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Swipe Left or Right but What Happens for the Rest of the Night? A Qualitative Approach to Understanding the Life Cycle of Tinder Relationships

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SWIPE LEFT OR RIGHT BUT WHAT HAPPENS FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT?
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE CYCLE OF
TINDER RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Swipe Left or Right but What Happens for the Rest of the Night? A Qualitative Approach to Understanding the Life Cycle of Tinder Relationships

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Research on relationship escalation, maintenance, and de-escalation has yielded important information on how relationships form successfully, the challenges of maintaining them, and the emotional impact the process can have for the parties involved. Technology has arguably altered the way in which individuals experiences the stages of a relationship but few studies have examined this area of communication. This dissertation explored the life cycle of relationships on Tinder. Three main themes emerged from interviewing 31 participants: the Functions of Tinder, Life of Connections, and Impact on Ego. While participants said Tinder functioned as an app used for entertainment and fostering a variety of relationships, Tinder users, especially males, also experienced a decrease in self-esteem from using the app. Furthermore, the data suggests Knapp's (1978) classic relational stage model does not account for the steps that are unique to connecting via location-based dating apps. Pre-communication stages where Tinder users engage in encoding a written and visual profile and decoding others' profiles via swiping are important to add to the model, as these steps must be successfully completed before communication can occur. Participants experienced the first two steps of escalation slowly because they were skeptical of other Tinder users, but once they met in person, the relationship progressed at a "normal" rate. Tinder users did not experience five steps of de-escalation, but instead a sharp decline in communication to terminate the

relationship or ghosting, where one individual abruptly discontinued communication.

The researcher proposed a model of the stages of relationships on Tinder to account for these changes to the traditional model. Future research should explore if the proposed model is applicable to other dating apps as well as continue to understand the challenges dating in the digital age has for its users.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Forming successful romantic relationships can positively impact a person's health and happiness (Borelli, Rasmussen, Burkhart, & Sbarra, 2014), while relationship termination can result in emotional distress (Wilmot, Harbaugh, & Baxter, 1985). Numerous studies have explored ways in which individuals escalate, maintain, and de-escalate their relationships (Knapp, 1978; Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998; Welch & Rubin, 2002), but few have accounted for the impact new media platforms have on these stages (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013).

Technology has arguably altered the way in which people experience the stages of a romantic relationship (Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Sukovic, 2007; Bonebrake, 2002). About 50% of the public knows someone who has an online dating profile or who has met a romantic partner via online dating (Smith & Anderson, 2016). In a national sample of over 19,000 people who recently married, more than a third of participants met online (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn, & VanderWeele 2013). Moreover, considering 68% of U.S. adults own a smart phone, people can now easily search for matches on their mobile devices (Anderson, 2015). Most recently, location-based dating applications (LBDAs) have become a popular means for people to find romantic partners. Tinder is the most well-known of these apps, yielding an impressive 9 billion matches using people's geographical location (Tinder, 2015). As a unique and popular app used to form various kinds of relationships, it is necessary to determine how Tinder is revolutionizing the social norms of relationship initiation, maintenance, and dissolution. First, knowing Tinder users' relational goals and how they wish to reach them by using

the app has consequences on users' health and safety (Lehmiller & loerger, 2014). Second, determining how users create their profiles on Tinder can provide an understanding of self-presentation and deceptive communication in the digital app age. Finally, understanding the life cycle of a relationship formed via Tinder can provide important data on the shifts in traditional ways in which users form and disengage in a relationship, which has implications on self-esteem, happiness, and emotional and physical well-being.

Rationale

The LBDA platforms themselves are intriguing to study for several reasons. First, they offer unique services to people because of their use of GPS technology to match users. Second, the nature of the medium can lead to people experiencing communication that is as personal or more intimate (i.e. hyperpersonal) than what is experienced in face-to-face conversations (Walther, 1996). In other words, online communicators can experience levels of social interaction that would not have occurred as quickly or at all in a similar offline setting (Walther & Parks, 2002). Studies on LBDAs are beginning to emerge, but they are limited in scope. Much of the research focuses on gay men's use of LBDAs, particularly Grindr, and the health implications that follow (Beymer, Weiss, Bolan, Rudy, Bourque, Rodriguez, & Morisky, 2014; Lehmiller & loerger, 2014; Grosskopf, LaVasseur, & Glaser, 2014; Bauermeister, Giguere, Carballo-Diéguez, Ventuneac, & Eisenberg, 2010), but few studies focus on apps that are not geared only towards gay men. Moreover, there is a lack of studies that examine other ways people are affected by communicating via the app, such as how they develop and disengage in a romantic relationship. Considering LBDAs have likely altered the manner in which

people experience romantic relationships (LeFebvre, 2016) it is important to explore these changes and understand the impact new media are having on users' experiences of successful or unsuccessful escalation, maintenance, and de-escalation of romantic relationships.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore various relationships (e.g. platonic, sexual, romantic) that form on Tinder by way of interviewing users who have interacted on Tinder to find romance, sex, or friendship. It is necessary to study relationships via technology because we cannot assume relationships form the same way online as they do through other channels (e.g. face-to-face, phone, written letters) considering the research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) and hyperpersonal experiences (Walther, 1996). Although this study is exploratory in nature, theories of CMC such as the hyperpersonal perspective as well as Knapp's (1978) Relational Stage Model will guide the study and provide a theoretical framework. Results will provide information on how the latest online technology is reshaping how users escalate, maintain, and de-escalate relationships formed via the app, including the shifts, benefits, norms, and challenges in the latest type of online dating.

Studying these phenomena has theoretical and practical significance. In an academic sense, this study will add to the extant research on LBDAs and romance. Because technology rapidly changes, it is important to understand the current ways in which online communicators are experiencing relationships. Understanding the cycle of relationships on Tinder can provide information on the new challenges users have forming relationships and the implications the Tinder process can have on users' confidence and emotional well-being. Additionally, this study will provide users'

descriptions of online deception and self-presentation, which can impact the likelihood of successfully forming a relationship from the app. As for practical significance, it is estimated that Tinder has about 50 million users (Giuliano, 2015), so learning more about the habits of users and potential positive or negative consequences can be beneficial beyond academia. Overall, knowing more about the nature of romantic relationships formed via Tinder will be beneficial to its 9.6 million daily active users (Kulwin, 2015).

Background

Many people hope to find romantic love in their life considering over half of all American adults are married and about 60% of singles hope to marry one day (Cohn, 2013). Others seek to secure dates or casual sexual relations. All of these types of romance are necessary to study because so many adults go through these experiences; 77% of Americans have had sex by the time they are 20 years old (Finer, 2007), and the majority of U.S. adults in their 20s are in romantic relationships (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). Thus, it is important to understand how adults form successful relationships. Forming close relationships, including friendships and committed romantic partners can result in happiness while failing to connect with others can promote “anxiety, jealousy, and loneliness” (Myers, 2003, pp. 375-376).

While many methods of finding a partner are available to singles, (i.e. dating someone from the workplace; being set up with a friend of a friend) (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn, & VanderWeele, 2013), online dating has been prevalent in society since the 1990s. Match.com was the first matchmaking site to launch in 1995 and was followed by a slew of other websites that perform similar services. These websites have grown in popularity with 15% of U.S. adults reporting the use of online dating

(Smith & Anderson, 2016), and have become a common way for people to meet and form romantic partnerships.

In addition to classic dating websites, location-based dating applications (apps) (LBDAs) have become popular recently. They are unique because they use GPS technology to connect users who are geographically close (Smith & Duggan, 2013). This aspect of the app can be alluring because a potential match can quite literally be right around the corner.

Similar to dating websites, there are several kinds of LBDAs; however, the two most popular are Tinder and Grindr. Tinder has made 9 billion matches as of 2015 (Tinder, 2015), and Grindr, an LBDA for gay, bisexual, and curious men, claims the title of the largest network for all-males to communicate (Grindr, 2017). To create a Tinder account, users first link their Facebook profile to the app. Next, they choose photographs from their Facebook profile to share on their Tinder profile and have the option of writing a short biography. Then, they select criteria for potential matches (e.g. men ages 20 to 28 years who are within 20 miles). Next, profiles of matches in the geographical area who meet their criteria (e.g. males ages 20-28 years) appear on their screen and a user is given the opportunity to swipe left or right. Swiping the person's profile photograph to the left indicates disinterest and no permission to contact whereas a swipe to the right means the user is interested in that person. If two users both swipe right for each other then they are able to communicate and chat through the platform. This eliminates the fear of rejection that many people feel when attempting to form any kind of romantic relationship as a Tinder user can only contact another if they also stated interest. Grindr works in a similar fashion except connects only gay, bisexual, and curious men.

One way of academically understanding the aforementioned apps can be through the theories of computer-mediated communication (CMC). The robust research on CMC can inform current research on new media technologies used for romance (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Walther, 1996). Initial researchers on CMC labeled it as an impersonal medium because CMC contains fewer cues than face-to-face (FtF) communication (Culnan & Markus, 1987). However, as studies continued, researchers suggested a more personal level of communication could exist online, when Walther (1996) proposed the hyperpersonal perspective. Pauley and Emmers-Sommer (2007) argued that when technology changes, there is uncertainty about how those advances will affect the hyperpersonal experiences in CMC. Therefore, the ideas of hyperpersonal communication should be explored in a study on Tinder and romantic relationships. Hyperpersonal communication is relevant for a study on Tinder because people may experience high levels of intimacy, especially in the beginning stages of forming a relationship online. The ideas from hyperpersonal communication could be applied to Tinder in order to have an understanding of how it may affect the way in which people form, maintain, and dissolve their romantic relationships initiated online.

In addition to studying the nature of the medium, a main aim of this research is to understand the life cycle of romantic relationships formed on Tinder. One model that provides a foundation to understanding this process is Knapp's (1978) Relational Stage Model. This classic model proposes a life cycle of relationships with five stages of coming together (escalation) and five of coming apart (de-escalation) (Knapp, 1978). From an interpersonal communication perspective, it is necessary to research how people move about or are restricted from going to certain stages and why, as many wish to reach

that final stage of Bonding and hope not to experience signs of de-escalation. The first few stages of this model are particularly interesting when new media platforms enter the dating realm. Classic models of relationship escalation assume initial communication is offline (Fox & Anderegg, 2014), so exploring message initiation on Tinder will add to the knowledge of how successful relationships form via technology. Research also suggests that interpersonal relationships do not develop as quickly online as they do offline, so examining how relationships escalate on Tinder will have implications on how online communicators experience the stages of relationship escalation and if and how they differ from traditional models. As for the coming apart portion of the model, senders of online communication are not physically present (Walther, 1996), which could influence their approach to de-escalating a relationship. A relationship may end more quickly for those meeting on the app because they feel more comfortable communicating their feelings through the app. Finally, because of the large number of Tinder users, those interacting on the app could feel hesitant to maintain a relationship or may de-escalate their relationship quickly because they think there are other users who are more interesting and more attractive. With the advent of new media, the literature needs to explore whether classic interpersonal models such as Knapp's Relational Stage Model (1978) are still applicable or if they have become obsolete, as there is much to learn about online romantic relationships (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Understanding the unique challenges Tinder users face has significant ramifications on understanding what kind of communication leads to successful relationship escalation and how computer-mediated communication and hyperpersonal experiences can influence the manner in which users escalate and de-escalate relationships. The process of coming together and apart can

positively or negatively impact users' self-esteem and happiness depending on if they reach their relational goals, so understanding this entire process has important implications for users' well-being.

Present Study

Because dating online has become a widely used method of finding a partner and the future of making connections is continuing in this direction, it is necessary to research the current ways users are experiencing relationships (Sukovic, 2007; Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). The goal of this study is to explore the entire cycle of a relationship on Tinder, from creating a profile to initiating and escalating conversation, maintaining a connection, and de-escalating the relationship. The benefits of studying Tinder are many, including understanding users' motivations for choosing Tinder, tactics for users' self-presentation of profiles, if and how users engage in deception, strategies for successfully initiating and developing conversation, how hyperpersonal experiences can hasten the stages of relationship development but also lead to disappointment when meeting offline partners, and how the large pool of users and nature of CMC influence the stages of dissolution. The main questions that will be explored include: What are Tinder users' motivations for using the app? How do Tinder users create their profile? What criteria are important to Tinder users regarding swiping on other users? How do users initiate and develop relationships, maintain them, and dissolve them via Tinder? How does computer-mediated communication and hyperpersonal experiences influence the cycle of a relationship on Tinder?

The researcher employed a qualitative approach to gain rich information and understanding regarding Tinder users' experiences, including their communication on the

app as well as their romantic and sexual experiences with other Tinder users. Thirty-one participants shared their experiences during individual, semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for flexibility in the data collection, but also continuity because each participant was asked the same core set of questions (Bernard, 2002). The researcher approached coding from a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) perspective, where participants' experiences guided the research and allowed themes to emerge (Charmaz, 1996). To analyze data, the researcher performed open, axial, and selective coding, meaning the participants' discourse was organized into categories and then collapsed into themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Results impart insight into the life cycle of romantic relationships initiated on Tinder and how the nature of CMC has affected romantic experiences on LBDAs.

The following chapter (Chapter 2: Literature Review) provides an extensive overview of the relevant literature on computer-mediated communication (CMC), interpersonal relationship development, and online dating and apps. Chapter 3 (Methods) outlines the methods and coding of data. Chapter 4 (Results) details the findings from the interviews, and finally, Chapter 5 (Discussion) explains the significance of the study, interprets the results and how they add to the literature, and reviews limitations of the study and suggestions for future directions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation explores how romantic relationships on Tinder escalate, are maintained, and de-escalate. The researcher took a qualitative approach using grounded theory to discover relevant themes that emerged regarding Tinder and the life cycle of romantic relationships. Although this research did not test theories, this chapter presents a review of theories that can assist in understanding technologically mediated romantic relationships. Therefore, concepts that are pertinent to review include computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the stages of a romantic relationship. This chapter begins with addressing the nature of CMC through three different perspectives (cues-filtered-out, cues-filtered-in, and hyperpersonal), and reviews the history and relevant studies regarding online dating, as well as mobile dating apps. Knapp's Relational Stage Model is also introduced to explore relationship development, maintenance, and dissolution. Finally, the main study is presented and the research questions are proposed.

Romantic Relationships

While scholars have been interested in studying romantic relationships for decades, it was not the focus for very early communication research (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2014). Communication researchers first focused on speech communication as it related to politics and mass communication in the 1950s, but a decade later many scholars recognized that most communication occurs within small groups or in one-on-one settings (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2014). In the 1970s, communication scholars began to focus on interpersonal communication as a phenomenon they wished to understand, and by the 1980s relational communication emerged as scholars examined

close relationships (platonic and romantic) (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2014).

Researchers have approached romantic and sexual relationships from many different angles in the field of communication. For example, romantic relationship research has focused on interpersonal aspects such as communication strategies of reducing uncertainty in romantic relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Health communication has been another focus of romance studies. Burke and Segrin (2014) produced an article in the journal *Health Communication* on communication between romantic partners about exercise and diet and the impact of those perceptions on the couple's health behaviors. Mass communication researchers have examined romantic relationships as well, including how television viewing impacts marital satisfaction (Osborn, 2012) and how media affect people's perception of their ideal romantic relationship (Ribarsky, 2014). Finally, scholars studying computer-mediated communication (CMC) have also been interested in romance research, particularly the effects of technology on romantic relationships. Because of the ever-changing technology, exploring romantic relationships from the perspective of CMC has been popular as of late. Studies have reported on new media platforms such as Facebook and romantic jealousy (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Muscanell, Guadagno, Rice, & Murphy, 2013; Marshall, Bejanyan, Castro, & Lee, 2013), privacy management and disclosure while dating online (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2009), and the uses and gratifications of dating apps, such as Grindr (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). The goal of the current study is to add to the growing body of knowledge on romantic relationships within new media research by focusing on romantic relationships formed on the unique platform, Tinder. Therefore, studies on computer-mediated research (CMC) will be presented in the

following section in connection with their relevance to the current study on the life cycle of romantic relationships on Tinder.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is defined as “synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are relayed from senders’ computers to receivers” (Walther, 1992, p. 52). More recently, videoconferencing (e.g. Skype) has been added to the category of CMC, which was previously described as text-based (Kappas & Krämer, 2011). With the widespread use of and easy access to webcams (in computers) and video conferencing on smart phones (e.g. FaceTime on iPhones), technologically mediated face-to-face communication is now a part of CMC (Walther, 2011). Plainly stated, CMC includes communicating over e-mail, instant messaging, computer chat services, text messaging, synchronous audio/video services, and other forms of online communication. Research in the field of communication has been exploring CMC for roughly three decades. Culnan and Markus (1987) were among the first to examine CMC. In their article, they explored the impacts of new media on organizational communication; the same concepts can be applied to interpersonal/relational communication. Culnan and Markus (1987) predicted that new media would have similar effects as when traditional media (e.g. telephone) were first introduced. The telephone took away the need to be physically close to one another to communicate synchronously, thus transforming the way many people experienced interpersonal communication. Just as the telephone and other technologies transformed communication when they were first introduced, CMC has also affected communication and has changed the way in which relationships are formed. A few

aspects that were explored with CMC as it applies to interpersonal communication were whether or not it was appropriate to use for personal communication and how intimate of a medium it could be. CMC was first labeled an impersonal medium when research begun in the 1980s and was seen as being effective for transmitting simple, task-related information, but not as effective for interpersonal communication or group decision-making (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Walther & Parks, 2002). However, as time progressed, so did our understanding of the nature of CMC. Joseph B. Walther, a communication scholar who is recognized for his large body of CMC research, presented new perspectives regarding the intimacy levels that could be achieved via CMC. He introduced the cues-filtered-in perspective as well as hyperpersonal communication and challenged the assumptions that communicating via technology is always less personal than face-to-face methods (Walther, 1996). A review of the evolution of CMC as it relates to romantic relationships is presented in the following section.

Cues-Filtered-Out Perspective

Early CMC research explored what type of communication (e.g. for business purposes, tasks, personal use, etc.) was effective through the medium, how intimate the communication could be, and if it was appropriate for interpersonal communication. One of the biggest areas of debate regarding CMC and romantic relationships was the intimacy of the medium (Walther, 1996). Researchers have defined CMC as being anywhere from impersonal (Culnan & Markus, 1987) to personal (Walther, 1996) and even hyperpersonal (Walther, 1996). Early research on CMC suggested that it was an impersonal medium because of reduced cues, such as a lack of nonverbal cues (Culnan & Markus, 1987). Culnan and Markus (1987) defined this perspective as cues-filtered-out.

Cues refer to nonverbal signals that are given during face-to-face communication that are reduced or absent during CMC. Nonverbal cues play a significant role in how people send and perceive messages interpersonally (Walther & Parks, 2002) and give clues about a communicator; notably, nonverbal cues assist in how we see others, help us to understand how partners decode a message, and give insight into the truthfulness of another person (Culnan & Markus, 1987).

