Bumble. The users that I saw on both of the applications had little information in their bio and minimal pictures of themselves.

Another experience I had while using these applications was stumbling upon fake profiles. As a female participant seeking a male counterpart I only ran in to this a handful of times. The profiles were typically fabricated with model pictures, no bio's, and had a singular

picture, not multiple. It was fairly easy to spot a fake profile while swiping even though they were not common. In contrast to that, I had a male peer of mine show me what their experience was on Tinder while seeking a female. The amount of fake profiles he encountered was fascinating. Again, most of the female fake profiles had no bio and minimal pictures, but they would always send a message upon matching. Typically, their messages were scripted and had automatic responses. At one point, my peer would write “no” and the female would respond with her scripted messages. Eventually the female would ask for “Tinder verification” which involved the male counterpart entering his credit card information. So, essentially what these fake profiles were doing was scamming people out of money. Unsurprisingly, this never occurred on Bumble – only Tinder.

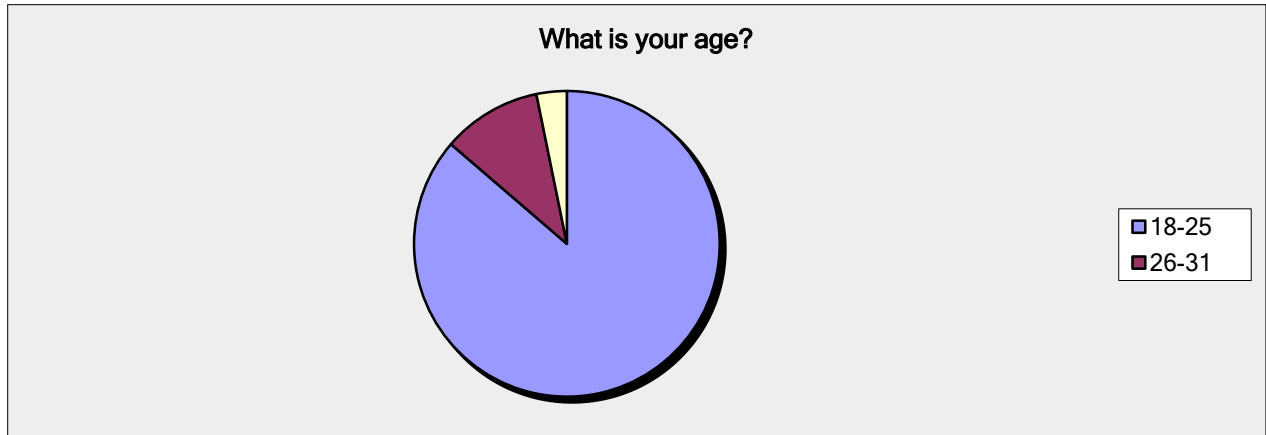
Overall, in relation to what the literature used for this research and in my experience, Tinder undeniably fits the category of “hook-up” app because of the superficiality. Bumble was the application that was geared more towards finding a relationship of substance and users do not experience fake profiles nearly as often, if at all.

Data Analysis

The following information was obtained from the online survey that was conducted for this research. Overall, there were 190 respondents, 131 (68.9%) of which were female and the remaining 59 (31.1%) were male. Of these 190 respondents, 164 (86.3%) were from the ages of 18-25, 20 (10.5%) were 26-31, and 6 (3.2%) were over the age of 31. This information is displayed below in Graph 1 and Graph 2.

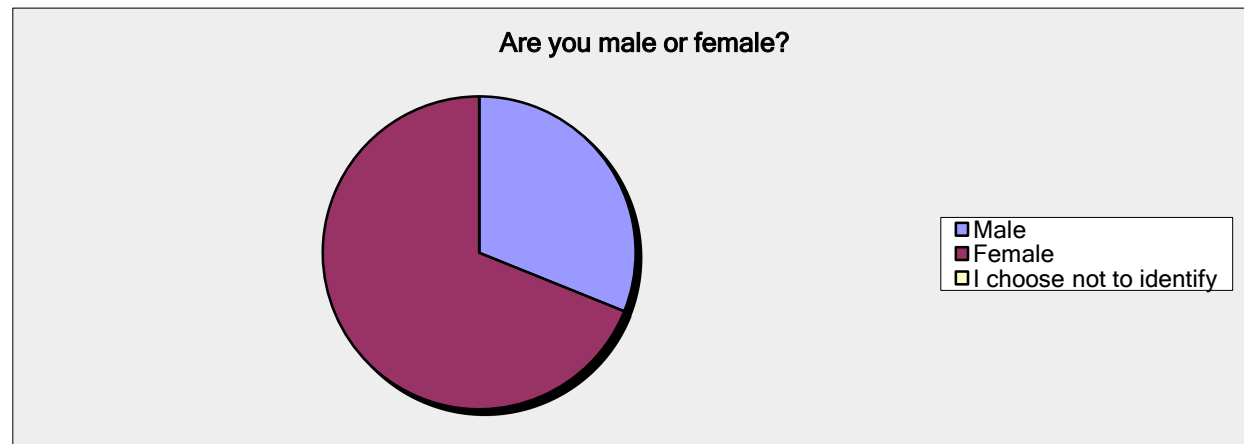
Graph 1

What is your age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
18-25	86.3%	164
26-31	10.5%	20
Over 31	3.2%	6
answered question		190
skipped question		0



Graph 2

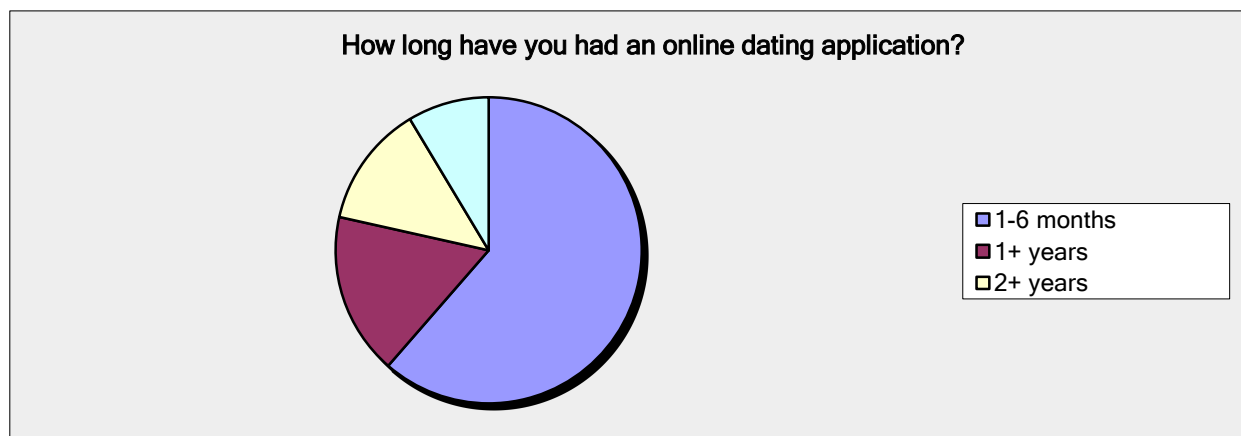
Are you male or female?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	31.1%	59
Female	68.9%	131
I choose not to identify	0.0%	0
answered question		190
skipped question		0



The following question asked respondents how long they had been using online dating applications. Eighty-six individuals responded that they had only used online dating applications for 1-6 months and 24 individuals stated they had used them for 1+ years. This was followed by 2+ years and finally more than two years, both with numbers less than 20. Comparing age with the amount of time an individual used online dating applications was worth examining, and after further investigation in to individual responses to the survey, more than half of the respondents who said they had used online dating applications for longer than two years were in the age range of 18-25.

Graph 3

How long have you had an online dating application?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1-6 months	61.4%	86
1+ years	17.1%	24
2+ years	12.9%	18
More than two years	8.6%	12
<i>answered question</i>		140
<i>skipped question</i>		50

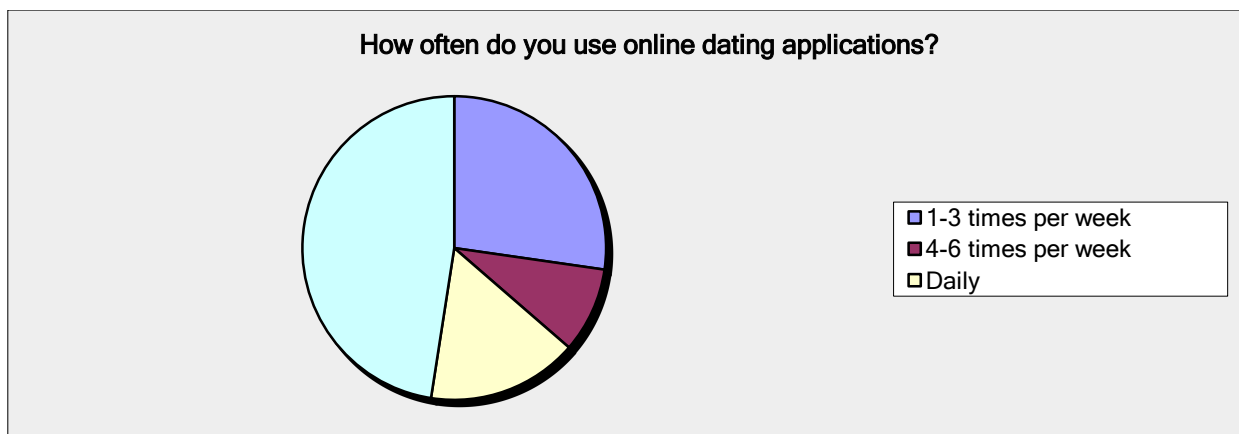


The fourth question derived from question three asking the respondents to clarify how often they used online dating applications. The largest amount, 68 respondents (47.6%), stated