To further understand this theory in connection with interpersonal communication, it is easiest to compare online situations with their face-to-face counterparts. An e-mail message does not contain the same kinds of nonverbal cues as a face-to-face message. Although CMC can contain nonverbal cues such as exclamation points or capital letters to show excitement or anger depending on the context, there are still fewer cues than a face-to-face interaction. Additionally, online cues can be difficult to decipher and easy to misinterpret. Even in circumstances where CMC includes video capabilities, eye contact does not mirror that of face-to-face communication and there is often lag time or misplacement of cameras. Therefore, this viewpoint suggests that face-to-face communication always trumps CMC in categories of personal and social communication because of the importance of cues only found in face-to-face communication (Walther, 1996).

As one of the earlier theories on CMC, the cues-filtered-out perspective has not continued to receive support by many CMC researchers (Walther & Parks, 2002) because the variable of elapsed time communicating online was not taken in to consideration. In given time, communication can be as personal online as it is in person (Walther & Parks, 2002). A more widely used framework of CMC is the Social Information Processing

(SIP) perspective which considers the idea of cues-filtered-in. The cues-filtered-in approach to CMC presents a more positive connection of mediated communication as it is used within romantic relationships and is mentioned in most articles regarding computer-mediated romance. This perspective will be addressed in the next section.

Social Information Processing (SIP) Perspective

Though the cues-filtered-out perspective labels CMC as impersonal, the Social Information Processing (SIP) view offers a different thesis that proposes CMC can be an effective platform for interpersonal communication in due time (Walther, 1996). This perspective rejects the notion that fewer cues always equal impersonal communication. Instead, the cues-filtered-in view suggests that time is a key factor in gaining interpersonal closeness through mediated channels (Walther & Parks, 2002). Cues still exist online, however it takes a longer time to process those cues (Walther & Parks, 2002). Face-to-face conversations are synchronous, which allow the communicators to interpret and make meaning of cues while engaged in their discussion. In a face-to-face synchronous conversation, receivers can interpret senders' cues and instantly derive meaning from the message. Asynchronous CMC involves reading senders' messages, processing them, and then sending their own (Walther & Parks, 2002), a process that arguably takes longer than face-to-face communication.

From the SIP perspective, the number of communicative exchanges used in face-to-face communication and CMC are not vastly different; however, the rate at which social exchanges are made differs (Walther, 1996). Walther and Parks (2002) proposed that when time is restricted, CMC would be impersonal. Impersonal communication is characterized by lack of nonverbal cues from a sender and lack of nonverbal feedback

from a receiver, making the messages unemotional (Kim, 2003). But, when time is not an issue, those engaged in CMC would be able to develop their relationships to reach the same personal levels as face-to-face communication, simply at a slower rate (Kim, 2003). Walther (1996) was quick to note that this does not mean all relationships developed over CMC will become friendly because not all face-to-face relationships reach that level either. Walther's (1996) main argument is that the same opportunities to strengthen a relationship are in CMC as with face-to-face communication as long as there is an allowance for sufficient message exchange.

Not only does the cues-filtered-in approach assert that the same levels of personal exchange as face-to-face communication can be reached, this point of view also offers different stances on the role of nonverbal cues. Walther and Parks (2002) put forth the idea that those participating in CMC can either place more emphasis on the cues that do exist or use other cues that would serve as alternatives to face-to-face cues. First, the aforementioned authors state that time stamps can give important cues with CMC. The amount of time that passes before a receiver writes back to a sender can indicate the receiver's level of interest. For example, receiving a quick reply at night for social messages can display more affection than that of a slow reply (Walther & Parks, 2002). People using dating apps may place a greater emphasis on the cues that are available to them, such as how quickly a person responds to their message, how long their conversations are, and any nonverbal cues placed in chat messages they may receive.

Second, to address substitute cues, emoticons, described as “graphic representations of facial expressions” (Walther & D’Addario, 2001, p. 324) can be used in an effort to display nonverbal communication and emotions that typically are noticed

during face-to-face interactions. However, Walther and D'Addario (2001) challenged the notion of emoticons being categorized as "nonverbal behaviors," and asserted that emoticons are not literally nonverbal communication due to intentionality. Nonverbal behavior is thought of as something that is less controllable than placing a smiley face into a conversation via email (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). When speaking face-to-face, people may not realize they begin to smile or cannot control the blood that may rush to their face when they are embarrassed. Emoticons do not spontaneously occur, but are more deliberate; most people do not type a smiley face unintentionally (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). Empirically, Walther and D'Addario (2001) performed an experiment using emoticons and found that the use of emoticons did not significantly influence the interpretation of a written message, perhaps because they are so common and even overused. The authors suggested that emoticons may serve as verbal components rather than nonverbal behavior and stand for social norms of conversations, in the same way that, "How are you?" is inserted into social conversations not in order to receive a surprising answer, but as a function of an everyday interaction (Walther & D'Addario, 2001).

The cues-filtered-in approach presents CMC as capable of being a personal medium, which can effectively be used for romantic relationship communication; the hyperpersonal perspective (Walther, 1996) expands this perspective to another level of intimacy. Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal perspective is reviewed next, as it relates to online dating research.

Hyperpersonal Perspective

A third approach to understanding CMC within interpersonal communication is the hyperpersonal perspective by Walther (1996). As one of the more popular CMC theories, it challenged previous stances on the level of intimacy that can be achieved online. Unlike the cues-filtered-out point of view, Walther (1996) contended that CMC is rarely impersonal. The hyperpersonal outlook of CMC suggests that interactions through CMC can go beyond face-to-face communication in terms of levels of emotion and affection conveyed and can ultimately be the more desirable of the two (Walther, 1996).

Although not a study on CMC, early research by Stafford and Reske (1990) exploring idealization in long-distance romantic couples, can provide an understanding of the beginnings of the hyperpersonal perspective. The authors noted that in long-distance romantic relationships, communication could occur differently than face-to-face, geographically proximate romantic relationships (Stafford & Reske, 1990). For example, communication can differ in both quantity and quality. Long-distance couples do not have the opportunity to communicate as their geographically close counterparts would. Next, the quality of the communication is limited (e.g. telephone conversations), which does not give communicators the opportunity to convey as many nonverbal gestures as they would in face-to-face scenarios. Stafford and Reske (1990) hypothesized that because of their seemingly limited communication, long-distance couples had idealized notions of their partner because they would focus on the limited, and likely more positive, interactions they did have. Findings revealed long-distance couples communicated less than geographically close couples and also used the channels of the telephone and the

written letter more than their geographically close counterparts. Results also suggested that long-distance relationships are more idealized than geographically close ones, with long-distance couples stating they had a higher satisfaction rate with communication and with their relationship overall (Stafford & Reske, 1990).

While the previous evidence suggested hyperpersonal experiences within long-distance dating relationships, the hyperpersonal viewpoint is mainly applied to CMC. As the Internet became more popular by the 1990s, research discovered that users were able to develop relationships, both platonic and romantic that were unpredictably personal via this new medium (Walther & Parks, 2002). For example, Chester and Gwynne (1998) conducted one of the earliest studies examining the hyperpersonal perspective. Their research delved into online teaching and online environments created between students. The authors found that students shared more content online, were more confident sharing information, and formed more positive impressions of others in the class compared with face-to-face environments. This can be attributed to the fact that students could carefully select their words online, so they felt less pressure giving an answer as compared with face-to-face contributions. Also, students formed more friendly impressions of each other online, supporting the hyperpersonal perspective that suggests interactions online can be as friendly or more friendly than the face-to-face parallel. Walther (2007) described how this could be accomplished by stating, “CMC users take advantage of the interface and channel characteristics that CMC offers in a dynamic fashion in order to enhance their relational outcomes” (p. 2540). Users take advantage of the element of time online. When crafting a message, users do not need to answer immediately as they do in synchronous, face-to-face conversations. Because they do not feel pressure to

answer immediately, users feel more comfortable and confident communicating online and are able to craft their ideal message. The characteristics of the medium and what the sender and receiver can do within that channel contribute to hyperpersonal experiences. Walther (1996) specifically proposed four components (sender, receiver, channel, and feedback) that influence the nature of online communication, and potentially create hyperpersonal experiences. These four elements are reviewed in the upcoming sections.

Sender: selective self-presentation. Creating an image traces back to the work of Goffman (1959a) who stated an important part of socializing is “the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealized in several different ways” (p. 53). He went on to say that people simply “put on a show” (Goffman, 1959b, p. 17). Therefore, it is not surprising that those who are searching for a mate will make an effort to put forth a first impression of themselves that highlights their best features.

Senders of messages via CMC and creators of online profiles have the ability to tailor the presentation of themselves (Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007) that could attribute to hyperpersonal communication. Anything from the photograph they choose, to the words they use to describe themselves in their biography can be tailored to their liking, giving them an opportunity to reveal what they want about their personality and physical appearance. Therefore, the manner in which people present themselves online can differ greatly from their face-to-face actual self (Walther, 1996). The information a person chooses to share as well as their physical appearance can be tailored to meet their ideal presentation of themselves (Walther, 1996; Bonebrake, 2002). Participants of CMC arguably have greater control over their self-presentation than they would in a face-to-face setting because CMC can be carefully crafted and edited (Walter, 1996; Corriero &

Tong, 2016), suggesting that online communicators tend to only reveal positive information. Online profiles can be compared to resumes in which the person only highlights their greatest features (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009).

While the original works of Walther (1996) focused more so on the textual elements of self-presentation, Hancock and Toma (2009) added to this idea of selective presentation by incorporating visual elements and connecting them with hyperpersonal experiences. An online profile can feature a photograph of someone cropped to only contain her most flattering features and may be manipulated and enhanced using software. In a face-to-face setting, that person could still wear makeup and a flattering outfit, but other features would be on display that could possibly be hidden via CMC. Relating to Tinder, users' profile pictures can easily be manipulated. The owner of a profile chooses which pictures they want to share and how many. They also can enhance them with filters with a few easy clicks of a button on most any smart phone. Filters are able to change the brightness or shades on the photo, which in turn can make the person look more physically appealing.

Connecting with romantic relationships online, Hancock and Toma (2009) expand upon this notion by stating that online daters could use the nature of the Internet to their full advantage by enhancing their physical features in photographs because physical attractiveness is a quality that many look for in a mate. Furthermore, with online dating, the photograph is often the deciding factor as to whether the remainder of a person's profile will be viewed and the person will be contacted (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Two aspects can be altered to affect the accuracy of the self-presentation of a photograph online: physical characteristics and photographic processes (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Physical aspects include the age of the photograph, professional use of a photographer, professional makeup and hair styling, and flattering angles and poses to name a few (Hancock & Toma, 2009). The photograph can be manipulated especially due to the easily accessible and simple-to-use software such as Adobe Photoshop (Hancock & Toma, 2009). People can alter their image by using tools to whiten their teeth, make their body appear to be slimmer, airbrush their acne, and to make their hair shinier (Hancock & Toma, 2009). In their study, Hancock & Toma (2009) tested self-presentation in online dating photographs and found that most online daters rated their profile photograph as being accurate, but independent judges disagreed, with women having photographs that were judged as even more inaccurate than men's. Hancock and Toma's (2009) study adds to Walther's (1996) idea of selective self-presentation in text and extends it to visuals, such as photographs in online dating profiles. Because profiles contain both text and visuals, both may be manipulated to the profile owner's satisfaction of creating their ideal self.

Several studies provide support for the selective self-presentation aspect of the hyperpersonal perspective. First, interviewees from a study assessing the positive and negative aspects of finding friends online stated that they were able to deceive others online and could present themselves in a manner that did not match with reality (Henderson & Gilding, 2004). Second, Duthler's (2006) study using politeness theory illustrated support for the hyperpersonal model, particularly in regards to selective self-presentation. Because a person can take more time crafting an email as opposed to a voicemail, Duthler (2006) hypothesized that email messages would be more polite than voicemails. This notion was corroborated by the data, thus supporting the hyperpersonal

perspective, where people take advantage of the opportunity to carefully craft their words. A third example comes from a study by Walther (2007), where participants who were communicating online to opposite sex partners in a similar age group edited their messages more closely in order to selectively craft their words. Finally, and specifically related to online dating, survey research investigating deception with online daters showed that men manipulated their age and personal interests and women were more likely to misrepresent their physical features, like weight (Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010). This research highlights a particular facet of hyperpersonal communication: the ability to selectively self-present one's image.

While people do have the ability to edit and alter their information and photographs online, Corriero and Tong (2016) postulate that online daters using LBDAs are less likely to manipulate their information because the likelihood of meeting face-to-face is expected to occur soon. This idea should be explored because few if any studies have addressed this issue with Tinder, yet the results could yield practical insight into hyperpersonal communication, specifically with the originator of the message. Because this dissertation is assessing all stages of a romantic relationship, how a sender uses Tinder in the beginning stages of a relationship (e.g. to attract a partner) will yield information about self-presentation regarding photographs, written portions of profiles, and messages to other users.

While the sender plays a key role in potential hyperpersonal communication, so does the receiver. The next section reviews research on receivers and how they can contribute to hyperpersonal communication.

Receiver. The next component of hyperpersonal communication is the role of the receiver. Unlike face-to-face communication where individuals can assess the entire situation (e.g. the setting in which the person is in, the person's friends around him, his nonverbal communication while speaking and listening, etc.), a receiver interprets fewer cues online (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009). One study found that people using online matchmaking websites relied mostly on the information that was available in the other person's short biography to make decisions about that user's personality (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009). This leads people who receive messages in CMC to idealize the sender of the message (Walther, 1996), thus creating inaccurate cognitions about their partner.

Walther (1996) stated that CMC could lead people to fill in information they do not have, based on the limited cues they do have; this leads to an "overattribution process" (p. 18). In this process, communicators take the cues they are given about their partner and they use it to make "stereotypical impressions" of the other person, which are not necessarily warranted (Walther, 1996, p. 18). If a person has poor style and grammar in their written description of their profile, they may automatically be deemed unintelligent (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009). Researchers have tested this hypothesis with online dating, where one study interviewed users of matchmaking websites to find that respondents overattributed certain traits of others due to limited cues and filled in missing knowledge about the other person (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009). One participant said that if a female did not respond in a timely manner, then he assumed she was uninterested in him romantically (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009). He focused on the specific cue of timeliness, ignoring other potential cues such as the content of the messages that were sent. Other participants decided that users with only one profile

photo or blurry photos were hiding something physically and should be avoided (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009).

Although the previous findings were from a study on matchmaking websites, quite easily, this can be applied to online dating apps. Regarding Tinder, those browsing others' profiles and beginning to chat with potential matches could lead to hyperpersonal experiences on the receivers' end. Users swiping left or right are likely going to make a quick decision based on the photograph of another, stereotyping them as "unintelligent," "ugly," or "slutty." There is limited information on each person's profile that could lead a user to fill in the blanks about that person's personality and physical attributes. Even through chatting, a receiver can idealize the sender's message because the sender was able to carefully craft it. Furthermore, because of the limited cues communicated via CMC (in this case, text-based chat through the Tinder app itself), a receiver often glorifies certain information and fantasizes about a person being perfect.

The sender and receiver play significant roles in this process of hyperpersonal experiences. Because participants in this dissertation will have been both a sender and a receiver of messages, this study will look into how they have communicated as a sender and how they have interpreted others' messages as the role of receiver. Insight will be gained regarding if and how they are experiencing hyperpersonal communication on Tinder from the perspective of the sender and the receiver of messages on this dating app. While the sender and the receiver are important components of understanding hyperpersonal communication, the channel itself also has specific attributes that can lead to hyperpersonal experiences online.

Channel. Besides the sender and the receiver, the channel also plays a significant role in hyperpersonal experiences. There is far greater control over message creation in CMC than in face-to-face communication (Walther & Parks, 2002). Walther (2007) presents four key characteristics of the channel used in CMC that lends itself to the hyperpersonal perspective.

First, the message can be malleable, as was indicated in the sender section. CMC allows a user to modify a message several times before sending (Walther, 2007), but with face-to-face communication, the medium does not create an opportunity for a speaker to edit a message. Those initiating conversation via Tinder are able to create, edit, delete, and mull over sentences before they send them. This is significant because a sender may not be a great communicator in-person, but can spend extra time to choose the perfect words online. However, this tactic can lead to disappointing offline meetings. Offline, the sender is not able to craft perfect messages and edit them before sending, thus violating the receiver's expectations about the sender's communication skills and personality.

Second, CMC can allow for asynchronous communication whereas face-to-face communication is synchronous. Time is of the essence for face-to-face conversations, as awkward silence may occur if a sender spends too much time crafting a message in her head. For asynchronous CMC, a user can spend more time editing a message and re-reading it before sending (Walther, 2007). Walther, Slovacek, and Tidwell (2001) found support for this concept in their study of perceptions of others in long-term and short-term communication groups, with and without photographs. The long-term groups with no photographs yielded more intimacy, attraction, and social attractiveness than the

groups with photographs and the short-term conversations. Additionally, a study by Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) found that as time increased, online romantic partners idealized notions of the other, thus experiencing hyperpersonal communication. Specifically, users relied on the most desirable communication or cues from the other person. Because additional cues were unavailable online, they had no information or nonverbal cues to disprove their idealized theories.

A third element of the channel that contributes to the hyperpersonal perspective is a writer's ability to craft her messages apart from the intended receiver (Walther, 2007). A sender is physically distant from the person to whom they are typing during an online conversation. Most if not all nonverbal behavior can be masked because of this facet of online communication. Like the previously mentioned characteristics of CMC, this element gives users greater control over how they present themselves. With face-to-face interactions, a person may knowingly or unconsciously be fidgeting, not maintaining eye contact, stuttering, blushing, or smirking while speaking to someone. These behaviors can be interpreted by the receiver and can add to the meaning of the message. In text-based computer-mediated interactions, a sender has more control over what they present, and if they choose to add in nonverbal communication, such as an emoji, the sender can choose to do so with intent.

A final trait of the medium leading to hyperpersonal communication is described by Walther (2007) as "the reallocation of cognitive resources from environmental scanning and nonverbal management toward message composition" (p. 2541). Environmental scanning is defined as activities occurring in face-to-face communication where a person is aware of their physical environment, attuned to the nonverbal

communication of the other person, and assessing the other person's feedback.

Nonverbal management means being aware of one's nonverbal communication while another is speaking. Finally, message composition is the process of crafting a message to send to another. All of this occurs while a person is trying to actively listen or attempting to craft a message to send. Walther (2007) argued that this is not paralleled in CMC because more of the focus is message creation or decoding in asynchronous interaction. Likewise, nonverbal management is also not as prevalent in CMC. When speaking to someone else, a person may be thinking about how close they are standing to another person, their eye contact, where their hands are, and much more. Similarly, while receiving a message, a person will likely be considering how she is reacting nonverbally to the message. Walther (1996) argued that because in CMC there is no need to provide cues such as nodding to indicate active listening, smiling while another is speaking, or holding in one's stomach to appear skinnier, more time is spent on the language and message creation.