that they used online dating applications less than four times a month. 39 respondents (27.3%) said they used online dating applications 1-3 times per week, 23 (16.1%) said daily, and 13 (9.1%) said 4-6 times per week. As seen in the graph below, 47 respondents chose to skip this question. This is probably correlated to the previous question where 50 respondents skipped the question. I assume this is because this particular set of respondents do not partake in online dating applications.

Graph 4

How often do you use online dating applications?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1-3 times per week	27.3%	39
4-6 times per week	9.1%	13
Daily	16.1%	23
Less than 4 times a month	47.6%	68
<i>answered question</i>		143
<i>skipped question</i>		47



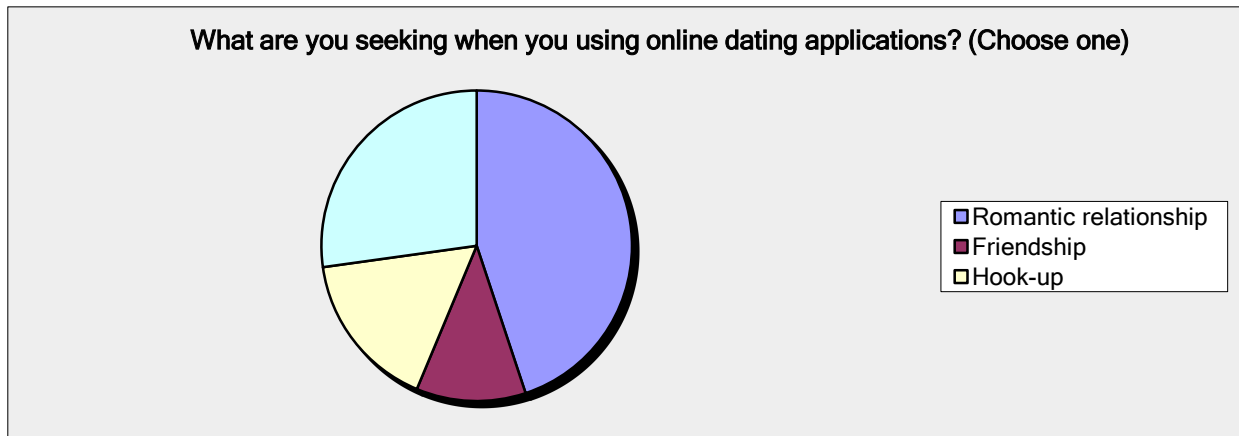
The next question dove further in to what respondents were seeking when using online dating applications. The largest group of respondents, 71 (44.9%), said that they used online dating applications to seek a romantic relationship. 43 (27.2%) chose other, which left room for an open ended response which will be discussed further, 26 (16.5%) chose hook-up, and 18 (11.4%) chose friendship. After being given the option to participate in an open ended response,

43 individuals chose to elaborate. Respondent 151 stated, “[I] just wanted to see what the fuss was all about. I would never actually date anyone on a dating site. Old fashioned meet and greets are the way to go.” This was a respondent who used the applications less than four times a month. Presumably, this respondent had the mindset that “old fashioned” dating was a better option than online dating because they were not a daily user on any online dating application.

In contrast to respondent 151 who did partake in online dating applications, respondent 16 provided an alternative response to the answer choices that were listed. Respondent 16 states, “where are the answer options for people who intentionally choose NOT to use online dating apps for the sake of having a better chance of long-term gratification from a sustainable relationship?” This respondent was in the 26-31 age range. Surprisingly, even with such a small difference in age range, these two respondents feel completely different about online dating. While respondent 151 believes in dating “the old fashioned way” but uses online dating applications, respondent 16 does not participate in online dating at all and seems to reject them.

Graph 5

What are you seeking when you using online dating applications? (Choose one)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Romantic relationship	44.9%	71
Friendship	11.4%	18
Hook-up	16.5%	26
Other (please explain)	27.2%	43
<i>answered question</i>		158
<i>skipped question</i>		32



The sixth question asked respondents how willing they were to meet up with a person they met on an online dating application. 59 (32.4%) of respondents said they were likely to meet up with a person they met on a dating application, 57 (31.3%) said they were undecided, 36 (19.8%) said it was unlikely they would meet up with a person they met on an online dating application, and 30 (16.5%) said not at all. The responses to likely and undecided only had a two person difference in number of responses, which shows that more respondents were on the spectrum of potentially meeting someone from an online dating application than on the opposite side of the spectrum where it was unlikely or not at all.