Computer-mediated interactions that do not occur synchronously, such as on Tinder, and which do not include video can permit communicators to put more of their effort toward message encoding and decoding (Walther, 2007). Overall, Walther argues that because people are not spending time being aware of their surroundings and monitoring their own nonverbal behavior in a synchronous manner, more energy can be directed toward crafting their message to send and interpreting others' messages. The sole focus of message creation in online environments can lead one to edit in order to craft their ideal message, which is significantly different than what people experience

during face-to-face conversations. Again, people could be creating their ideal self, which may be skewing their “real self,” thus leading to hyperpersonal communication.

Feedback. Finally, the concept of feedback is instrumental in creating hyperpersonal communication. Walther (2007) posits that CMC can lead users to experience feedback loops, where “exaggerated expectancies are confirmed and reciprocated through mutual interaction via the bias-prone communication processes” (p. 2539). Walther & Parks (2002) theorize that the feedback portion of this model creates “self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 541). To expand upon this idea, Walther and Parks (2002) explained that senders carefully craft their messages, which are received by a partner who then returns an equally selective message. Partners then continue to communicate in ways that fulfill exaggerated expectations that have come to be the norm in CMC. Applying this idea to dating apps, unrealistic back and forth communication can easily exist through Tinder where users may be participating in such feedback loops.

Regarding the hyperpersonal perspective, Walther (1996) argued that when people believe their communication with another may be long-term (e.g. online dating), “CMC is no less personal than FtF” (p. 33). The hyperpersonal experience can exceed relational impressions we develop in face-to-face environments in terms of first impressions and self-presentation maintenance (Walther, 1996) and can elicit more self-disclosure from participants as compared to face-to-face situations (Chester & Gwynne, 1998; Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Sukovic, 2007). Finally, it is necessary to consider that although CMC can be defined as impersonal, interpersonal, or hyperpersonal, it is ultimately up to the user to take control of the medium and use the nature of medium as ranging from impersonal to hyperpersonal (Walther, 1996).

It is clear that research on hyperpersonal experiences is important considering the vast amount of studies that have used this theory to explore online dating and developing friendships via CMC (Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010; Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2009; Walther, 2007). It is also clear that researchers should continue to explore this area. The current research explores romantic relationships via Tinder and how they escalate, are maintained, and de-escalate, and will include questions about how the hyperpersonal perspective affects a person's experience of each stage of a romantic relationship on Tinder. Few, if any, previous studies have looked into users' experiences of the personal or impersonal nature of CMC via Tinder, yet the results could yield useful insight into how hyperpersonal experiences affect the stages of a relationship via LBDAs.

Online Dating

After discussing the spectrum of personal experiences people can have through communicating online by exploring cues-filtered-out, cues-filtered-in, and the hyperpersonal perspective, the following sections summarize research related to dating through traditional matchmaking websites and dating through mobile apps.

The first matchmaking website, Match.com, launched in 1995 with mission to “help singles find the kind of relationships they’re looking for” (Match.com, 2016, About Match.com section, para. 2). The site operates by having users create a profile with biographical information and photographs. Next, users select criteria that are important to them in a potential mate and browse their matches; they then select with whom to communicate using the website's own messaging system. Another widely popular dating service, eHarmony.com, prides itself on using research to remain current on the

most successful matching algorithms. They claim high success rates and state that they are the most trusted online dating website. According to their official website, over 400 couples marry in the United States because they were matched through eHarmony.com (eHarmony Inc., 2016).

Match.com and eHarmony.com are services that users pay to gain access to, while other popular dating websites are free. POF.com (Plenty of Fish) declares it is the largest free online dating site, with an average of 3 million people using the site each day (Plentyoffish Media, 2016). The organization claims it is so popular that every person knows someone who has found a match using their service (Plentyoffish Media, 2016). Another popular service is OkCupid.com, which uses mathematic formulas to match others free of cost. They also openly state that users can look for any type of relationship on their site, not just one that is long-term (OkCupid, 2015).

While the above services offer matchmaking to a general audience, others target more specific demographics. One of the most popular specialized dating sites is ChristianMingle.com, whose popular slogan is to “Find God’s Match for You” (Spark Networks USA, 2016). Other demographically-oriented sites include FarmersOnly.com, designed for country folk, GlutenfreeSingles.com, where people with similar food preferences can meet, and Vampersonals.com, an online dating platform for gothic people.

Many of the popular dating sites mentioned above also have their services available on apps so people can access their matches through mobile methods. Although many of the traditional dating services are now available on a user’s phone, a new type of dating service has emerged using global positioning system (GPS) technology. These

apps allow users to be aware of singles that are geographically close to them, and have revolutionized the dating industry once again. Current research on the GPS-enabled dating apps is reviewed in the upcoming section.

Location-Based Dating Applications (LBDAs)

A current platform for finding romantic partners is found on smart phones, with one in ten Americans ages 25-34 years reporting the use of a mobile dating app (Smith & Duggan, 2013). These dating apps are referred to by several different descriptions: people-nearby applications (PNAs) (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Corriero & Tong, 2016), location-aware mobile applications (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Licoppe, Riviere & Morel, 2015), location-based real-time dating (LBRTD) app (Birnholtz et al., 2014), location-based social networks (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014), location-based mobile apps (Grosskopf et al., 2014), location-based dating or satellite, mobile, and GPS dating (Quiroz, 2013), mobile dating applications (Corriero & Tong, 2016), location-based mobile dating applications (Corriero & Tong, 2016), and geosocial networking applications (GSN apps) (Beymer et al., 2014; Lehmillier & loergre, 2014; Grosskopf, LaVasseur & Glaser, 2014; Holloway, Dunlap, del Pino, Hermanstynne, Pulsipher, & Landovitz, 2014; Goedel & Duncan, 2015; Holloway, Rice, Gibbs, Winetrobe, Dunlap, & Rhoades, 2014). Because most of these descriptions contain the word “location,” this study will refer to these types of dating apps as location-based dating apps (LBDAs). Although there is a plethora of dating apps users can choose from (e.g. OKCupid, POF, Zoosk, Jack’d, Skout, Hinge) the most popular LBDA is Tinder, boasting 9 billion matches worldwide (Google Play, 2015a). For gay men, bisexuals, and curious males to find dating partners, the most widely used LBDA is Grindr, which has a setup similar to

Tinder (Google Play, 2015b). Both LBDA's are rated mature/17+ on the Google App store and while a user must be 18 years of age or older to join Grindr, a person only needs to be at least 13 years of age to use Tinder's services. Both Tinder and Grindr will be defined and discussed in the next paragraphs.

Grindr. According to its official website, Grindr made its debut in 2009 and is currently "the world's largest social networking app for gay, bi, curious and queer men, with millions of daily users spanning almost every country in every corner of the planet" (Grindr, 2017, About section, para. 1). Grindr users can create an account by using an email address and then providing the following optional information and content: name, photograph, and biographical facts (Grindr, 2017). Users can then begin to chat with others on the app. Grindr markets itself as being easier to use than traditional dating sites because users do not have to answer extensive questions in order to be matched with other users. Grindr's (2017) mission is to connect men so they are no longer using the app and are chatting face to face. An upgraded version (Grindr Extra) is available for a fee that provides an ad-free app and gives users the ability to load more profiles at once (Grindr, 2017).

Tinder. Tinder is the leading LBDA with "26 million matches made every day" (Google Play, 2015a). It is a free app that is quick and easy to use and also like Grindr, does not feature a list of psychological questions that need to be completed in order to set up a profile. Once the app is downloaded to a smart phone, a new user can link his or her Facebook to Tinder in order to create an account. Once a new Tinder user chooses which photographs to display and creates a short bio, he or she can choose which sex they are interested in and the distance (in miles) the user wishes to receive potential matches (i.e.

receive matches within 10 miles, 20 miles, 30 miles of current location, etc.). Upon completion of the initial set up, Tinder users can then browse others' profiles by looking at their photographs, biography, and mutual friends. When making a decision on each profile that is shown, a user can swipe left, right, or up: a left swipe indicates no interest in that person, a right swipe communicates interest, and a swipe upward is considered a "Super Like," which shows that a user is very interested in another user. When two profiles match, the users are able to chat with each other within the app. Users can send text to each other through the app and are now able to also send GIFs. Like Grindr, an enhanced version of Tinder is available for a fee; this upgraded version, TinderPlus, gives users the ability to be matched with others worldwide and to go back to a previous swipe to change a decision (Google Play, 2015a).

Three selling points of the app are highlighted on Tinder's official website: "you can control who can message you, it's more than meets the eye, and there's no pressure, no rejection" (Tinder, 2015, p. 1). First, users do not need to be bothered by people they are not interested in. By only allowing users to connect when both indicate interest, this filters out any potential to receive a message from someone to whom a user is not attracted. Second, Tinder states the matching is not just made from physical photographs of users, but that those on Tinder are able to look at another's biography and read his or her fun facts before deciding if they would like to connect. Finally, Tinder's website emphasizes the fact that people do not need to feel rejected if they do not match with another user because the swipes are anonymous until a match is made (Tinder, 2015).

Romantic and Sexual Relationships Formed via LBDAs

Although not explicitly stated by either company, Grindr and Tinder are culturally-known as being hook up apps, and can be used for finding casual sex partners (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Seefeldt, 2014; Corriero & Tong, 2016; James, 2015). Although hooking up is a phrase that is commonly used in young people's vernacular to describe sexual acts, it is not concretely defined universally (Fielder, Walsh, Carey & Carey, 2014). Fifty percent of respondents from one study described hooking up as having sex with someone, about 33% stated that it could include any sexual activity, while 9% said hooking up means kissing and touching sexually (Holman & Sillars, 2012). When an online profile states "not looking for a hookup" or "just here to hook up," users may be interpreting that vague phrase very differently.

Visually, these apps lend themselves to being defined as hook up apps. The Grindr app preview on Google Play shows the interface with all shirtless male users but with the disclaimer that "photos depicting nudity or sex acts are strictly prohibited" (Google Play, 2015b). Tinder is similarly known as a place to go to find a casual romantic partner, although its website promotes it as a place for committed relationships. Featured stories on the Tinder (2015) website show the following headlines: "He used Tinder to propose to me," "He proposed after a helicopter ride," and "He told me I was a girl he would drive two and a half hours to meet." Both websites for the apps have a "safety" tab that includes information on how to meet someone safely in person, but neither mentions anything about sexual safety aside from Grindr alluding to the importance of sexual consent, by stating "you always have the right to say 'no' and have it respected" (Grindr, 2017).

While hearsay depicts these apps as places to find a quick sexual partner, there is also evidence to back up these claims. Previous research supports the idea that these LBDA's are used to find non-committal sexual partners (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Grosskopf et al., 2014; Licoppe, Riviere, & Morel, 2015; Holloway et al., 2014), with Licoppe et al. (2015) proclaiming, "casual hook-ups still remain the dominant orientation of Grindr users" (p. 6). A study on the uses and gratifications of Grindr found that the top four reasons their sample used Grindr was for socializing, sex (hooking up), entertainment, and romantic partnership (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). Additionally, a third of the sample from Goedel and Duncan's (2015) study engaged with others on the app to find a sexual partner.

Consequently, much of the research on Grindr focuses on health risks of hooking up with someone via the LBDA (Beymer et al., 2014; Lehmler & Loerger, 2014). Beymer et al. (2014) found that MSM (men who have sex with men) who use LBDA's to find sexual partners were more likely to test positive for chlamydia trachomatis and gonorrhea as opposed to those participants who located partners via in-person or Internet networking. Another study examined health outcomes with 112 MSM which showed 77% of participants having a Grindr profile, but more interestingly, app users had more recent sexual encounters and were twice as likely to have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) compared to non-app users (Lehmler & Loerger, 2014).

Although fewer Tinder-specific studies exist compared to Grindr within the communication literature, it is also known as a hook up app (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Seefeldt, 2014; Corriero & Tong, 2016), with instances of users writing specifically about seeking a hook up in their profile and others experiencing these

romantic acts. One story written about Tinder use describes men's use of the app for quick, casual sex (Sales, 2015). One participant said that because the sample is so large on Tinder compared to in-person methods, a person has a better chance of finding people who will agree to hook up (Sales, 2015). Other users describe hooking up with someone from the app to be easy and an ego booster (Sales, 2015). Finally, a master's thesis explored the motivations for Tinder users, and results showed that casual sex was a reason for using the app, although entertainment, passing time, and relaxing were rated as more important motivations for using the app than casual sex (Ligtenberg, 2015).

While research suggests that people may be using LBDAs to find a hook up partner, there is also reason to believe that hyperpersonal experiences online could play a part in couples hooking up quickly. Corroborating the concepts of hyperpersonal communication, a similar idea coined "online disinhibitions," suggests that people feel less restricted in online environments for several reasons (Suler, 2004). In line with the hyperpersonal model and the focus on the medium's channel, Suler (2004) states that the asynchronous nature of online communication allowed for lowered inhibitions. First, asynchronous communication, often used in online dating sites and apps, allows one to be less inhibited because they are not reacting in real-time to another's nonverbal feedback. Next, just like a person may partake in offline daydreaming and imagine they are flirting with a romantic interest, online communication can lead one to project these types of fantasies because just like daydreaming, the online world can be a safer place to explore these thoughts than in face-to-face reality (Suler, 2004). Furthermore, one study suggests that in the absence of certain gatekeeping features in FtF settings (e.g., not approaching someone because you do not know their relationship status, or fearing that they are in a

different social class than you), online communicators are more likely to approach one another and develop relationships compared to face-to-face settings (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Overall, there is reason to believe that Tinder users can experience interactions that lead to disinhibitions and thus users hook up faster than they might in similar face-to-face situations. These concepts will be explored in this study.

While even the executives behind Tinder agree that some people are on the app to find a hook up, other researchers and users believe most are on the app in order to match with someone for more long-term reasons (Foster, 2016; Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). One *New York Times* article details accounts of many people who have married someone they met through Tinder (Foster, 2016). Also, Stenson, Balcells, and Chen (2015) sampled 111 students to assess their dating app use, with 44% of those sampled stating they use a dating app; reasons why they use them yielded the top three answers of meeting people, dating, and fun, followed by curiosity, then finally loneliness, to hook up, and boredom.

As commitment and long-term romantic relationships arguably play a part in why people use Tinder, it is important to understand how romantic relationships escalate and de-escalate on such a unique app. Researchers have studied the stages of a romantic relationship with traditional romantic relationships that form in-person as well as those that develop through social media platforms. Adding to the literature, this study will dive into understanding the stages of a romantic relationship formed via Tinder. Although not testing the model in this research, Knapp's Relational Stage Model (1978) will be used as a guide in this study.

Knapp's relational stage model. Knapp (1978) conceptualized a classic model of relationship escalation and de-escalation that is popularly referred to in interpersonal communication as the relational stage model or the staircase model (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013; Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998; Welch & Rubin, 2002). Knapp's (1978) model contains similar ideas as Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory, which suggests that people are like onions with several layers who self-disclose the depth of their personal information incrementally (Griffin, 2012). As a relationship progresses, so does the amount and depth of information a person discloses. Knapp's relational stage model is primarily geared toward understanding opposite-sex relationships that people are engaged in based on their own freewill (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). The stages do not take into account outside influence (i.e. from family and friends), but focus on the development and the digression of the relationship between the two romantic partners (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

As this current study wishes to understand the complete cycle of how romance is experienced through Tinder, Knapp's model is undoubtedly a relevant one to refer to as it proposes ten stages of a romantic relationship. Knapp offers five stages of escalating a relationship that features "Initiating, Experimenting, Intensifying, Integrating, and Bonding," and five stages of de-escalating a relationship including "Differentiating, Circumscribing, Stagnating, Avoiding, and Terminating" (Knapp, 1978, p. 13). People can move through the phases in a forward or backward motion, but these steps are usually taken in a sequential fashion (Knapp, 1978).

During the Initiation stage, which usually takes a brief fifteen seconds, individuals decide whether they should initiate conversation with another person based on

attractiveness, prior knowledge of that person, previous communication, and if that person is approachable. A plan is then devised to communicate (Knapp, 1978). Knapp (1978) notes that the choice of opening communication is based on the nature of the relation (e.g. stranger versus friend), time for communication (e.g. “passing on the street versus a formal appointment”), how long it has been since the last meeting (if the two people know each other), the type of situation and environment (e.g. school versus a dance club), and whether special communication exists (e.g. “fraternity handshake”) (p. 18).

The second stage, Experimenting, features the communicators informally attempting to uncover more information about the other person, which is often executed through small talk. Most interactions in life do not go past this stage (Knapp, 1978). Strangers in this stage of relationship development usually search for common ground or interests (i.e. You went to XYZ University? So did I! Did you have Professor Z?). In this stage, people attempt to reduce uncertainty through passive, active, and interactive strategies (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Passive strategies consist of discovering information about a person through observing (Griffin, 2012). An example of an active approach to uncertainty reduction is when a person asks a third person for information (Griffin, 2012). Finally, an interactive strategy occurs when a user interacts directly with another.

Intensifying is the third stage and occurs when people disclose more personal information and the type of communication becomes more informal; “we” is used to refer to the two people, commitment may be more explicitly addressed (e.g. We really work

well together), and informal names are used (e.g. nicknames, honey, baby, sweetie) (Knapp, 1978).

The fourth stage is classified as Integrating and is defined as an integration of two people to be a couple, while their individual identities still remain. Others may refer to them as a couple, they engage in sexual relations, and many items or activities may be shared (e.g. the couple has a bank account together) (Knapp, 1978).

In the final stage of Bonding, the couple publicly announces their relationship is official (Knapp, 1978). This is the highest level of the stages of escalation and is defined by individuals' commitment to each other and high levels of intimacy (Hall, Travis, Anderson, & Henley, 2013).

While those are the five stages of relationship escalation, maintenance is an ongoing part of this model. Samp and Palevitz (2008) state that maintenance is certainly something that occurs online with partners. Maintenance simply “serves to maintain the current status or characteristics of the relationship” (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010, p. 77). Maintenance behaviors may consist of:

Positivity (e.g., acting polite, cheerful, and cooperative in interactions), openness (e.g., disclosing needs, discussing quality of relationship), assurances (e.g., stressing commitment to relationship, showing love for the partner), sharing tasks (e.g., helping equally with tasks, sharing joint responsibilities), and including the partner in one's social network (e.g., spending time with common friends, including friends and family in activities with the partner) (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010, p. 77).

The maintenance behaviors described above may be sustained through online or face-to-face methods. Showing commitment to a relationship can be executed in the form of “relationship official” statuses on online platforms or by showing affection to a partner in-person. Including the partner in social networks can also unfold online or in-person. One partner may become friends with the other partner’s friends on social media and in-person as a means to maintain their relationship. Maintenance behaviors of those who formed relationships through Tinder will be explored in this study.

Knapp’s (1978) model also features phases of de-escalation of relationships, beginning with Differentiating. This stage features couples starting to use “I” more instead of “we.” Differences begin to show between the two people, which could be because the couple rushed into the Bonding stage (Knapp, 1978). Stage two of de-escalation is Circumscribing, which is defined as a decrease in communication, both in the amount and the quality (Knapp, 1978). In the third stage, Stagnating, the communication is still ineffective and not progressing (Knapp, 1978). The fourth stage of relationship de-escalation is Avoiding; in this phase, the couple attempts not to communicate face-to-face or via phone calls. The person could not want to further the relationship due to dislike, or could simply not want to put effort into the relationship anymore and give excuses as to why they cannot meet with the partner (Knapp, 1978). The final stage is Termination, in which the relationship or communication, whether it was ten seconds long or ten years, comes to an end (Knapp, 1978).

Knapp’s (1978) relational stage model is one the more popular models in interpersonal communication used to understand the full cycle of romance (Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998). Many interpersonal scholars have used Knapp’s (1978) classic

model to ground their studies, but few studies have empirically tested Knapp's (1978) relational stage model, especially studies focusing on relationships via new media platforms. However, technology has arguably altered the ways in which these stages are experienced.

First, technology has changed the social norms for relationship initiation. Samp and Palevitz (2008) make a case for the Internet being a sound place to initiate a romantic relationship because they can confirm certainty for others' relationship goals via their profiles, and it is simply a convenient method of finding a partner. Relating specifically to Tinder, users may not be hesitant to contact other users because they are more certain of the others' attraction toward them if he or she swiped right.

Second, relating to relationship escalation, Paul (2014) asserts a relationship that develops online does not advance as quickly as its offline counterpart. One reason for this is that users first have to set up their profile, send and receive messages, and then text long enough to feel comfortable meeting someone offline (Paul, 2014). Another explanation is that people still may be skeptical of online dating and therefore will take more time to develop trust with another before progressing their relationship further (Paul, 2014). While this is not necessarily a negative aspect of online interactions, it is one to explore. Some argue that currently users do not attach as much of a negative view to online dating, thus making it a more trustworthy environment than it was considered to be ten years ago (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

Third, considering uncertainty reduction with online communication, users are capable of engaging in passive, active, and interactive strategies for learning information about another user. Users can passively view another's profile, interact with a user

directly through chat messages, and actively search for other information about the user via an Internet search or by asking a mutual friend.

In addition to reducing uncertainty, managing uncertainty (Brashers, 2001) should be considered in online relationship development. Corriero and Tong's (2016) study on dating apps explores the application of Uncertainty Management Theory to online dating. Brashers (2001) asserts that uncertainty is not always a negative experience and sometimes people want a little bit of uncertainty in their interactions to "allow people to maintain hope and optimism" (p. 478). This idea aligns with the hyperpersonal perspective and idealizations of partners in CMC. It is possible that users of online dating apps want to maintain some uncertainty about another because it allows them to idealize their partner. Users overemphasize the positive information they have about their partner and do not have much to contradict that information if they maintain some uncertainty. If a user learns too much information about another user and categorizes this information as something they do not like, the idealization of the partner may disappear. Corriero and Tong (2016) found that their participants who were looking for casual sex on dating apps wanted to maintain some uncertainty. To elaborate upon this notion, Corriero and Tong (2016) hypothesize "daters value uncertainty because it allows them to maintain the perception of control over the casual nature of their encounters and preserve positive illusions about their sexual partners by avoiding additional (and potentially unpleasant) information about them" (p. 137). This point relates to the hyperpersonal experiences that were previously mentioned in this review. People tend to overattribute other people's cues online, so maintaining some uncertainty about the other person can contribute to that ignorance that many people enjoy when first initiating a relationship.

Fourth, as for the continuation of a relationship to reach the final two stages of Knapp's (1978) model of escalation, many online relationships may never reach this point. Previous research on online dating suggests that many potential couples will never make it this far because of the temptation that so many other matches are available (Paul, 2014). Online daters may turn to the same medium in which they began their relationship, the Internet, to terminate their connection because it is easier and often preferred to end a connection online rather than face-to-face (Samp & Palevitz, 2008).

Fifth, just as traditional relationships often do not follow all of Knapp's (1978) five stages of relationship de-escalation (Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009; Hall, Travis, Anderson, & Henley, 2013), online relationships are likely to also de-escalate quickly. Ghosting, ending all communication with no reason, has become a popular means of exiting online relationships (Scott, 2016). This strategy skips all four of Knapp's (1978) proposed stages of de-escalating a relationship and goes to the final step of ceasing all communication. The "lack of social ties, endless pool of other dating partners, and the digitalization of bodies" contributes to ghosting being used for terminating connections with online daters (Scott, 2016, p. 2).

Clearly, Knapp's (1978) relational stage model is important for understanding romantic relationships. Moreover, CMC has changed the manner in which online daters experience those stages. Understanding how dating apps have impacted the classic model and the implications of those changes are important to study. One of the few studies to empirically test Knapp's (1978) stages of a romantic relationship via new media platforms is Fox et al.'s (2013) study on Facebook and romantic relationships. Fox et al. (2013) studied the relationship escalation portion of the model via relationships

developed on Facebook and found support for the beginning stages of Knapp's (1978) model but also learned current insights on relationship development that is unique to Facebook. However, Fox et al. (2014) only focus on the first part of the model: relationship development. This dissertation explores the entire cycle of a relationship via Tinder to uncover how relationships progress and unfold in the digital age.

Proposed Study

The Life Cycle of Relationships on Tinder

As an area of communication that deserves attention (Samp & Palevitz, 2008), there have been numerous studies on romantic relationships and how they escalate and de-escalate, but there is not sufficient research on how these steps transpire online (Fox et al., 2013; Samp & Palevitz, 2008). As many interpersonal theories and models were created under FtF communicative environments, there is now a need to determine if and how these same ideas apply to communication on new media platforms that include online and offline components (Fox et al., 2013), considering the growing number of online daters (Smith & Duggan, 2013) and potential consequences escalating and de-escalating relationships via Tinder have on users.

This dissertation seeks to understand the life cycle of various types of relationships that form via Tinder. Similar to Fox et al.'s (2013) study on the development of romantic relationships on Facebook, this study will take a qualitative approach to understanding initial communication and escalation of relationships on Tinder, but will also explore the maintenance and de-escalation stages via Tinder. Understanding the shifts regarding the norms of relationship escalation and de-escalation on Tinder have implications for understanding how users successfully communicate to

reach their relational goals, but also challenges users are presented with by communicating on this unique platform. Ultimately, users' emotions are at stake for those who are looking for a romantic or sexual connection, and thus exploring why users are on Tinder and how they navigate the app to escalate, maintain, and de-escalate relationships is important to study. Therefore, the researcher proposed the following questions:

RQ1: What are Tinder users' motivations?

Although previous studies (James, 2015; Ligtenberg, 2015) have assessed the motivations for being a part of Tinder, this question is necessary to continue to ask, as there is still not a large body of literature that addresses this area. With contradicting evidence as to what kinds of relationships form via Tinder, from casual sex to marriage, it is necessary to consider the outcomes of interacting on Tinder. This study is not focused on uses and gratifications of the app, but the question of why people use this app is still an important one to ask in order to understand answers to other questions, such as the life cycle of a relationship. Logical connections may be made between how a user moves through the stages of a relationship depending on their purpose of being on Tinder in the first place.

RQ2: How do people use Tinder?

Tinder users will be asked about how they create their profile. In an effort to assess selective self-presentation, participants will be asked to describe their profile, as there may be connections between how users present themselves in their biography and photographs (*RQ2*) and why they are using Tinder (*RQ1*). Tinder users will also be asked about the criteria they consider when swiping. These two stages must be executed before

users can communicate, making them important in the process of developing a relationship.

RQ3: How do Tinder users initiate and escalate relationships?

The first step of probing into the life cycle of romantic relationships on Tinder is to ask questions about how they are initiated and developed. Users will be asked about their initial communication strategies and content of messages they have received.

Additionally, participants will be asked about their uncertainty reduction strategies in the beginning stages of a romantic relationship as Pauley & Emmers-Sommer (2007) note the importance of incorporating uncertainty reduction in studies that assess how relationships are developed online. The hyperpersonal or impersonal nature of communication will also be explored through understanding how participants on Tinder communicate with others and how they feel about the other person.

RQ4: How do users maintain their relationships formed via Tinder?

This research question looks to gauge communication on and offline and how the communication or lack thereof contributes to maintaining their romantic relationship formed on Tinder. It is important to note the inclusion of offline communication as a component of relational communication, as there is a need to include both online and offline components in a study about dating apps because many relationships begin online and then continue offline (Fox et al., 2013).

RQ5: How do Tinder relationships de-escalate?

The final research question focuses on how Tinder relationships de-escalate. Fox et al.'s (2013) study on Facebook and relationship development noted that a limitation to the study was the absence of investigating romantic relationship de-escalation. The

current project seeks to strengthen the body of knowledge by including the de-escalation element of romantic relationships formed online to have an understanding of the complete cycle.

These particular questions were formulated in an effort to add to the insufficient research on CMC and interpersonal relationships, particularly with Tinder. Past research has focused on gender and sexual orientation differences with Tinder (Seefeldt, 2014), privacy issues (Stenson, Balcells, & Chen, 2015), how and why people use Tinder from a uses and gratifications perspective (James, 2015; Ligtenberg, 2015), and message initiation (Seefeldt, 2014). This project adds to the literature by exploring the stages of romantic relationships formed via Tinder. Within this exploration is a goal of understanding how the nature of CMC, particularly on Tinder, is affecting the stages of a romantic relationship and what new challenges this poses for users. Because individuals feel happiness by securing close relationships (e.g. friendships, committed romantic relationships), and negative emotions when connections dissolve (Myers, 2003), it is necessary to discover how interacting on Tinder is helping or hindering users from reaching these goals.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The researcher used a qualitative approach to explore the life cycle of romantic relationships initiated via Tinder. Justification for this approach will be explained, along with details on the interviewing method including the participants, recruitment, and interview procedures. Finally, the analysis of data, including the coding process, will be described at the end of this chapter.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative approaches are well suited for studies that seek to contribute to the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) from participants' points of view as opposed to experimenting or testing predetermined hypotheses. This dissertation sought to understand Tinder and romantic relationships through the eyes of participants' stories and experiences, not by testing hypotheses. Although relevant theories and models were presented in Chapter 2 (e.g. Hyperpersonal Perspective and Knapp's Relational Stage Model), those ideas served as a guide to understanding the topic in terms of what has been published thus far, not as a means of creating preconceived notions about what the data collected will reveal. The researcher assessed whether the theories that emerged from the data fit into existing findings or if new theories surfaced (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Many previous studies have assessed LBDAs other than Tinder (i.e. mostly apps used by gay men) using various methods. Past studies revolving around other LBDAs, such as Grindr, have used survey methodology (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Lehmillier & loerger, 2014; Grosskopf, LaVasseur, & Glaser, 2014), focus group research (Blas,

Menacho, Alva, Cabello, & Orellana, 2013), observations (Birnholtz, Fitzpatrick, Handel, & Brubaker, 2014), and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Licoppe, Rivière, & Morel, 2015; Bauermeister, Giguere, Carballo-Diéguez, Ventuneac, & Eisenberg, 2010; Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2015; Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2014). However, research on Tinder has not been as abundant. Of the little published research on Tinder in the communication world, most approach the topic through experiment or survey methodology (Seefeldt, 2014; Stenson, Balcells & Chen, 2015; James, 2015). One unpublished master's thesis explores the subject through ethnography (Braziel, 2015), but other qualitative studies on the topic are hard to find, if not non-existent. More studies need to take a qualitative approach to Tinder for several reasons (James, 2015). First, a qualitative approach allows us to understand users' direct stories of the app without any hypotheses about what we think their experiences entail (Braziel, 2015). Second, there is a lack of measurement scales developed for Tinder, so exploring this area qualitatively first is logical; then, researchers can begin to develop quantitative scales to use for future studies. Finally, considering there are no studies to the researcher's knowledge published on Tinder use and the stages of relationship escalation, maintenance, and de-escalation, qualitative methods are fitting to explore this underdeveloped topic.

Respondent Interviews

Many methods of data collection are available, such as individual interviewing, focus groups, and observations. The researcher chose individual respondent interviews for this study because of the benefits this approach yields for the study and the practical nature of the method. One advantage of conducting interviews to gather data is that it is “useful when participants cannot be directly observed” (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). In this

case, it is impractical to study romantic relationships formed on Tinder by direct observation. Understanding the life cycle of a romantic relationship developed on Tinder by directly observing the in-person and online communication would be difficult for many reasons. First, viewing participants' conversations on Tinder would be difficult considering privacy and consent issues. The researcher would need permission from both parties to use the information. Second, the researcher would need to observe all of the interactions (offline and online) in which the participants had communicated or visited each other in person, which would be near impossible. Asking participants to share their stories via qualitative interviews is the most effective approach to gain rich information.

Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were employed in this study. Bernard (2002) defines these kinds of interviews as "open-ended, following a general script, and covering a list of topics" (p. 203). Semi-structured interviews should be used when a researcher will only have one opportunity to converse with someone (Bernard, 2002), which is the case for the current dissertation.

An interview guide should accompany all semi-structured interviews. The interview guide is a "list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (Bernard, 2002, p. 205). The benefit of having this guide is to provide some structure so that the researcher can ask all participants similar questions so she can compare all answers later during the analysis (Bernard, 2002). The consistency provided by the interview guide can contribute to the reliability of the study (Bernard, 2002). Another benefit of the semi-structured interview guide is that it allows for some freedom regarding the conversation. New directions may be taken if a participant wants to elaborate upon something she was not specifically asked. Similarly, the researcher may

branch off from a question and ask something else that is relevant that may not specifically be listed on the interview guide (Bernard, 2002).

Participants

Participants of qualitative studies should be selected purposefully in order to provide the researcher with individuals who are best able to contribute relevant information regarding the research questions, as opposed to a randomly selected group of respondents (Creswell, 2014; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher invited Tinder users at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. There was no age limit. Participants needed to be active on the app within the past year or have a clear recollection of their Tinder experiences if their use was more than a year ago. Participants also needed to have significantly interacted with one or more person on the app so they were able to give a detailed account of the experience. A significant exchange on Tinder would indicate that a user has had more than one interaction with a single person (i.e. sending a “hello” to another user and hearing nothing back would not qualify; the user must be able to tell the researcher substantive information in order for her to learn in-depth information about the users’ experiences). Once the researcher secured her initial participants by recruiting through face-to-face and online methods, she employed snowball sampling to gain more participants. She asked participants if they could refer her to another qualified participant if they know of any. As for the desired number of participants, there is not a specific number that is standard for qualitative research. However, Creswell (2014) asserts that interviewing roughly 20-30 participants is standard. The researcher should study the phenomenon until she reaches the point of

saturation, meaning gathering new information no longer provides unknown insights (Creswell, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The participants were not compensated, but had the opportunity to be entered in a drawing to win one of three Amazon.com gift cards valued at \$25 apiece. The researcher drew three winners from the pool of email addresses and notified them via email of their prize. Each winner, if they chose to receive the gift, provided a mailing or e-mail address where the researcher sent the gift card. Upon completion of the raffle, the researcher shredded the papers with the email addresses used to physically draw the winners. Those who did not win the raffle received no other compensation.

Recruitment Procedures

The researcher sought to recruit roughly 30 participants for individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews. The researcher invited Tinder users to participate through a variety of methods including inviting students from Communication courses at Indiana University of Pennsylvania as part of a convenience sample, recruiting participants from the researcher's in-person and online social networks, and by inviting users from Reddit's (reddit.com) "Find Participants!" community to participate. Approximately 100 students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania were invited to participate. Additionally, professors who have agreed to help the researcher emailed their students the study information provided by the researcher. This served as a reminder for students who may have been interested in participating by listening to the researcher's in-person announcement, but also allow absent students to learn about the study. Next, a potential of 800 people saw the virtual invitation to participate through the researcher's social networks via Facebook post, and finally, roughly 326 readers subscribed to the "Find

Participants!” community on Reddit were exposed to a post inviting them to participate. The reason the researcher invited a large number of participants is because the researcher did not know how many people who were invited actually met the criteria to participate (18 years of age and older and a Tinder user who has communicated on the app). The researcher interviewed a total of 31 participants for this study. The participants’ demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants’ Demographic Information

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Sexual Orientation</u>	<u>Length of Interview (mins.)</u>
Nick	36	Male	Straight	1:35:37
Tiffany	30	Female	Straight	49:37
Dominique	27	Female	Straight	32:08
Zack	30	Male	Straight	1:00:27
Gina	35	Female	Straight	42:13
Chandler	26	Male	Straight	1:04:06
Demi	30	Female	Straight	46:40
Sabrina	21	Female	Straight	47:40
Chasity	20	Female	Straight	29:59
Stefani	20	Female	Questioning	45:24
Deborah	20	Female	Straight	31:30
Bryan	20	Male	Gay	1:03:38
Miley	20	Female	Straight	49:03
Justin	19	Male	Gay	44:47

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Sexual Orientation</u>	<u>Length of Interview (mins.)</u>
Shaun	22	Male	Straight	29:15
Michelle	18	Female	Straight	21:05
Melody	23	Female	Straight	48:45
Dana	21	Female	Straight	38:16
Josh	29	Male	Straight	1:01:56
Sandra	18	Female	Straight	44:22
Jake	21	Male	Straight	32:20
Will	20	Male	Straight	20:44
Fitch	33	Male	Gay	1:52:11
Ethan	33	Male	Straight	1:02:38
Kasey	26	Female	Straight	51:42
Thomas	31	Male	Straight	46:34
Anthony	30	Male	Straight	43:52
Colton	36	Male	Gay	42:18
Adam	40	Male	Gay	41:37

Interview Procedure

Once participants were secured, the interviewing process commenced. Participants were interviewed somewhere undisturbed and quiet. This included a private room on a university campus and at the interviewee's home, as to make them comfortable talking about their experience on Tinder. In addition to physical face-to-face methods of interviewing, participants interviewed over the phone or via Skype. This allowed the interviewer to include participants

who were not in the southwestern Pennsylvania geographic area. The researcher contacted those who volunteered to be interviewed for this study via email, as is listed in the recruitment script (see Appendix A). Through email exchanges, the researcher set up a date, time, and location for the interview. Each participant received a copy of the research information (see Appendix B). The interviewer read the research information aloud to each participant prior to beginning any interview. Any questions regarding the study were answered at this time. The interviewee was told he or she may stop at any time, with no repercussion. All participants were reminded that they would be referred to by a pseudonym in the written results of the study to provide confidentiality. Participants signed a written consent form prior to beginning the interview. The researcher received permission from all participants to be audio recorded before beginning the discussion. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to almost 2 hours in length, with an average length of 45 minutes. Thirty-one interviews yielded 23 hours of conversation and 537 pages of transcript.