Graph 6

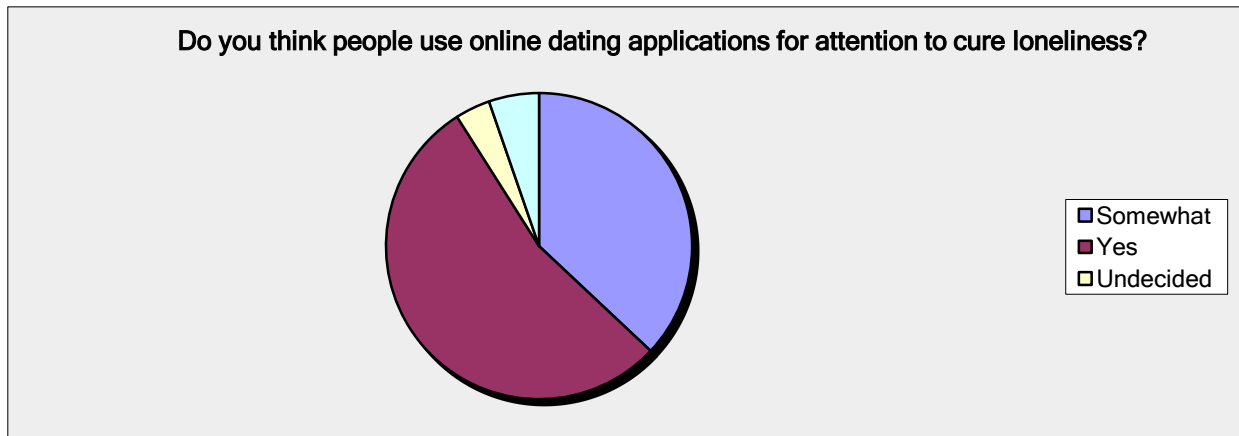
How willing are you to meet up with an individual you met on an online dating application?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Likely	32.4%	59
Undecided	31.3%	57
Unlikely	19.8%	36
Not at all	16.5%	30
answered question		182
skipped question		8



The seventh question explored further in to the reasons as to why people use online dating applications. The question asked respondents if they thought people used online dating applications to cure loneliness. More than 50% of respondents, 102 (54%) stated yes, they believed people used online dating applications to cure loneliness. 70 (37%) respondents chose somewhat, 10 (5.3%) chose no, and 7 (3.7%) chose undecided. Only one person skipped this question, which gave this specific question a more accurate response. The answer choices “yes” and “somewhat” accounted for 91% of responses, which shows that the majority of respondents thought that online dating applications were used to cure loneliness.

Graph 7

Do you think people use online dating applications for attention to cure loneliness?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Somewhat	37.0%	70
Yes	54.0%	102
Undecided	3.7%	7
No	5.3%	10
answered question		189
skipped question		1



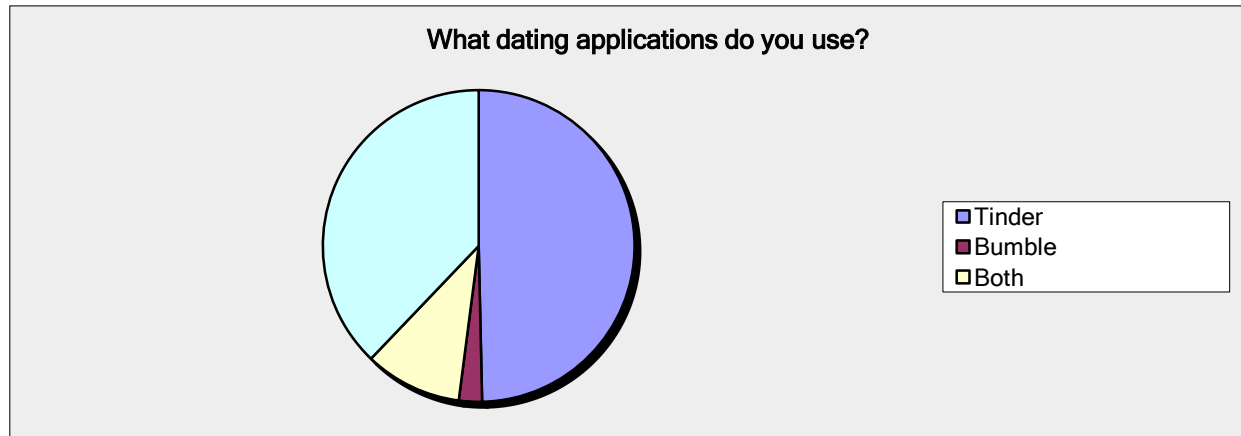
The next question asked respondents what dating applications they participated in. This question also gave respondents the option for an open ended response. 84 (49.7%) respondents said they singularly used the dating application Tinder, 4 (2.4%) said they singularly used Bumble, 17 (10.1%) said they used both applications, and 64 (37.9%) chose other. Some of the open ended responses included the names of online dating applications such as: OkCupid, Twitter, Snapchat, Grindr, Math, Plenty of Fish, Badoo, Facebook, Myspace, Craigslist, Scruff, Coffee Meets Bagel, BigFish, E-Harmony, and Bodybuilding.com. Respondent 29 answered, “none of the above. Bodybuilding.com is a fitness forum app, it surprisingly turns to extra attention from the opposite sex. Sometimes flattering, sometimes awkward.”