The conversations began with questions from the interview guide (see Appendix C). Creswell (2014) notes the interview should begin with a warm-up question to allow the participant to feel comfortable in the interview. The conversations started with general questions that were not too intimate (e.g. How old are you? What do you currently do for a living? Where are you from?). Second, participants were asked why they use Tinder and how they created their profile. Finally, participants were asked about their relationships via Tinder including the development, maintenance, and de-escalation. The researcher applied techniques to allow the participants to feel relaxed. One technique employed was the “silent probe,” in which the interviewer gave the participant time to mull over their answer before interrupting (Bernard, 2002, p. 211). The reason for waiting was to allow participants to gather their

thoughts before interrupting them, which can sometimes terminate participants' current engagement with a question. The echo probe was also used, but sparingly. This strategy allowed the researcher to repeat part of what the participant had just said and then probe for more information. It showed that the interviewer was interested in the given information, paying attention, and seeking more detail (Bernard, 2002). The researcher consciously took every measure possible to make the participant feel at ease while simultaneously conducting an effective interview that provided data in response to the chosen research questions.

Following the interview, the mp3 version of the audio recording was loaded onto the researcher's computer; the information was kept on her personal, password-protected computer. After loading the audio recording, the researcher transcribed each interview. The data will be kept for three years after the interviews and once the three years have expired the data will be destroyed.

Analysis

Once the data were collected, the analysis began. The researcher took a grounded theory approach to this project. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and is defined as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Grounded theory can be used to answer a wide range of research questions, but is especially suited for "studying individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes" (Charmaz, 1996, pp. 28-29). Studying participants on Tinder and how they experience romantic relationships would fall under "interpersonal relations," giving more support as to why this approach was employed. Instead of having preconceived notions of what the data will reveal, grounded theory

researchers take an open-ended, inductive approach to theory building instead of theory testing (Charmaz, 2015). By using this approach, theories will develop as the research progresses (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). One participant's data will provide a particular point of view into a certain subject; that participant's answers can be coded and then compared with the next participant's answer. The codes and themes will develop and be shaped as the research goes on because there is data collection and analysis being executed all at once (Charmaz, 2015). One of the reasons to take this route is to produce a theory (Charmaz, 1996) about particular phenomena. Another motivation for using grounded theory is that end results will come from participants' words and not from a researcher's hypothesis regarding what she thinks will happen (Charmaz, 1996). The predominant method used for collecting data when using grounded theory is interviewing (Creswell, 2013). In this case, participants' interview data dictated the understanding of romantic relationships experienced from Tinder (Creswell, 2014) and information emerged from the data that is grounded in participants' recollection of their experiences on Tinder (Charmaz, 1996). The details of the coding process including open, axial, and selective coding will be presented in the upcoming section.

Coding

While a researcher begins to unofficially assess the data while transcribing the interviews, open, axial, and selective coding are the official steps in analyzing the data (Charmaz, 1996). Coding is described as "the process of defining what the data are all about" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 37). Researchers code and analyze interviews concurrently and thus edit the interview guide accordingly if a certain area of the subject is gaining more attention than another based on initial interviews (Charmaz, 1996). Because there

is a back and forth between gathering data and analyzing it, this process is known as the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In other words, the researcher compares the current data she is analyzing to categories already formed (Creswell, 2013).

To begin, the researcher exercised open and in vivo coding. Open coding consists of “unrestricted coding” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 219), meaning an almost unlimited number of categories is created and nothing is concretely defined yet. The purpose is to generate several categories that later will be refined, defined, and condensed. In addition to open coding, the researcher used in vivo coding. In vivo coding contains words or phrases that are used specifically by the participants (Charmaz, 2015). These might incorporate colloquialisms (e.g. *Tinderella* to refer to attractive women in *Tinder*) spoken by participants during the conversation that are recorded in order to better understand the language natives use.

In order to gain initial insight into the participants’ data through open and in vivo coding, the researcher executed line-by-line analysis, paragraph analysis, and entire document analysis as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Line-by-line analysis consists of assessing each line of transcribed data for categories that emerge from the dialogue. Completing this is especially important in the beginning stages of analysis because it allows researchers to quickly develop categories that can later be compressed into significant themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Paragraph analysis is similar, but during this assessment, a researcher reads an entire passage and records the meaning behind it in the margins of the document. The entire document analysis is completed when a researcher records the essence of the entire conversation and then compares it to other interviews for similarities or differences. The codes are created by the researcher

based on what the participants say, unlike quantitative approaches, which take predetermined codes and connect them with the data they have collected (Charmaz, 2015).

After open coding, the researcher moved to axial coding. The procedure of axial coding is defined as a researcher taking the categories developed from open coding, and condensing them into relevant subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of this second step is to refine the data by collapsing relevant concepts together to begin to bring clarity to the research results (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Finally, the researcher completed selective coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define selective coding as “the process of integrating and refining categories” (p. 143). During this final stage of selective coding, the categories developed earlier will dictate a theory that has emerged from extensive analysis (Creswell, 2013). From this final stage, each category will connect and tell a story of the larger picture that has materialized (Creswell, 2013).

The next chapter provides results to the five research questions and presents three major themes that surfaced from the participants’ data. Results are organized by theme and are supported by participants’ quotes.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This dissertation sought to understand Tinder users' experiences forming interpersonal relationships on the app from beginning to end. The interviewees discussed why they chose to use Tinder, how they used it, explained the life cycle of their connections, and talked about the consequences of using Tinder in terms of their ego. Three main themes emerged from the data: Functions of Tinder, Life of Connections, and Impact on Ego. The first main theme, Functions of Tinder, discusses the dominant roles of the app by exploring why people use Tinder (*RQ1*). The second main theme, Life of Connections, discloses the stages of relationships that are formed via Tinder, beginning with the creation of a profile and ending with the continuation or dissolution of a connection. Life of Connections uncovers information regarding how participants used Tinder, as in how they created a profile and decided on whom to swipe (*RQ2*), as well as how they initiated and escalated relationships on Tinder (*RQ3*), how they maintained and continued their relationships (*RQ4*), and how they de-escalated (*RQ5*). The final theme, Impact on Ego, discusses the role ego played throughout the entire process of using Tinder and addresses the negative and positive impacts on users' self-esteem. A summary of these themes can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Themes

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>
RQ1: What are Tinder users' motivations?	One: Functions of Tinder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Entertainment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social Amusement b. Individual Recreation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Tinder game ii. Passing time 2. Connections <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Convenience <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Other options have been unsuccessful ii. Simplicity iii. Kid in a candy store b. Variety of relationships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Hook up app ii. Dating app iii. Array of connections
RQ2: How do people use Tinder?	Two: Life of Connections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online Profile <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Goals b. Advice from others c. Best foot forward 2. Swiping Process <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Vetting users b. Catfish and bots c. Factors of swiping <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Physical attractiveness ii. A picture tells a thousand words

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>
RQ3: How do Tinder users initiate and escalate relationships?	Life of Connections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial Communication <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Societal expectations b. Opening lines <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Short and generic ii. Specific greetings iii. Pick up lines iv. Compliments x. Sexual/offensive lines 2. Escalation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Selective self-presentation b. Unsustainable conversation c. Channels to escalate conversation d. Timelines
RQ4: How do users maintain their relationships formed via Tinder?	Life of Connections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offline Meetings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expectations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. No surprises ii. Differences b. Continuation
RQ5: How do Tinder relationships de-escalate?	Life of Connections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. De-escalation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fizzle b. Blunt ending c. Ghosting d. Discontinued use of app

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>
N/A	Three: Impact on Ego	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decrease in Self-esteem <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protective measures <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Nature of the app ii. Swiping concerns iii. Confidence to message b. Bruises <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Profile pictures ii. Matches iii. Messaging 2. Increase in Self-esteem <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Perception of others b. Boosts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Matching ii. Messaging

Functions of Tinder

Theme one, Functions of Tinder, presents users' explanations of what Tinder is and why they use it. Interviewees talked about the use of Tinder as a means of entertainment and discussed how it is an activity they passively take part in when bored to pass time, but also a game in which they actively engage in swiping and judging others. Next, Tinder functioned as a channel to make connections. The app was named as convenient to make connections because it is easy to set up and navigate, simple to use, and available when other means of securing a relationship have failed. Finally, Tinder functioned as a channel where users initiated in a variety of connections such as friendships, romantic relationships, and hook ups.

Entertainment

The first subtheme of Functions, Entertainment, chronicles how time spent on the app can be a leisurely and amusing event on both a social and individual level.

Contributors to this study noted the enjoyment they felt when opening the app with friends or when swiping by themselves. They also said the app helped them pass time when alone. The use of Tinder for entertainment purposes on a social and individual level will be considered next.

Social amusement. Participants shared stories of when they would have fun swiping and interacting on Tinder in social settings. Tiffany, a 30-year-old straight female using Tinder to become more comfortable dating, described the enjoyment she and her roommate had while using the app together.

When my relationship ended I moved in with some roommates and one of my roommates, who was a guy, just made a joke at me like oh you're hanging out at home on a Friday night, you should just get Tinder. And I was like what's a Tinder? And I think we spent the entire Friday night drinking cheap wine and just looking at all the guys on Tinder. Oh my god it was so much fun – just making fun of people – it was great.

Tiffany spoke of this event as a fun night with friends that included drinking and making light of the people who would be on Tinder. It gave them something to do and became the centerpiece of their conversation that night. Colton also spoke of Tinder in a similar fashion. Currently single, Colton (a 36-year-old gay male) downloaded Tinder to date men and find a serious relationship. During his interview Colton noted the social side of Tinder as a pastime he partakes in with friends.

I find that it [Tinder] comes up in conversations. I'll be out with friends and we'll just sit there and look through them, and I'll swipe right on people, but it becomes a conversation. You know like oh my god look at how bad this photo is. And that kind of stuff. I mean I do it and it's fun, but I mean I guess in a way it's kind of bad that you're sitting there in a group critiquing these people.

While Colton and his friends would critique others' profiles, they also would talk about whether they knew the people Colton was swiping on.

The way it works is kind of nice because you can kind of be sitting there with a friend and they can be your wing man and be like oh hey you know I talked to this guy or I met this guy one time at a bar and he's not cool or something like that.

So it's like you can kind of have a digital wing man.

Colton used Tinder with his friends to joke about other users' profiles but his friends also served as "digital wing men" who would tell Colton if they had dated the men in the picture or if they knew anything about them. He pointed out that because he lives in a small community, his friends would often know of the users that appear on his Tinder. This was not only informative, but also entertaining for him and his friends.

Tiffany and Colton commented on how they used Tinder with friends as an entertaining way to talk about other users' photographs and how sometimes friends in person would personally know the Tinder users. Dana and Shaun talked about the entertainment the messaging portion of Tinder provided. Dana, a 21 year-old straight female who was just curious about Tinder, said the following:

I went home and my roommate would just play with it and just see who I matched up with first. So we'd spend a good half hour at least a day doing it. Then we'd

go back and we'd wait to read the messages together and message people at the end of the day.

Dana described interacting with others on Tinder as a fun exchange that she shared as a social activity with her friend. Shaun (a 22-year-old straight male) also talked about messaging other Tinder users with friends, but spoke of it as a joke and nothing serious. This is no surprise because he downloaded Tinder for fun and said the app served as pure entertainment for he and his friends.

Me and my friends would mess around on there and joke around. We would do this thing where we would just swipe right on everybody and he'd have to tell me some crazy pick up line and I'd have to say it. It was a joke. It was entertainment.

Many users had lighthearted fun with the app while using it with friends. Some never had any intention of using it to make offline connections with others, but saw it more as something they did with friends to entertain themselves. Not only did respondents use Tinder as an entertaining activity while with friends, it also served as an enjoyable pastime when alone. The following passages address how participants see Tinder as a game and to pass time when alone.

Individual recreation. Many people interviewed said Tinder functioned as a game to them and played a role in how they spent their time when bored. When talking about it as a game, users discussed the activity as being more active, but as a way to pass time, it was passive entertainment.

Tinder game. Participants described the act of using Tinder as a game. Swiping profiles on Tinder was so fun to partake in, it was described as addicting. Just as participants used Tinder with others to judge people, Michelle said she did this alone.

Entertainment. Yeah it's mostly like if I'm bored I kinda thought it was kind of a game. You know you basically rated people, like hearted them or gave them an X for their picture so it was a fun game to me.

Michelle pointed out the specific buttons on the app, a heart to show she was interested in the profile or an "X" to say she was not, as being fun to use. The act of rating the profiles was part of this enjoyment. Michelle, an 18-year-old straight female, was in a committed relationship and had used Tinder for entertainment when she was bored and saw it as a fun game. She never communicated with anyone via the app. Nick, a 36-year-old straight male using Tinder for companionship and hooking up, also discussed the evaluation of others as a fun game, except he referred to swiping left and right instead of using the heart or "X" buttons.

You can just swipe to the right or swipe to the left and it's almost like a fun game. And then you never know who's going to swipe right on you obviously until you match so it's just interesting and it's very entertaining.

As participants excitedly talked about how their Tinder experience led to joy just by using the app, others described it in a more passive manner. Interviewees, especially those who were not looking for a romantic connection through Tinder, said they would open Tinder for entertainment when bored.

Passing time. Several Tinder users spoke of the app as something they used to entertain themselves when bored to pass the time. They explained that they would use it

while waiting at an appointment or simply lounging in their home. Zack, a 30-year-old straight male at first was looking for a romantic relationship on Tinder, then casual sex, explained using Tinder to pass the time. Zack said, “If I'm just laying in a hammock or watching T.V. Tinder was one of those things that you would do to pass the time.”

William also used these same words to tell of his Tinder experience, but mentioned that he mainly opened Tinder as something to do when bored because he was not looking for anything serious by using the app.

Tinder was a thing that I used for fun. I didn't really put too much time into it. It was just kind of something to mess around with and pass the time and I wasn't really looking for a girlfriend or anything from Tinder. It was just kind of a way for me to, I don't know, pass time.

Because he was not looking to make a romantic connection on Tinder, William, a 20-year-old straight male in a committed romantic relationship, used Tinder as entertainment in a passive manner and did not put much thought it to how he was swiping, but looked toward the act of swiping as something that was fun to do when he was bored.

Summary of Function One: Entertainment

Tinder can be used for active or passive entertainment purposes both on an individual and group setting. On a social level, participants engaged with the app and conversed with friends about other profiles, sought advice on whether they should swipe with certain people on Tinder, and overall used it to start conversations with their in-person friends. Using Tinder for those purposes was deemed to be entertaining. It served as lighthearted fun and as a conversation piece when with friends.

On an individual level, users actively participated in swiping and saw it as a game to play. They were entertained by looking at others' profiles and enjoyed the motions of swiping left and right. It was fun to judge others and they became addicted to swiping because it seemed like a game. Many users who found Tinder as a game to play for their own pleasure did not seek to secure any type of offline meeting or connection beyond exchanging messages, which could lead to frustration for users on the other end who were expecting an in-person meeting to occur from using Tinder. Tinder also served as a passive activity that users engaged in while alone and bored. Participants would open the app when they wanted to relax and kill time. It entertained them when they were alone and bored and worked in a similar manner as scrolling through other social media, such as Facebook or Instagram.

While Tinder functioned as a way for users to entertain themselves, one of the main reasons why participants downloaded Tinder was to make connections. The app was created for users to eventually meet offline, which many participants named as the primary reason for which they were using it.

Connections

The second function of Tinder, Connections, focuses on one of the main uses of Tinder: matching with others online and meeting offline. Those who created a Tinder profile wished to connect with others through the app and form friendships, engage in hook ups, and/or find an exclusive romantic partner. Participants acknowledged the ease of use and many options of possible connections the app allowed them to find and the variety of interpersonal connections they could make because of Tinder.

Convenience. Throughout the discussions, participants expressed how convenient Tinder is to use considering it can be opened in the comfort of one's home. The app took away the steps of going out, pondering who is single, and making the plunge of approaching someone in person. It was a convenient app to turn to when other options of finding a date or romantic partner have failed. Additionally, many users said the app is so easy to use and there are so many other single people on the app.

Other options have been unsuccessful. When other means of finding a romantic partner failed, Tinder was a convenient option for people seeking an interpersonal connection. Participants recalled difficult times making connections in their past and cited their geographical area and profession as hurdles that prevented them from finding a match. Additionally, they explained other online apps have not worked for them, so it was fitting for them to turn to Tinder, which operates a lot differently than many other dating sites.

Participants named their location as something that made it tough to find the connection they were looking for. Zack pointed out that the culture where he lived made it difficult to connect with others offline.

Class status is a very important thing to people here. So if I go to certain bars and I don't fit into their class range, they're not interested in talking to me. Or they're not going out to meet people, they're going out to entertain themselves and have fun. And so you're not out at a bar trying to talk to people or interact with people. You're there to hang out with your friends and that's about it. So you're not trying to meet new people and hook up or anything like that.

The area in which Zack resided made it hard to connect with others. It was convenient for him to create a Tinder profile and find others who were looking for the same goal as he was - dating and hooking up. Gina also mentioned the area in which she lived as being a deterrent to meeting others.

It's hard in this area to meet professionals. I don't know it seems like in the...area a lot of men my age are either already married or ...gay or they're just like losers that play video games in their parents' basements. It's [Tinder] a way to meet someone and connect with them and talk to them instead of going to a bar or something. I feel it's worse to meet someone at a bar than it is to go online and get to know someone and do it that way. But I would say Tinder, it's a good way to meet different people and kind of just spark up conversations and it exposes you to people you otherwise probably wouldn't have met.

Tinder was convenient for Gina to use, considering her lack of options in her current location, and was a better alternative than meeting someone at a bar. Gina, a 35-year-old straight female, downloaded Tinder to date and find companionship as she was recently separated after 4.5 years of marriage. Looking for matches over Tinder afforded both Zack and Gina with more opportunity for success than they had with trying to meet others offline.

Another challenge Tinder users recounted was the difficulty in meeting potential matches in their place of work or study. Dominique, a 27-year-old straight female and medical resident, said, "It's hard to meet people in my line of work so I was like okay you know it doesn't have to be my future husband but it could be someone that you know could be my friend." Whether a professional or a student, there were scarce opportunities

described by the participants to meet people where they lived, worked, or studied. Miley, a 20-year-old straight female college student, noted the struggle of locating the eligible bachelors at the university she attends.