This respondent did participate in online dating applications, however the application was not the standard dating application, but a forum where body builders go to engage in conversation with other members of that community. It is important to display that even when an application is not geared specifically towards online dating, social applications catered to a specific group can lead to romantic involvement or attraction.

The other responses that are not mentioned above included something along the line of “none”, as in they did not participate in online dating applications.

Graph 8

What dating applications do you use?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Tinder	49.7%	84
Bumble	2.4%	4
Both	10.1%	17
Other (please explain)	37.9%	64
<i>answered question</i>		169
<i>skipped question</i>		21



The last two questions asked on the survey were strictly open ended questions. The first question asked respondents if they gained gratification, pleasure, especially when gained from the satisfaction of desire, when using online dating applications. The respondents were asked to explain their answer, some of which chose to reply with a simple yes or no. Out of the 190 overall respondents, 142 individuals did respond to this question and 48 respondents chose to skip. Some respondents agreed whole heartedly that they experienced gratification from online dating applications, like respondent 180 who stated, “yes, there is a small feeling of confidence when you match with someone because you know the feeling is mutual rather than face to face your still not sure when you meet someone.”

In relation to confidence, one respondent, respondent 165, stated, “yes, sometimes when I’m feeling ugly I go on Grindr and get compliments and it helps my self esteem.” This

application, Grindr, is the online dating application specifically catered to the gay community. This statement corresponds with respondent 180 because both of these respondents stated that they used these two different applications to get a confidence boost. However, some respondents showed a lack of caring when it came to the reason they used online dating applications.

Respondent 164 noted, “to be honest I use it [online dating] mostly for laughs. I use terrible pick up lines.” This can also be considered to be a type of gratification because this respondent is using the application to achieve their desire to laugh. Some responses were very individualized based on their own personal experiences with online dating applications.

Respondent 150 felt that,

“it is nice to know that someone read or saw something that interested them, in myself. But I do not find it gratifying or pleasurable to be sought after by someone I find to be undesirable. After 5 years or more of having social media and dating site profiles, I have found there to be people who do not know how to do real life relationships and end up right back online only to see the same faces.”

Another individual, respondent 59, felt the complete opposite when it came to gaining gratification from online dating. “No, I do not have too much success from them [online dating applications] so often times it is almost the opposite feeling. Feeling depressed, not good enough, or even sometimes shy, scared, self conscious, or nervous.” Respondent 22 felt similar about online dating applications. “No, I find them to be overwhelming overall. I end up talking to a few people I could potentially be interested in, but the rest of the app use consists of mostly ignoring tens of messages from people I do not want to talk to.”

The variety of responses gathered in the response to this question gives the research an extensive insight to how individuals feel about gratification and online dating applications.

Graph 9

Do you gain gratification (pleasure, especially when gained from the satisfaction of desire) when using online dating applications? Please explain.	
Answer Options	Response Count
	142
<i>answered question</i>	142
<i>skipped question</i>	48

This next question, the final question of the survey, asked respondents if they felt as though male and female representation, the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way of as being of a certain nature, differs on online dating applications. The respondents were asked to explain their answers. Most of the respondents said “yes” with an explanation that followed, however, there were some respondents that simply put “no” with little explanation. In regards to the “yes” answers, several respondents felt that males and females were represented different on online dating applications, but they had different perceptions as to the ways in which they presented themselves. Respondent 188 stated: “Yes, I do think that male and female representation is different in terms of online dating applications. Men portray themselves as more masculine and “bro-ish”. Where as females appear to be more feminine and dainty with their bio.”

Similar to the statement made above, respondent 187 stated, “I feel like females are depicted as being friendly on dating applications while males are depicted as lonely and desperate.” Another, respondent 184, noted that, “yes compared to men, women look more scandalous or slutty if they use the app a lot. Guys are just seen as players and I do not think they get nearly as much negative feedback or assumptions made about them.” A common theme between all three of these responses is that male participants on online dating applications portray themselves as masculine, but them using the applications for anything serious categorizes them as lonely. Women, however, are considered to be submissive - they appear dainty, fragile, and friendly, but they are considered promiscuous for using these applications.