Well I'm a theater major so 90% of the guys I'm around are homosexuals and I like guys. So the people I hang out with aren't straight. So for me I felt like it was harder to meet straight guys, especially in college, because XYZ University is such a big campus, I feel like it can be hard.

Other participants mirrored Miley's opinion on the difficulty of meeting romantic partners in college by saying that students do not talk to each other in class and the heavy use of social media has hindered social interaction in person. Tinder became a convenient way of locating others, despite one's profession or school.

As respondents gave various reasons to why they have not had luck meeting suitors offline, they elaborated upon other dating websites they used that also resulted in little success. Justin, a 19-year-old gay male, used Grindr and described it as frustrating when he stated, "People could just contact me with very sleazy messages and people who are not in my age group." This prompted him to try Tinder to find friends and "see why everyone loved it." Similarly, Nick shared his thoughts on OkCupid and Plenty of Fish, noting that the "quality of women was very low," on each of those dating sites. Gina also discussed the kind of people on her previously chosen dating website, Christian Mingle, and said that the people plus the distance was a red flag to her.

There were some really strange men on Christian Mingle... I'm Christian but these people are over the top and just weird... There weren't a whole lot of local people on there so I was only on there for a hot minute, it wasn't very long.

Other websites and apps proved to be unsuccessful for participants to find matches, making Tinder an opportune medium to use as an alternative and better way to connect. Tinder conveniently matches users with others in their geographical region. This made it easy for users to connect with people who are close to them, as opposed to some other websites that used a larger radius for matching. Tinder was also considered to be convenient because of how quickly a user could create a profile; nothing in-depth was required, as some other sites demanded, and users did not exchange long emails, but short chat messages. This simplicity was the second convenience participants mentioned.

Simplicity. The simple nature of the app was a positive part of Tinder many participants brought up. Tiffany compared Tinder to being so simple that it is “made for pretty much a monkey to use.” Demi also discussed Tinder favorably in terms of its ease of use by saying, “It’s very quick. You can integrate it to Facebook to pull your photos and your information and interests so it’s easier to connect with people. It’s just convenient. It’s easy.” Demi, a 30-year-old straight female, was using Tinder to date and find a long-term partner.

Josh and Anthony characterized Tinder in a comparable manner, but also noted the visual aspect, compared with a written-based profile as helping to make Tinder a quick and easy way to connect with others. Josh, a 29-year-old straight male, succinctly summarized this idea with the following:

I mean Tinder’s easy access. It’s fast-paced. Easily digestible. It’s meant to be quick and fleeting. Profiles are short. It’s mainly picture-based...It allows you to upload a few pictures and you basically just rapid fire start swiping through people, either giving them a thumbs up or a thumbs down.

The picture-based profile allowed users to swiftly swipe right or left, giving them the opportunity to connect with many matches because of how quickly they can express interest in one another. Anthony, a 30-year-old straight male looking for a committed romantic relationship, also talked about the simple set up of Tinder and the short bio as contributing to Tinder being almost effortless to use.

The other pro that I'd think about throwing in there is just the ease of use.

Obviously you don't really have to write a big profile, spend time on it, so that's I guess convenient for everybody. Everybody's looking to get things done quick, get things done easier, find your phone, click two buttons, and you're in there.

You know it doesn't take long to go through.

Tinder was designated as a simple app, which made it function as a convenient one to use to garner connections. It was easy to create a profile and not difficult to swipe on other profiles. Users said this was not a tedious process, as some other dating websites required a long biography and more complicated messaging system. The simple nature of the app made it convenient for users to try to secure a connection, whether it was a friendship, or something that was romantic or sexual. A final positive part of Tinder that interviewees observed as a convenience was the number of potential matches that would appear each time they opened the app.

Kid in a candy store. Men and women who were interviewed pointed to the number of users on Tinder as something that made the app convenient. There were many options and in most cases, those using the app could spend hours swiping through matches without running out of possibilities. This category's name, Kid in a candy store, is an in vivo code inspired by Nick's description of Tinder:

I mean it's just like being a kid in a candy store. You have so many options of meeting someone it's almost like a pre-screening process of meeting someone and what's cool about it is like you just have a feeling for someone or you don't, you know?

While Nick saw an endless number of women on Tinder, Gina saw a large number of men as possible matches. Her comparison of Tinder was to that of a "meat market." Chasity, a 20-year-old straight female who downloaded Tinder out of curiosity, also noted the number of choices on Tinder as a positive attribute: "I like how you can match with people and how you can also deny them and they can't get ahold of you or anything. It's cool to have a choice, like a line up of all of these options." Both men and women noted the number of users on Tinder as a convenience because it provided many options of people with whom they might connect. Additionally, when asked about their matches, many users said they had hundreds or thousands of matches through Tinder and usually said they spoke to about half of their matches. This illustrates the "kid in a candy store" comparison well, as it shows that users have not only many users to swipe on, but many with whom they match.

Although Tinder was largely described positively due to the number of users on the app, some did point out that there are many people using the app with whom you do not want to connect. Anthony addressed the pros and cons of the quantity of women using Tinder:

So the pros are that there's a very wide net cast so it's very well-known. A lot of ladies are using it. I guess that's a pro and a con. Means you kind of have to spend time, work your way through the different individuals you're screening out

to find somebody that you're initially – like attractive in their pictures. And it's not going to be worth meeting up or spending time with every attractive girl so there's a lot of screening you have to go through with the wide number of people using it. Um I guess another pro, like the reason it's so widely used is because it's free, so more people are willing to use it. But then again that's a con, because it brings like you know some riff raff in to the Tinder game.

Anthony saw both sides of the number of people using the app; it was helpful because there were many choices, but it also meant that he had to spend time thinking about which of all the attractive women would he like to take to the next step. He also said there were a wide number of people as far as attractiveness and profession that use the app because it is not something you have to pay for. Demi and Ethan both agreed in that there were a wide variety of people on Tinder. “So I'm seeing a lot of professionals on here [Bumble], versus on Tinder, where it's kind of like a pool of everyone,” said Demi. Ethan had similar remarks about Tinder as he said, “I find Tinder is a huge mixed bag of women, meaning um you know...from a homeless person to a very successful woman.” Ethan was active on Tinder to find casual sex or a committed romantic partner and described himself as a 33-year-old straight male.

While they did not say the variety of different users on Tinder made the app any less convenient, respondents noted that this was a small obstacle they dealt with as they tried to connect with others. Overall, participants spoke about the lack of other viable options for making romantic connections, simple construction of the app and ease of navigation, as well as the many users on the app as something that makes it function as a

convenient way of making worthwhile connections. With the many people using the app comes the different types of connections that can be made through Tinder.

Variety of relationships. The previous section discussed the variety of users that were on Tinder while this section focuses on the variety of connections people are looking for on Tinder. Participants described what they thought the app was created for; this does not necessarily match with the reason as to why they personally used the app. About 32% of participants, mostly ages 18-23 years, said they thought Tinder was mainly used for making connections that lead to hooking up. Others (10%) stated at first Tinder was known as a hook up app, but now can be used for a variety of reasons including dating. Roughly 26% of respondents said their impression of Tinder is a dating app where users go to eventually find a romantic partner.

Hook up app. While different connections can be made via Tinder, many younger users thought Tinder was a hook up app. Miley thought that Tinder was made for the college audience as she said, “I feel like Tinder is better on college campuses and that’s why Tinder was invented. It was supposed to be an easy hook up app.” When asked to define “hooking up,” respondents answered with varying degrees of sexual intimacy, but most agreed that it means you are meeting with someone to have sex.

Miley illustrated this in the following:

Oh I say hook up is having sex. Some people say it’s an intense make out session and other people say oh people should date, they should hook up, which like that confuses me, because when I hear people say oh they should hook up, like okay?

Shaun agreed with Miley in her definition of hooking up, as he plainly stated it is “sex,” and also was in agreement with Miley when he said hooking up is the only reason users should be on Tinder.

I mean some people are on there, I can tell, like I said I didn’t really read the bios – some people have huge bios or write they’re not here to hook up. I guess some people try to use it serious, but that’s the wrong thing to use if you’re trying to find a serious relationship.

Of the traditionally aged college students, 53% of them said Tinder functioned as a place to connect and eventually hook up with someone. This differed however with 80% of gay Tinder users who were interviewed. Because they saw Grindr as being a hook up app, they thought Tinder was used for romantic relationships. Justin explained this in the following passage:

Because in my experience people go – or from what I hear from my straight guy friends - they go to Tinder for hookups. But in my experience Grindr is for hookups and Tinder is usually for relationships. I don't know about girls, but I do think for straight guys it's more for hookups.

Justin explained that because gay men can use Grindr and straight men did not have a similar app, Tinder became a hook up app for straight men. Fitch also shared similar thoughts on this concept of gay men using Tinder for relationships. “I did not get any messages from any matches on Tinder that led to someone propositioning someone to hook up. It was always more about oh, would you like to go get coffee sometime?” Fitch, a 33-year-old gay male, had met his boyfriend via Tinder. While Tinder can be

used for connecting with others and eventually hooking up, it also can be an app used to find a date or romantic relationship.

Dating app. When asked about the uses of Tinder, many interviewees defined it as a dating app primarily for finding dates or a committed partner. College student Miley distinguished Tinder being used on a college campus versus a small town. She said that while college students used it to find a hook up partner, when she would return to her hometown, users on the app were looking for dates.

I'm from a small town, so people used it for dating or people that weren't in college and just working and they went to meet people so it was way different in the sense of who people were and what they were looking for. At home they wanted just dating and meeting people and at school the majority of Tinder is just to hook up with people.

Miley's point was that she thought college students used Tinder to hook up but going off campus led her to find people with different reasons as to why they were on the app.

Stefani, a 20-year-old questioning female, had used Tinder to confirm her attraction to females. She did not mention hook ups in her description of how people connect on Tinder, but noted that it is a place to find dates.

It's a dating app where you put a brief bio about yourself and you can swipe left or right based on whether or not you think a person is someone who you would want to talk to. And if you both like each other then there's a way for you two to communicate; otherwise neither party can get ahold of the other. And people basically just hit it off from there.

Demi and Anthony had also known Tinder to function as a place to find committed partners. Demi said:

My roommate went on Tinder for the first time and one of her first ten guys that she connected with she started dating and she no longer lives with me and she lives with him. So can it work? Yeah. It's very I think rare, but it can definitely work.

Demi was still skeptical about the likelihood of finding a romantic partner on Tinder, but did note that this connection could be made through Tinder. Anthony had also heard of successes from Tinder via his friend who got engaged to someone he met through the app. "There's success stories. I have a friend getting married in September and he met his fiancé on Tinder," stated Anthony.

Younger and older men and women portrayed Tinder as channel for connecting with people to date. Still other users mentioned more reasons why people use Tinder, and notably that it can be used for not one single reason.

Array of connections. Although Tinder was mainly called a dating or hook up app, there were other reasons brought up regarding the connections that can be made on Tinder. Many users, like Ethan, said Tinder was first a hook up app, then used for many other reasons.

I think when it initially came across, it was initially a hook up app. And I have found now, people are utilizing it more for – more than just hook ups but also meeting Mr. Right or your future husband/wife. Or meeting people just in general if you're new to an area and want to just know more people. So I find that people utilize it in a lot of different formats and some people will say right from the get

go – if it's not in their bio, or when you start chatting with them - I'm not looking for a hook up or I am looking for a hook up or I'm looking for a relationship or I'm not looking for a relationship or whatever.

Josh's remarks about the connections that can be made on Tinder resembled those of Ethan. He also added that friendships can be made through Tinder, among various other relationships.

I think there are different groups of people and different reasons why people go on Tinder. Some are looking for dates, some are looking for friendships, some are looking for committed relationships. I've heard of people using it – you know they'll move to a new town and they just want to meet people. And that's one of the best ways to do that. And on the other end of the spectrum, I have a friend who basically uses it to find sex partners. So I think it's a little bit of everything.

Josh's description of how Tinder functioned to make connections illustrates the multitude of relationships that can be formed from the app and that it does not serve just one purpose.

Finally, Miley excitedly talked about her friend's success story from Tinder, which convinced her that Tinder could function as an outlet to make a variety of connections.

I have a really good friend that I grew up with and he was using it religiously and he was like oh yeah it's great and I had never really dated so I hadn't done anything. I'd only kissed one person and so I was like I wanna date, I wanna try this! Cause he really liked, it and he met a bunch of people. He had not just

hooked up, he was in a relationship with someone that he met off Tinder for a couple months.

Participants addressed how Tinder functioned as an app where users can make multifaceted connections. Younger people saw it as a place where college students browse for hook ups, but others said it should be used for finding a romantic relationship or friends in a new town. Because there is not one agreed upon reason for what kind of connection Tinder allows users to make, this can cause confusion. Users on the app thinking everyone else is present for a long-term relationship can be confused, surprised, and disappointed to learn that others are only there for entertainment, hooking up, or friendships.

Summary of Function Two: Connections

The second major function of Tinder was to make connections. First, users said Tinder functioned as a medium where connections could be made conveniently. Participants stressed the difficulties of meeting others in school, at work, and on other dating websites. When other ways of reaching their goal of hooking up, meeting new people, or finding a romantic partner had failed, Tinder was a convenient app to turn to. It was quick to set up and simple and easy to use for finding matches in the area. It also served as a convenient channel to connect with others because of the number of people using the app; participants could swipe for hours and not run out of profiles to view. Second, participants reported that a variety of connections could be made via Tinder, which was also a convenience. While it was first known to be a hook up app, it has since become a place to find other connections beyond casual sexual partners. It has been

deemed a dating app, a place to meet new people, and somewhere to find friends, giving it multiple functions for users to take advantage of.

Summary of Theme One: Functions of Tinder

The first theme, Functions of Tinder, comprises the subthemes Entertainment and Connections. Tinder operated as an app that allowed users to entertain themselves while alone and with others. Users told stories of how much fun they had on Tinder while hanging out with a roommate, friend, or a group of people. Friends would help each other craft messages to send on Tinder or judge profiles. Not only did interviewees use the app as entertainment with friends, it also functioned as entertainment while alone. Some saw the app as a fun game because of the swiping motions or ability to judge others, while other respondents said it was simply a way to kill time and amuse themselves when bored. Viewing Tinder as a fun game has implications for users on the other end. If users are swiping for fun and making light of interpersonal connections, others on the app can endure feelings of frustration because they are using the app for serious connections and think others are too. This also connects to the variety of functions for Tinder. Participants had different beliefs in regards to why users are on Tinder, emphasizing there is not one clear use for Tinder (i.e. a place for friendships, a place for hooking up, a place for dating), and thus causing confusion for users.

Tinder's second purpose was all about making connections. Tinder users said the app was a cinch to use and that those on the app could make a variety of interpersonal connections, including meeting new people in a town, casual sexual affairs, and committed romantic partners. Tinder users had many different ideas as to why other users were on the app, meaning there was not one clear purpose to Tinder. Again, this

can create confusion for users who believe the app should be used for a particular romantic purpose. Finally, it was a convenient app to turn to when other methods of connecting, such as other dating websites or finding a romantic partner in a college setting, had been unsuccessful. Participants overwhelmingly described other methods (e.g. connecting through other dating websites, finding romantic partners in college) as being ineffective. Ironically, at the end of many interviews, some participants also included Tinder in this category as failing to provide a connection they were looking for despite their initial hope.

As Tinder functioned as a place to make connections, the process of creating and ending those connections are the focus of the second major theme: Life of Connections. The second theme elucidates the process of making connections through Tinder from beginning to end. The life cycle of securing connections through Tinder begins with creating an online profile and concludes with the continuation or dissolution of a connection.

Life of Connections

The second theme, Life of Connections, explores the stages of relationships (e.g. romantic, sexual, platonic) that begin via Tinder. This theme addresses how people use Tinder (*RQ2*), how communication is initiated and escalated on Tinder (*RQ3*) and if and how the connections are maintained (*RQ4*) or de-escalate (*RQ5*). Six major steps are explained in this process: building an online profile, swiping on others' profiles, initiating communication, developing conversation, meeting offline, and continuing or dissolving a romantic, sexual, or friendly relationship. This process will begin with how users create a profile to represent themselves online.

Online Profile

Tinder users devised a profile influenced by their goals for using the app, advice from others, and desire to put their best foot forward. Wanting to form a committed relationship, a hook up, or locate friends influenced the creation of a profile as far as what pictures and information Tinder users would share. Second, many Tinder users sought the opinion of their friends when choosing pictures to use on their profile and how to compose their biography. Third, users wanted to portray their best self while still communicating an accurate picture of themselves. This process will begin with exploring how users' goals impacted the development of their Tinder profile, which was the first step to take before one could make a connection on Tinder.

Goals. While participants had earlier described what they thought Tinder was made for, each participant named their specific goal for using Tinder. The type of connection they wanted to make via Tinder ultimately influenced the way in which they created their profile as well as how they decided to swipe. Over half of participants (55%) wanted to secure dates or a romantic partner from Tinder. Of those participants who said they wanted to find a romantic partner, 76% were 26 to 40 years of age and 24% were traditional college age. Twenty-nine percent of participants, all 18 to 22 years of age, stated they were using the app because they were curious or looking for friends and had no real romantic objectives. Fewer Tinder users (16%) who were interviewed were upfront about being on the app to find a casual sex partner. Those who blatantly indicated hook ups as a goal were men ages 30-36 years. While others engaged in hooking up from the app, they had not given that reason as their primary goal for creating

a Tinder account. To give themselves the best opportunity for making the connections they had hoped for, participants strategically crafted their profiles.

Users who wished to form a committed romantic relationship via Tinder chose more conservative photographs for their profile that also showed some of their personality, while those looking to hook up chose more revealing photos. Dominique was looking for new friends and dates from Tinder and chose certain photos of herself to share with others based on those objectives. “I had no excessive cleavage pictures or anything like that. I had pictures of me doing activities versus looking nice at a party. I was trying to go for a respectable girl, but also one who has fun,” said Dominique. Likewise, Sabrina, a 21-year-old straight female who used Tinder out of curiosity and did not want to be solicited by men looking for hook ups, created a profile that exemplified her objectives.

I'm not showing any cleavage or anything so just me as a person, the way that I dress and who I am. Cause your picture represents you and who you are as a person. And that's it. I didn't want people to think oh she's showing this or not so she's easy, that's not what I wanted. It's just me smiling, you can't even see my whole body it's just my head and some of my shoulders.

Dominique and Sabrina were cognizant of the message their photos were sending and took care to use photos that matched their reason for being on Tinder and the type of relationship they wanted to emerge from using the app.

Colton was also not looking for hook ups on Tinder, but dates or something more serious. He revealed that his personality is one of his best attributes and continued to say, “On a dating site it's more about that [personality] versus just being like, you know,

smoldering.” In order to reach his goal of securing dates or a boyfriend, Colton chose an opening profile photo that highlighted his personality.

It's me and one of my closest female friends on a film set. We were filming a movie... and we're just hanging out. We were in a police office of all places and she had on this infinity scarf and I took it off of her and I wrapped it around both of our necks, so we're squished together like both wearing the same scarf and stuff like that. And it's just really cute and I felt like it got my personality across a little bit more like you know it was fun, we were goofing off on set.

Colton believed the lighthearted nature of his profile picture highlighted his personality, which he wanted to showcase to find a partner.

While the previous users chose pictures because they were looking for a romantic relationship, other users tailored their photos to communicate their desire to engage in casual sex. Tinder users focused their photographs on themselves and their best physical features when looking for a hook up as opposed to having a lot of photos with friends. Stefani had made several different profiles, which changed based on her goals. She discussed the most recent time she made her online profile when she was looking to hook up with someone and was questioning her sexuality.

Each time was different. The first few times I had it, I didn't have a bio and the pictures I had were pictures of me and my friends or me at scenic places; I didn't have any selfies. And then the most recent time I made it, whenever I literally just wanted to hook up with someone, I put selfies of me. Like one of my face, one of a mirror selfie, and then my bio I think it said I'm in Town ABC for the weekend. And then I had two emojis; one of two girls holding hands and then

one of a guy and a girl holding hands. In all profiles I made they were all varied, but in the last one – they were more like, I don't know, they weren't revealing, but there was more of a focus because I was the centerpiece of the photo. Whereas in the other ones that I made it would be like oh there's Stefani in some trees. Or like a group of friends or something.

Stefani clearly recalled her thought process for trying to reach her sexual goals through Tinder by being clear in what her profile communicated to other users. Miley recalled a comparable method of attracting users who wanted the same physical encounter as her. At first, Miley used the app to date, but eventually saw it as a means to open her up sexually, which she had not experienced yet in life. Miley shared that her photos showed her in a more sexual manner. “I had a picture of me in a dress that showed off my legs and then I had a picture that was kinda low cut,” she said. Showing more skin is something that users did when conveying their desire to engage in sexual relations. Likewise, Shaun used the app for fun and entertainment at first, but then saw it as a way to hook up with females. His profile matched both goals: “I don't remember what I had in the bio – something goofy. And then I do physique competitions so I put pictures like that. It was nothing serious.” Shaun talks about the creation of his profile in a carefree manner and did not put too much time in to it because he was not looking for anything serious. His photos focusing on his body matched his goal of wanting to hook up with women.

The type of relationship users wanted to bring to life by using Tinder guided their approach when choosing profile pictures. Those who wanted to find a romantic partner were sure to showcase their personality in their photographs along with good-looking

pictures of themselves that did not give the impression they were looking to hook up. Others who were there for entertainment put less effort into selectively choosing photographs, but still wanted the pictures to be cute. Finally, those looking for a hook up highlighted their physical attributes and put the focus of the pictures on themselves.

Advice from others. With their goals in mind, users created a profile where they hoped they would eventually realize their romantic relationship, date, or hook up come to life. During this undertaking, Tinder users would consult others for advice on creating their best profile. Nick spoke about his desire to make many connections and the research he conducted on effective Tinder profiles to see his goal come to fruition.

I've definitely done research on profiles, on what things work, what doesn't, just reading online pictures to include, pictures not to include, or descriptors to use and words not to use. I've tried to take that advice and tried to make my profile most attractive or appealing as I can, cause you want to meet as many people as you can.

Nick researched articles online to improve his profile while other users talked about seeking out advice from friends to create a more effective profile. Just like participants said they would use the app for entertainment with friends, participants also sought their friends when they needed Tinder advice. Justin explained how he modified the written portion of his profile after showing his friend his current description.

When I first made my description I made it sound like I was going into an interview. I had a friend and he was like this is sad. He's like you literally sound like you're applying for a job right now and so he helped me with it and I guess I made it more humorous and more relatable or likable.

By adding humor as suggested by Justin's friend, Justin saw a better response rate from others who were viewing his profile. Dmitri, a 30-year-old straight male, also took the approach of seeking out friends' advice when creating an account for Tinder and the Chinese version of Tinder, Tan Tan. He wanted to know how to create a profile that would catch the attention of women and how to tweak his profile depending on which country he was using it in.

I'm not a big photogenic person to begin with so that was a struggle in itself. But I got more people's advice on what to do. So I got a good selection of different photos of me: traveling, climbing mountains, and they all kind of show different attributes that I'm not some video gamer that sits on a couch and eats potato chips all day, which obviously that's not attractive to most women. But girls always talk about how they like to travel so I try to really portray that pretty strongly. Some of this is a whole pullover from Chinese Tinder, Tan Tan, because my friend who lives in China gave me advice on – the flavor of the week over there, and with Chinese girls they look for different things than Western girls would look for. Cause with Chinese girls blue eyes is almost enough to get you in to a relationship all in itself. And then Chinese girls tend to love cats. So it was important for me to get a photo in there petting a cat. I was with my friends in Kentucky over the summer and we were discussing upgrading my profile for Tan Tan and my friends had a cat. So we had a photoshoot of me petting the cat and looking like I was smiling and happy and loved animals and loved cats basically. It's really the message behind the looks that Chinese girls are concerned about. The next one is me actually sitting next to a Mustang I had rented just because

like ooh wow you have a nice car. In China, that's a big deal and very important to women. And then the final photo is me with some friends because it's important to show that you have friends and a social life.

Dmitri sought the advice of his friends and took the time to create pictures and scenes that would exemplify what women wanted to see, taking into consideration the culture of the area in which he was swiping. He did this to increase his chances of making an offline connection by using Tinder. Each participant described changing their profile based on the trusted advice from friends and research. Their goal was to get more swipes and a better response rate.

Best foot forward. In addition to altering their profile based on friends' advice, participants also said they wanted to showcase their most appealing pictures on Tinder. "Best foot forward," an in vivo code, described participants' desire to upload their most physically attractive photographs to their profile. In doing so, participants also said they tried to make the pictures accurately represent themselves and did not edit them or use photographs that were dated.

Tinder users who were interviewed said they undoubtedly chose pictures they looked good in for their Tinder profile. Jake, a 21-year-old straight single male looking for a long-term girlfriend, talked about how he chose his profile pictures. "I used my best-looking pictures of course," said Jake, while Anthony stated, "My pictures were obviously good pictures of me." Female respondents shared the same thoughts, with Deborah (a 20-year-old straight female who did not have romantic objectives for Tinder) commenting, "I basically just wanted to put cute pictures of myself for the most part," and Chasity explaining, "I honestly just picked the pictures where I felt I looked good

in.” After briefly addressing the obvious, participants went into detail about how they chose the photos where they look good, but ones that also accurately portrayed themselves. Fitch summarized this idea in the following passage:

So obviously I picked ones [pictures] that I thought I looked really good in. But I didn't go and retouch them or anything to make my nose look smaller or something like that, it was just good looking pictures of me. I made sure that there were full body photo-ish type things. If it's just a close up of my face then the person's gonna be like well he's cute in the face, but is he fat? And I'm just being realistic, this is what goes through people's minds. So I always like to show an accurate, you know for the most part, portrayal, so they would look at me and say oh he's an average skinny guy.

Fitch wanted to give life to a meaningful exclusive romantic relationship from Tinder and therefore wanted to show that he is a good-looking person, but at the same time did not want to misrepresent himself. He thought it was likely that he would make a connection from Tinder and meet another user in person soon and did not want the other person to feel as though he misrepresented himself, thus possibly ending the connection. Fitch's thoughts differed from Dmitri, who had posed with a cat and Mustang to attract women. Although Dmitri also expected to meet women in person, he felt he needed more help from his profile to make matches, as he had said he is not the most attractive person.

Like Fitch, Bryan also wanted to choose photos that were true-to-life, which included showing his body type on Tinder. He described his profile pictures as the following:

Two of them are me on the beach with friends. My body type is skinny, so I don't want people thinking I'm built and coming to meet me and being turned off cause I'm not muscular, so I put that on there.

Bryan, a 20-year-old gay male looking for a partner, knew he also might be meeting users from Tinder offline soon, so he wanted to give the relationship a good chance of moving forward. He wanted others to know exactly what type of body type he had as he realized physical appearance is important to a significant other.

Not only do thinner or average body type Tinder users want to truthfully depict their size through their photos, users who described themselves as bigger or chubby did as well. Michelle did not want to deceive other users as to what kind of body type she has.

I actually did try to include full body pictures because I'm not a skinny girl. I tried to make sure the person viewing my profile didn't get the wrong idea of who I was, like thinking I was some skinny little thing on the Internet.

Michelle wanted to secure a connection from Tinder based on who she truly is, not someone who has edited her photographs to look smaller. Adam said similar remarks to Michelle, except he noted that he wrote something in his profile about his body.

When I do my descriptions in my profile I say I am a chubby guy. Because my face tends to look thinner than my chubby body. And so when they see just the picture of my face, they think, oh yeah he's cute, and then if they'll read further they'll see that hey I'm chubby. Like I said I try to put my best foot forward, but I also am very - I'm pretty honest and upfront.

Adam, a 40-year old gay male looking for a long-term relationship, was cognizant of the message he was sending regarding his physical appearance, as he did not want to misrepresent his body to others. Posting flattering, yet accurate photos proactively helped users to match with people who had interest in them knowing what they looked like with little to no deception. Users expected to meet others in person soon so they believed portraying accurate photographs would help continue the life of a connection in that a connection may die if a user met them and realized they are bigger than they portrayed themselves to be.

While participants described their pictures as being an accurate representation of themselves, there were a few instances of deception. Chandler (a 26-year-old straight male) stated, “I never want to be that person...here’s what I’m saying I look like but I don’t look nearly as good as I do in the photos,” but he also said one photograph he chose for Tinder was “a low angle shot of myself that makes me look taller than I actually am.” When asked if he classified that as deceptive he said, “A little bit. But it’s like saying here’s who I am, but at an angle where it’s up to you to decide exactly how tall I am.” His reasoning for doing so was related to women overwhelmingly wanting to match with tall men. Chandler shared, “Unfortunately height is a make or break characteristic. You see that on profiles, like ‘I want a man who’s such and such tall or taller than me.’” Chandler did not edit his photograph, but did engage in some trickery because he consciously wanted to appear taller in his photograph. He knew his height might influence his chances of making matches so he wanted to do what he could to give himself the best chance of matching on Tinder because he was looking for a committed

romantic relationship. He would face an offline meeting and the consequences of the other's potential disappointment if and when that occurred.

Similarly, Dmitri's description of his photo shoot with a cat from the previous section also illustrates some deception. Dmitri talked about the staged photo shoot with the Mustang and cat, which did not necessarily represent his personality, but what he thought other women wanted to see and would swipe on. He was more concerned about making matches than necessarily representing his personality accurately through his profile.

Summary of Online Profile

Devising a profile based on their relationship goals, receiving advice from others, and putting their best, yet mostly accurate, photos forward are all ways Tinder users tried to create a profile that would eventually launch successful beginnings to romantic and sexual relationships. Those who wanted to begin a romantic relationship wanted to communicate photographs of themselves that did not give the impression that they were "easy" or looking just for sex. This finding implies that women were aware that showing too much cleavage or showing off their legs was perceived as inviting sexual comments or relationships. Women felt restricted as to how they could display their body when they were looking for a romantic, long-term partner, not a sexual hook up. Users looking for a romantic partner also wanted to showcase their personality, as that was an important characteristic to communicate when looking for a relationship. Others who were looking for casual sex focused their pictures more so on their physical attributes, such as their muscles, cleavage, or legs. This communicated their desire to connect with someone to hook up for a physical relationship. Next, online profiles often changed based on the

advice users received from research and from friends. They tailored their profile pictures and descriptions to their goal and what they thought would produce the most swipes from others, thus giving them a better chance of launching a successful relationship or hook up. Finally, participants talked about choosing pictures for their profile that were attractive, yet accurate. Most users did not want to deceive and disappoint other users they were meeting in person, as they believed they could make serious connections from using the app. However, some participants used minor deceptive practices in hopes they would receive more matches on Tinder. Users who were less confident on their level of physical attractiveness engaged in small deception versus those who were more confident. Upon completion of a profile, users could then begin to swipe on other profiles and make matches.

Swiping Process

Before initial communication can begin, Tinder users must swipe on profiles of other users in their area and match with them. Deciding on whom to swipe is a precursor to making a connection through the app. Although swiping through profiles can be done quickly, those interviewed for this study talked about various features of a profile they consider when swiping. First, it was important to screen users to be sure they were authentic people and not catfish or bots. If they passed that test, users then discussed what influenced their decisions. Participants talked about pictures or a mix of pictures and the biography as helping them to make up their mind. Photographs were discussed in detail in terms of users' physical beauty as well as the message behind the picture being important to consider. The following sections explore each of these steps that lead to matching and communicating with others on the app.

Vetting users. Before choosing to express interest in someone and possibly begin a connection, interviewees wanted to be sure the person on the other end was not a fraud. Tinder users of both sexes and all ages were apprehensive about the authenticity of other profiles on the app. Users wanted to protect themselves from physical harm and/or disappointment and only connect with people who were true to what their profile was representing. Several interviewees spoke highly of the app being connected to Facebook. All Tinder profiles are linked to a Facebook account, which gave users some hope that the accounts were real. However, some mentioned that others could still easily create a fake Facebook account to use to register for Tinder. The concept of being someone behind the screen, but portraying different photographs of one's self online is known as catfishing. Interviewees referred to catfishing as something they were aware of and tried to avoid at all costs while swiping left and right.

Another scam users were cognizant of was bots. Bots are fake accounts on Tinder used to generate interest from the party who is swiping. It gives an illusion that other people are attracted to a user, which is supposed to keep users returning to the app. Melody defined bots as “computer-made profiles to make you more likely to use the app, because oh there's attractive people on this app!” Melody, a 23-year-old straight female avoided bots and found her boyfriend by using Tinder. Both catfish and bots were discussed in the stage of vetting users.

Catfish and bots. When first opening Tinder, users said they were aware while swiping of potential catfish and bots and before swiping they would assess whether the person behind the profile was real or fake. Elizabeth, an 18-year-old straight female who used Tinder for entertainment when she was bored, had not experienced a catfish while

using the app, but knew others that had, which made her hesitant when swiping. She said, “I’ve never had it personally, but I know people get catfished. It’s very sketchy and you don’t know who’s waiting on the other side.” In order to confirm whether a potential catfish was a real person or too good to be true, Dominique researched them on the Internet. She explained, “I try to learn more about them so I – this sounds really stalkerish, but just to Google them to make sure they're a real person.” While Dominique used the Internet as a resource to vet users, Dmitri said that it was easy to spot a catfish from just looking at their profile.

As of recently I have not really been talking to anybody on there or I haven’t had anybody I felt the need to swipe with. Because you’re kind of murkin’ – it’s like a muddy pond. There’s catfish in there and there’s regular fish, so you have to be very conscious of catfish. I would say at least 25% of the people most guys would swipe with are probably catfish. But they're fairly easy to pick out unless you’re completely stupid.

Dmitri estimated that other people most likely swipe right for a high percentage of fake accounts. His description of catfish and real fish shows that he was mindful with whom he swiped in order to only match with actual users and not waste any time connecting with a fraud.

Sometimes catfish are innocuous in the sense that catfish are not looking to get money from another person, but a boost of confidence by hiding behind someone else’s photographs. Other times, as in Ethan’s description, catfish are looking for money or other gains for the user.

The other thing about Tinder that I have found is that there's a lot of times where you match with a female that might be "out of your league." And you interact with a catfish. Meaning there's a sequence of messages that turn highly sexual within the first couple minutes and therefore they will ask you for your TinderPlus code and it dissolves from there.

What Ethan was describing is when catfish try to lure users in by sending sexual messages, but there is a scam and an agenda not relating to connecting for honest reasons behind these accounts. Some catfish are looking for money, as in this case, and try to use sexual advances to get what they want from male users.

One way to verify users' legitimacy was by their photographs, both on Tinder and through social media. Participants drew on the number of photographs and the quality of the pictures to decide whether the profile was worth swiping on or if it was a fake. Justin simply stated, "If you only have one pic, I assume you're a catfish." Nick also mentioned the quantity of photographs as being an indication of a possible catfish but also the quality of those snapshots. He said, "If a woman's profile has three photos for instance and they're all studio photos they're always fake. It's not a real woman, it's like a bot." In addition to determining the validity of others' profiles, Tinder users will also turn to social media to assess if the person in the profile is a catfish. Respondents talked about turning to Instagram and Snapchat for verifying the true identity of a potential match on Tinder. Sabrina talked about both social media platforms in her interview.

That [Instagram] can be an easier way for like if they would request me I would go follow them or not even follow them, just see their page to see if either their

pictures matched up or they had pictures of other people so I knew they weren't catfishing.

Sabrina went on to say that Snapchat can be used by both parties to corroborate the other's profile pictures from Tinder.

The majority of guys would rather use Snapchat so they can make sure you are who you say you are – the number one way to verify that's really you. So I would do that too because I would want verification too to make sure your pictures just aren't like this on here and you didn't take them off of somebody else's profile. Like it's actually you. But then there would be other guys who would trick you and just take pictures of the wall or whatever that weren't pictures of themselves, so then I would just be like off Snapchat.

If Tinder users visually looked the same on Instagram and/or Snapchat, those swiping felt more comfortable moving forward. When profiles did not match social media accounts or real time photographs taken through Snapchat, interviewees said this was a red flag and would not move forward. This is an important step to take while progressing toward making a connection because users can be disappointed and frustrated if they meet someone in person who is a catfish.

Once Tinder users believed the profiles were genuine, they then decided which factors were most important to them when swiping right on others. Participants spoke of the written biography and/or pictures being important to assess, but to varying degrees and order of importance.

Factors of swiping. When asked about their swiping thought process, users stated differing practices regarding how they swiped; some swiped right on almost all

profiles, while others were more particular about their swipes. Chandler classified his swipes on Tinder as atypical because he took a lot into consideration before swiping right on a profile.

It [swiping] was based on several factors. Probably put in more thought than the typical person would. But swiping left was pretty easy. You would get that immediate first impression when the first photo pops up- not interested. But if I was interested in the way someone looked based off the initial photo, I would click on that image to see more about them and more photos. Sometimes the way the deck is stacked, the first image is the best one and then when you start looking at the other ones, not quite as good, or they revealed stuff that you didn't necessarily see in that first one. Such as you know other features, body. Sometimes you'll get a person who looks thin and then you flip over a few images and turns out they're snowman-shaped. But once you get past the stack of images that they have, I actually did spend a lot of time reading through profiles to see what they're interested in.