One respondent, respondent 183, stated that males and females both hide behind certain safety blankets online. “Yes, men online tend to hid behind comedy, and women hide behind their makeup. They both however so rely on old pictures.”

A couple respondents directly responded to specific applications when answering this question. Respondent 150 noted, “Bumble portrays more beautiful woman than most others.”

Moving on to the “no” responses – most respondents who chose to state that no, they do not think male and female representation differs on online dating applications, simply stated “no”. However, one respondent, respondent 134, said that, “no, men and women are largely the same when it comes to relations, sexual or otherwise.” While this is a very general statement, it provides the research with a response that is not favoring the difference in representation amongst the genders.

A common theme occurred in many of the other responses to this question. Instead of specifically referring to the difference between male and female representation, many respondents chose to be general in their response and discuss overall representation on online dating applications. Respondent 90 noted, “absolutely, you can be the best version of yourself, or anyone for that matter online.” Another respondent, respondent 83, followed the statement above with, “yes. You can pretend to be anyone you want online because you are not seen. It is just your words that have to be trusted.”

In relation to the above statements, some respondents discussed the potential to easily deceive people on online dating applications compared to in person interactions. Respondent 151 said, “Yes because online you can be whatever you want to be, whereas in person it is hard to deceive people.”

One respondent, respondent 57, related the use of online dating applications to marketing stating that, “I think representation online dating applications depends entirely upon what the individual is trying to portray. You are basically marketing yourself to other people so they see what you want them to see.

The underlying theme that is displayed from these variety of responses is how simple it is the portray yourself online regardless of if the information is actually accurate. Since the conversations are based on a mediated platform both males and females can create an online persona to match who they want to be, regardless of who they already are. As respondent 151 above mentioned, it is much easier to be deceptive on online dating applications.

Graph 10

Do you feel like male and female representation (the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way of as being of a certain nature) differs on online dating applications? Please explain.	
Answer Options	Response Count
	135
<i>answered question</i>	135
<i>skipped question</i>	55

Findings and Discussion

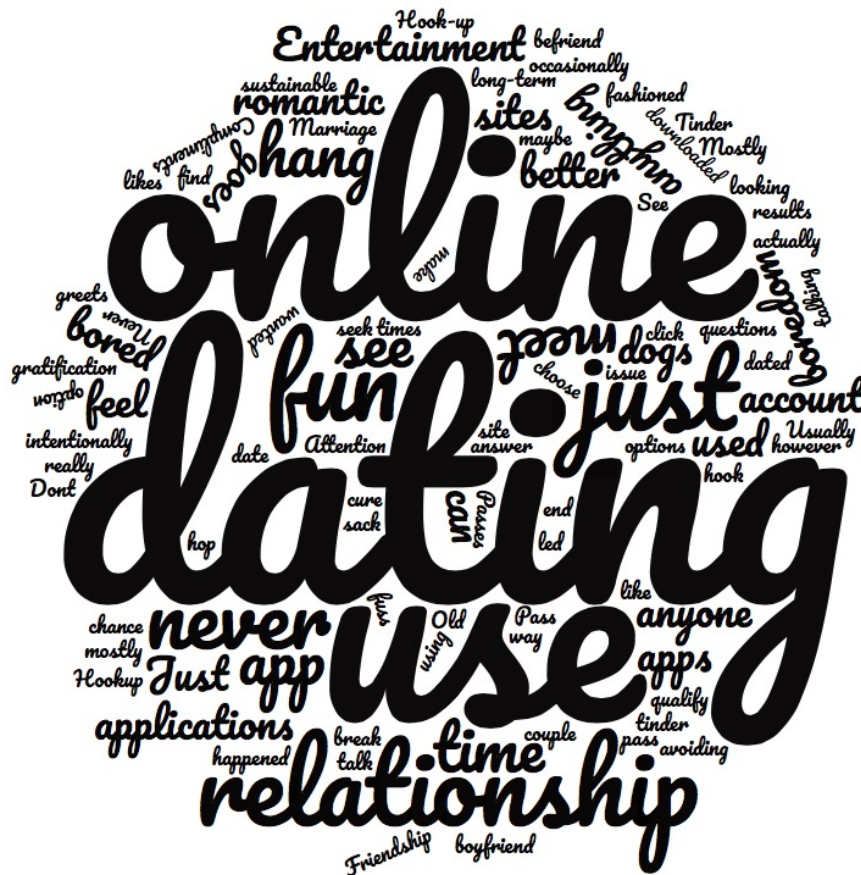
The responses to my survey questions and research provided a number of connections and themes, specifically from the open ended response questions which I will discuss in detail further in this section. In regards to the multiple choice questions, the information that was obtained was that most of the respondents who took my online survey were between the ages of 18-25, had used online dating for 1-6 months, and a majority of the respondents used the applications less than four times a week. When asked about the willingness participants had to meet up with an individual they met off of an online dating application, most respondents chose “likely” or “undecided” with only a two-person difference between the two responses. These two

answer choices can be correlated with one another because of the generality of “undecided”. This meaning, respondents who chose undecided may meet up with a person they met on an online dating application, or they may not. Therefore, of the respondents who chose undecided many of them could potentially sway towards “likely” giving that answer choice the definite majority.

The next question asked respondents if they thought people used online dating applications to cure loneliness or to seek attention. Most respondents chose “yes” and the answer choice “somewhat” was in close second. This can be related to the above statement in regards to the previous question because the two answer choices can be correlated with each other since “somewhat” is so fluid.

The following question prompted respondents to divulge what dating applications they used, giving them the option for an open ended response. Unsurprisingly, Tinder had the majority, however unexpectedly sixty-four respondents chose other. A majority of respondents either said “none” or responded with different applications that they used. Some of the most common applications that were mentioned were OkCupid and Plenty of Fish. This is displayed in the word cloud, an image composed of words that displays the frequency which specific words were used by making them larger, below. Word clouds are useful to this research because they provide a visual representation of the common themes in the responses. There is a plethora of applications out there when it comes to online dating, however an interesting fact about this specific question is that many people did not choose Bumble specifically. Respondents were given the option to chose both Tinder and Bumble, however only seventeen respondents chose that answer choice. Often, even in the open ended answer choices, many respondents wrote Tinder, which is also shown in the word cloud below.

also gained sustainable relationships via online dating applications. Overall, the responses provided a theme that if respondents were not using online dating applications for relationships, hook-ups, or friendship they were using them to pass the time or for fun. This is displayed below in the word cloud.



Now, in regards to the last two questions which were specifically open ended – question nine asked respondents if they gained gratification when using online dating applications. Out of the 190 respondents who took this survey, forty-eight skipped this question leaving the research with one hundred and forty-two responses. Out of the responses, the most common theme by far was ‘yes’, respondents did gain gratification from online dating applications. A majority of the

respondents who answered yes explained that it was because “it feels good”, which leads to another theme that was discovered in the research. This theme was ‘feel’ or ‘feelings’. Many respondents stated that they felt confidence when they would get a match or when someone complimented them while using online dating applications. Other respondents stated that when they were feeling lonely they were use the application purely to get compliments to make them feel better about themselves.

Sub themes that were found in the responses to this question were ‘attention’ and ‘good’. Even if respondents were using the application for fun, they were gaining gratification out of getting the attention they were seeking. As seen in the word cloud below, other common themes, or sub themes, that emerged were confidence, like, dating, and interested. All of these correlate with one another because of their explicit relationship with dating in general, specifically to online dating applications in this specific circumstance. Other respondents who replied with no explained that it was because they had not used online dating applications, but could see why people who did participate would feel that way. Overall, the common theme that is displayed is that people do use online dating applications for gratification and attention.

Stereotyping is a large part of online dating applications considering the first impression a user gets is simply a picture. It is easy to be shallow and fabricated while participating in a mediated format of dating because you can create an online persona that mirrors yourself completely, or fabricates it. Many respondents stated that many users make themselves look like something they're not online, which can be seen in the sub themes below in the word cloud. This can also be related to what people are looking for in terms of a relationship on online dating applications. Unsurprisingly, a common theme was that many respondents thought that men were more likely to use the application for hook-ups, whereas women were more likely to use the applications for romantic relationships. This falls under the category of stereotyping, but it is standard to the norms of today's society.

More often than not men are seen as more sexual beings, this was displayed in the literature as well as the responses in this research. Females are often depicted as the ones who care more about a sustainable relationship and getting to know more about a person before they engage in sexual contact with a partner. Also, seen in the literature and the responses from respondents was that men's personal descriptions on the applications was vaguer, whereas women had more detailed descriptions and disclosed more information. The theme that was displayed was that women are looking for a serious relationship and men are looking for short term interactions on online dating applications.

The fabrication of one's self online seemed to be a common trend amongst the respondent's answers. Many respondents stated that they were more likely to engage in conversation with someone online since there is more pressure in person, they were more likely to speak honestly and waste less time online, and they would also save money by engaging online because there was less pressure to initiate the conversation on a date where going out

would be involved. The use of pictures makes it easier to fabricate one's self because the user on the other end is exposed to a specific set of pictures, they are unaware of the time frame of these pictures – how long ago they were taken, if the person looks like they do in the photos, if the person is actually who is displayed in the photos, etc. The Catfish culture has become prominent in today's society and it is depicted in the respondent's answers. Essentially, the Catfish culture is based off a television show on MTV called *Catfish*. This reality show displays the struggles of online dating and the hardships people face in regards to mediated relationships.

The basic layout of the show is that one user will seek the help of the hosts of the show and they aim to find the person on the other end of the conversation so both participants can be united and hopefully progress their relationship. More often than not users are usually faced with the hard reality that the person they have been talking to is not who they thought it was specifically because of the fabrication of an online presence. They use other people's photos, lie about where they live, and they won't ever video message. This culture is becoming a phenomenon because of how simple it is to gain access to other people's information because of the large presence of social media in today's society. This culture can be correlated to this research on online dating, and more specifically this question, because many respondents felt that yes, more often than not individuals are displayed differently on online dating applications, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

Many of the answers that respondents gave were more general than specific to the genders, which was very interesting. Instead of answering the question like the respondents above, these respondents chose to talk about the hardships every online dating application user faces. Men and women are both capable of creating an alter ego online presence and that is important to note, because there is no distinction between what gender can portray themselves as

As seen in the information above, the main reason people use online dating applications is to seek a romantic relationship or to pass the time and have fun. This information is not surprising because human beings are naturally drawn to love and a romantic relationship falls in to that category. In regards to using the applications for fun and to pass the time, this information is also not surprising because of the most common age group who participated in the survey (18-25). Many young people have not matured enough to settle down and fully engage in a sustainable relationship by the time they are 25, many of them hope to engage in serious romantic relationships, however that is not always achievable. Therefore, many users on online dating applications often use them to pass the time because there is not a drastic need to settle amongst this age range.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory factors in to online dating immensely, as seen in the responses gained from the research. Again, the overall concept of the theory is that people seek media to satisfy specific needs. In terms of online dating and this research, the conclusion that was drawn was that people use online dating applications for three main reasons: *attention, self confidence, and to pass the time*. Many respondents said they they sought attention because they were lonely and it made them feel good. This can be related to self confidence because many of the conversations on the applications involved compliments, which help boost self esteem. Also, the general matching with someone was a form of a confidence boost as well because this it meant that both users were interested, providing them both with a sort of gratification.

If neither self confidence or attention was something the respondents were actively seeking, passing the time to cure boredom was the final reason. Many respondents participating in online dating was a way to have fun and pass the time. They would use pick up lines or swipe

right on every person to entertain themselves. This was unsurprising because of the lack of the need to settle down from the age range that was most prominent in this research.

Finally, the difference in representation between males and females on online dating applications was the most surprising. This was not because of the difference in representation between genders, but because of the way in which respondents answered. Many of them chose to generally explain their answer, not relating it to either gender – simply stating that anyone can make themselves look different online. This is important to note because it shows that we are moving beyond the typical gender roles that have been set in front of us by society in the past and moving on to a more gender fluid society. There were responses that involved stereotyping the genders in to their typical roles of females wanting a more serious relationship while men were more promiscuous, but typically the responses were not aimed at any specific person. Therefore, it was hard to draw a specific conclusion to the question of how representation differs in presentation on online dating applications, but overall what was displayed was that both males and females can be represented differently on online dating applications -not because of their gender, but because of their own self disclosure.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways in which individuals divulge in online dating applications and the gratification they seek while doing so. The responses from 190 participants who participated in a survey were analyzed and discussed in detail to draw conclusions about the nature of online dating applications and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This research experienced a flaw in regards to the survey - some respondents chose to skip questions. This impacted the data and the overall research because of the fluctuation in responses to individual questions.

Despite this flaw and the range of topics and realizations that were discussed in the literature used for this thesis, this research has determined that there is a prominent online dating application that appeals to today's society, Tinder, and three reasons as to why people use online dating applications: seeking attention, gaining self confidence, and passing time. Males and females are commonly stereotyped on online dating applications; however, the overall representation of genders is no longer determined by society – but by the user themselves.

The biggest contribution from this research to the Uses and Gratifications Theory is the expansion of motivations as to why people use social media, specifically online dating applications. With technology ever evolving, there is no end in sight for online dating applications as they are practically unstoppable and unavoidable. The future is bright for this industry and for the users who actively pursue relationships on the applications. The application of the Uses and Gratifications theory to online dating applications will likely remain applicable in later years, but the specific gratifications one seeks will more than likely change and develop with the emergence of new dating applications and technologies. If further research was to be

done on this topic the focus should be on the expansion of online dating applications, specifically apps that are catered to a narrow audience.

It is important to understand the impact online dating has on a person's social abilities since many users feel most confident hiding behind a cell phone screen. It is impossible to determine how this will impact later generations, but presumably, based off of the information gained from this research, the concept of in person dating will become part of the past and online dating applications will dominate the dating realm more than they already do. This will impact a variety of things, but mostly it will impact the way in which we communicate with one another.

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