Chandler took multiple factors into consideration, but initially his swipes were based on the visual impression, especially for swiping left. Stefani also found that looking at multiple photographs was often more telling than the first one that appeared on a profile.

I can tell if I'm going to swipe left usually just like the first picture because if it's a group picture, chances are the person in there is the least attractive. So I kind of had that down to a science and most of the time whenever I would scroll through I would be right after looking at the rest of their pictures.

Several users mentioned initial group photographs as being a red flag, as the person behind the profile was usually hiding behind their more attractive friends and hoping the user swiping would swipe right.

When deciding on a profile, William also said he started with the first picture and then his choice went from there.

I just kind of based it off the first picture I saw. I never really went too far into a person's profile. If I just saw their first picture I would just base it off of that pretty much. If I saw the first picture and I like - I don't know maybe I thought they were good looking and I just wanted to see more pictures, I would click on them and then read their bio. Sometimes their bio would turn me away too. Uh just kind of like, I don't know, just weird stuff, like looking for hook ups or like anything else that would throw off a red flag that they might be a fake account or they're just kinda weird.

William's decision to swipe right on a profile was mostly influenced from the first photograph he saw; however, the biography also played a role in his decision. Ethan had a similar thought process when swiping through women's profiles, but he talked about specifically looking at one's face first, body, then written portion.

I would first look at their face and if the face to me seemed attractive, I would swipe right. If the face maybe wasn't as good, but let's say the body was very good, then I would swipe right again. If the face and body were average or maybe not to my ultimate superficial liking, I would read the bio and look at the activities of those people. If those activities and or bio seemed interesting to me then I

would swipe right. So superficial face, body next, then the actual bio / activity of the person.

Ethan placed chief importance on a person's face and body; however, he also would swipe right on someone if they seemed interesting per their biography yet not as physically attractive. For Kasey the biography meant a lot, especially if she was on the fence about swiping right. Kasey, a 26-year-old straight female, specifically pointed out music as being something that influenced the direction of her swipes.

The bio was a big thing for me. If it had something funny or sarcastic in the bio then I would probably swipe right and then I swiped right a lot too if we liked the same bands. I think it was the tipping point a lot of times. I can't tell if this guy is that cute but he likes the White Stripes, you know, then I would swipe right. Or if I was like he's mediocre looking, but you know he likes Drake too, then I would probably swipe right. So I don't know if I'd put it [music and biography] ahead of it [physical appearance], but it was definitely a deciding factor a lot of times.

Especially for those looking to begin a romantic relationship through Tinder, the pictures and the biography were important to consider.

As the previous statements have demonstrated, Tinder users put much thought into their decision to swipe right or left on a profile. But, other users have explained that the process is more casual and less choosy for them. Thomas, a 31-year-old straight male divorcee, was recently single after a six-year marriage. He began using Tan Tan to meet others to hang out with and to engage in casual sex. Thomas found his current girlfriend from Tan Tan, but discussed how he swiftly swiped through his potential matches when

he was single. Thomas noticed with whom he matched and then assessed his matches to see whom he wanted to message.

I kind of just swipe in rapid succession. Go through the daily just to see who I could talk to. Because I didn't feel like there was really that big of a need to be very selective because the conversation would yield more results and be more interesting than doting on a profile. So I just kind of swipe through in very rapid succession and see what happened and see who I would connect with or whatever and I would just try to start talking with whoever.

Thomas placed more emphasis on the conversations he had with women as opposed to the profile pictures or biography. He said the conversations were more telling to see if he would have a strong connection with another user.

Dmitri took a similar approach to swiping and also noted that he more selectively chose with whom to move forward after seeing who swiped right on him.

I don't discriminate in the initial –I don't like the face value aspect of Tinder.

Some people take a look at every profile. I take the approach of I swipe right literally on every single profile I see. Because that way if I match with them then I have the ability to weed out which people I would want to talk to. So it's more like casting a big net so you can throw back in the ocean what you don't want.

By swiping right on every profile, Dmitri then assessed who was interested in him by seeing who matched with him. He went from there and spent time looking at their profiles instead of assessing profiles from the start. Zack's swiping also resembled Dmitri's in that he eventually swiped right on all profiles.

I didn't immediately swipe right blindly. What I would do is I would read the profile and I would get a sense of who they are, if they matched a couple of my beliefs or if they have the same thought process that would work out really well. But after a while that changed. If I was just looking for hookups, it would literally just be swipe right on everything for a couple seconds and then whatever came back, you know, you would talk to the people that you wanted to talk to.

The way Zack decided to swipe right was also influenced by his goal. In the end when he wanted casual sex, he was not as selective as he said he swiped right on all profiles then decided which ones he would try to connect with.

While different users place importance on varying qualities of Tinder users' online profiles, most agreed that the photographs were of high importance. Interviewees spoke of the profile photographs in terms of users' physical appeal and what the photograph said about their personality based on what they were doing in the picture.

Physical attractiveness. Being a visual platform and place for users to connect romantically and sexually, it is no surprise that interviewees focused on physical attractiveness as part of their decision-making process. Zack said, "I think it was more about physical attraction immediately. I think that's what Tinder is though." Kasey agreed that Tinder is about one's looks, but says it is not different from how people would connect at a bar.

So I mean yeah I think that was the big thing, like a lot of people were like well I don't like it because you're basing it solely off of looks. But when you go up to somebody in a bar, you go up to them solely based off of how they look.

Participants were blunt about the role that attraction played on Tinder. When asked how users elected to swipe right on a profile, Deborah said, “Basically whether I thought they were attractive or not. If I thought they were good looking or not.” Dana had identical remarks: “And for me I also look for some appearance. I’m not going to swipe for them if I’m not really attracted to them.” Demi answered the question in a similar fashion, as she said:

Am I attracted to you? Period. I’m not kidding. You have to be attracted to the other person and if I am not remotely attracted to you then I’m gonna swipe left. There was a good one that I actually did date for 3 months– he literally looked like Prince Eric from *The Little Mermaid*, I’m not even kidding you.

Demi was looking to date men from Tinder, so the physical attraction was an important part of connecting with a potential suitor. For an offline connection to be successful, she knew he had to physically meet her standards.

When talking specifically about qualities other Tinder users had that would make them swipe right or left, respondents discussed others’ smiles, facial features, hair color, clothing, and body type. Heterosexual female users mentioned wanting good facial features in a man, a nice smile and males who were not tinier or shorter than them. Straight men were looking for women who were physically fit, had nice facial features, and did not have weird clothing, to name a few. While users had specifics of what hair color or style they liked, many users had mentioned race as a factor of swiping. Race was not of utmost importance to Chandler, but he said it did play a role in his swiping. “To a much lesser extent I guess than other criteria, race does factor in,” said Chandler. Other interviewees felt the same way as Chandler. Sandra, an 18-year old straight female

looking for friends and a boyfriend via Tinder, elaborated on this point and said, “I don't mean to sound bad doing this but I'm not really into ethnic people, so that's a big red flag to me. I just like to stick with me and myself so that's a big red flag with me.” Like Chandler and Sandra, Anthony also swiped right with his own race and stated his romantic goals were part of that reasoning.

I really can't wrap my mind around being with a non-White girl. So since I'm making these efforts to use Tinder for dating for potential long-term suitor reasons, I'm probably going to be swiping left if the girl's not White.

Anthony took race in to consideration as that was part of his criteria of who he could see himself with long-term, which is why he was on the app in the first place: to find a romantic partner.

Although many Tinder users referred to a person's photograph as being the sole reason they swipe left or right, many times they were not referring to the person's physical allure but rather what the photograph said about the user. The next factor in swiping is what a picture says about the user's interests, hobbies, and character. This played a role in how users determined whether they would swipe left and stall a connection, or swipe right and try to make a match.

A picture tells a thousand words. This category's title was triggered by Adam's in vivo code where he said, “A picture does tell a thousand words. So you could tell a lot about a person from their profile picture.” While gazing at a profile picture, those ready to swipe would assume certain qualities about users from their pictures. While on the topic of swiping, Tinder users talked about different kinds of photographs they had seen

on Tinder and what the picture said to them about the user's personality and hobbies, but ultimately their compatibility.

First, several interviewees spoke about selfies in a negative manner. According to interviewees, selfies made the user seem as if they were full of themselves or did not have many friends. Colton proclaimed, "I don't like douche people, you know what I mean? Sometimes you can just tell. If the photos are a bunch of selfies, it seems kind of conceited." Selfies can also be associated with lack of social interaction offline as well as having a self-admiring personality. Anthony asserted that females' selfies on Tinder made him think they did not have many friends.

If a girl has a bunch of selfies and no pictures of any of her friends, then that just kind of – that's a turn off in the sense that you're not good with people, you're not going to interact well with people, what's me trying to talk to you? But I like to see a girl who seems to have a life and friends and family that she's close with and it's not a bunch of selfies. Actually that's a huge turn off.

Social skills were important to Anthony so seeing a profile full of selfies made Anthony assume that the woman did not have friends. He ultimately wanted to connect with women who had good people skills. Justin also did not care for selfies and mentioned the social aspect of what the selfie stood for. He instead wanted to see more variety in the photographs.

When it comes to them as a person, I do like to see social pictures. I like to see pictures with people. I also like to see different environments. It kind of shows that they're more variety than you know just mirror selfies.

While a few selfies were not a complete red flag, a profile full of them was. Participants preferred a variety of photographs with the user in different environments.

Interviewees also discussed the activity or environment shown in the picture. They shared that certain hobbies being displayed in a picture were favorable while some were not. Tinder users spoke approvingly about profiles that depicted activities. Colton expressed, “I like the ones with group activities and like out doing things and stuff. Cause you can get a good idea of what they like to do.” Users’ hobbies and interests were determined through glancing at a profile picture and many people interviewed shared what caught their eye about these photographs.

Participants indicated adventure as something that was appealing in a profile picture. Elizabeth remembered an instance where she expressed interest in a profile because of the activity. “Someone was paddle boarding and that was adventurous, so I swiped right.” Elizabeth did not mention anything about this person’s physical appearance, but was interested because he seemed outgoing. Stefani also spoke highly about adventure.

For me people who are doing fun things with friends, like adventurous stuff - so I do like it when people put pictures of them and their friends up because it shows their personality a little bit like if they're social and kind of just gives me a glimpse to see if they're fun and adventurous. I really like to travel so I like seeing other people's travel pictures or if they're doing fun outdoor activities, they're kind of adventurous like rock climbing or swimming, biking.

As indicated by Stefani, pictures can shed light on users' personality and interests. This helped those swiping to decide if the story the pictures told was compatible with what they were looking for in a potential partner.

Even if the photographs were not adventurous, respondents named other portions of profile pictures that Tinder users said would gain their interest because of what it said about the other's personality.

I remember swiping right on a girl because she had Harry Potter earrings. If you weren't looking for it you'd miss it completely, but I saw it and I found that interesting so I'd swipe right on her. And some people would put up some interesting artwork that they did, and I would swipe right on that or if it looks like they play an instrument or something, that always seemed interesting to me.

The above statements from Josh show that he would assess the pictures not simply based on physical attraction, but on what the pictures said about their personality. Bryan specified pictures had the ability to provide him with evidence supporting whether he would match well with the person behind the profile. He was looking for other men who enjoyed doing the same activities as he did.

Some things I like to see are if their pictures are them on the beach. Because I like the beach. I guess aesthetic things, if they're on the beach, or if they're shopping because those are things I like to do. If they have really good looking food in front of them, which means they like to go out to eat at restaurants, because I really like to eat too.

The previous quotes emphasize environments and activities in Tinder profile pictures that allowed people swiping to make a judgment about the compatibility of their

personality. Although many respondents talked about what they saw as intriguing profile pictures, they also explained that a picture could turn them off because of how it represented the user. Participants referred to the environment in which the picture was taken and the nature of the activity as being a sign of the user's personality; the following quotes represent what interviewees did not like.

Issues of culture were brought up for people who used Tinder in other countries. Thomas talked about the incompatibility of some users while he was swiping through Tan Tan in China.

If it seemed like there would probably be no way to communicate with them, like they're from a totally different world just based on their profile picture. It's a lot more obvious and apparent here in China with the profile pictures that would just be totally weird. Like an older woman standing in front of the communist headquarters - probably not going to be terribly interested.

Without remarking on the person's physical appearance in the profile, Thomas knew some users would not be suitable matches. Likewise, Chandler could make these same assessments in the U.S.

If the picture looks like it was taken in someone's basement at a slutty college get together where there's fifty people in a basement that can really only comfortably fit twenty. I think there is a certain level of class that should go in to photos at least where it doesn't look like you know - some pictures just make it seem like you're the kind of girl that would give a hand job to anyone who asks. Red Solo Cups are also kind of a turn off. Cause it perpetuates that trashy, party college student persona.

It was easy for users to stereotype profile pictures and make quick judgments regarding whether they wanted to swipe and possibly make a connection. Many people interviewed remarked on partying pictures as being something that was a turn off in a profile.

Alcohol and smoking was specifically mentioned several times. Gina said, “If there were pictures of people smoking, then it was a ‘no.’ Or just pictures of a beer in every picture, that was a ‘no.’” Besides partying, drinking, and smoking, numerous participants called upon “redneck activities” as putting them off. “I didn’t swipe on everyone. Cause people on Tinder have hunting pictures or fishing pictures and outdoorsy and I was just like no. You know what I mean, people on the redneck side.” Miley’s statement was consistent with many others who referred to “redneck activities,” such as hunting and fishing as being something that was disenchanting. Dominique also talked about fish and that it seemed to be inherent to many men on Tinder who were in her geographical swiping area. She said, “Bad is when they had fish in their hand because that seems to be a thing here, or like a construction worker outfit.” Fishing, hunting, and guns were popularly referred to in the interviews. Chasity had noted, “If they – like I’ve seen guys have guns in their hands in the photo and I’m like yeah, no.”

Clearly, there were stigmas users would place on activities and interests they saw in profile pictures. Tinder users placed a lot of emphasis on what the picture said about the person in terms of their character and who they were beyond their physical appearance. Users were quickly and easily stereotyped based on the activities they were doing in their profile.

Summary of the Swiping Process

As a visual platform, much of the decisions to swipe right or left was based on users' photographs. Participants talked about how to spot a catfish or bot and how important it was to vet a user before deciding to swipe. Next, participants spoke of how they chose a swiping direction, which was impacted by their romantic goals. Finally, we learned that physical allure is important, but even more so is the message behind the picture.

Participants stereotyped users based on what they were doing in the photograph, which in turn influenced their swiping direction. This stage was important to explore because communication cannot occur between two parties unless both users swiped right. If communication is never allowed, then users will not be able to realize their goals of connecting with others offline. As previously indicated, participants spent a lot of time creating a profile that would get them many swipes. This section explored what goes through users' heads regarding how they decided to initiate a match with someone and what others' profiles communicated to them, both good and bad. The information is important for users to learn how other users decode information that was displayed on a profile. Users may realize their profile is not sending the message they had hoped and could edit it in hopes of communicating their goals accurately and making matches.

While many factors go into swiping, once both users swipe right on each other, a match is made. About half of users who could recall their number of matches said they had a few hundred matches on Tinder, with some climbing to the thousands. Participants who estimated the number of matches with whom they communicated most often said they engaged in messaging with half or fewer of their number of matches. This next step,

initial communication, is expanded upon in terms of societal expectations and crafting opening lines.

Initial Communication

Initial communication was described as a fragile time in the escalation of a relationship. Knapp (1978) asserts that in a mere 15 seconds, individuals decide if they want to begin a conversation with another based on the physical appeal of that person among other qualities. Failing to get to this stage meant a connection would never be made, as initial communication opens the door to further conversation. Many conversations on Tinder did not go further than one message so it was important to write a line that would have the potential for beginning a conversation if a user was looking for a date, hook up or friendship. Participants shared lines that they would use to begin conversations as well as messages that other users would send; these were discussed in terms of their effectiveness and ability to move a conversation forward. But first, the issue of who would initiate the conversation is addressed in terms of gender stereotypes.

Societal expectations. Heterosexuals using the app discussed societal expectations regarding gender and message initiation on Tinder. Straight males specified they began most or all the conversations through Tinder and straight females largely stated that males reached out to them first on the app. Tiffany explained that she liked the traditional means of beginning a romantic relationship and wanted that same gesture from men on Tinder.

I don't know what it is, if it's just me having a little bit of that classic mentality of the guy courting the girl but I never sent a single message that was unprovoked. I was always the message receiver.

After matching on Tinder, Tiffany wanted males to reach out and start a conversation because that is how she wanted to begin a romantic connection. Tiffany did not want to start a possible relationship by reaching out to the male first. She wanted to stay true to the traditional communication initiation for romantic courtship despite forming a relationship on a new platform.

Because users followed the expectation of males writing to females first, women tended to receive significantly more messages than men. Tiffany also explained this experience by saying:

If you're a female who isn't generally viewed as unattractive, whether it be your weight or some kind of physical deformity, then it would be really rare for you to not get at least fifty messages a day.

The number of messages females would receive each time they logged in would become frustrating. Michelle spoke about this idea during her interview:

I was so annoyed because my notifications would be like oh you got a match! You got another match! You got a match! So when guys, after a couple minutes, see I match with them they'll be like "Hey!" I had so many "Heys." I get a "Hey!" Then I get another "Hey!" I'm like stop.

The quantity of messages Michelle was presented with made her frustrated so she did not respond to them. This is not a surprising result, as using Tinder was described as being a "kid in a candy store," where men felt they had an abundance of women to choose from. Many men also recognized this experience that Tinder females go through. Nick had said in his interview that it is a challenge to get females' attention through messaging on

Tinder. Because a reply to a message is one of the first steps to bringing life to a connection, it is important to garner a response.

While women generally received more initial messages from men on Tinder, which held true to gender stereotypes, there were times when straight women would message a male first. Interviewees concluded that whoever messaged first was more interested.

If a woman reaches out first on Tinder you know that they are more interested even more so than Bumble. Because they don't necessarily have to take that step, but when they do they're more intrigued and therefore on Tinder I find that when the woman takes that first step I'm oh okay I need to focus some effort on this one.

Ethan's statements regarding gender and message initiation meant that he would spend more attention on a woman who messaged him first, as that communicated a lot of interest. He gathered that the woman was more serious and a connection had a better possibility of launching if the female messaged first.

Bryan, who identifies as a gay male, did not have gender stereotypes to follow with message initiation, but said he started about half of the conversations on Tinder. He also shared a statement similar to Ethan's when he said, "A lot of the times I would not communicate with them just to see if they were actually really interested." Other participants offered statements similar to Ethan's. While the cycle of a relationship cannot begin without a conversation, many were waiting for the other party to start speaking to validate the interest they had. Many users assumed that other users were swiping right on everyone and some males even mentioned practicing this swiping

activity in their interviews. Therefore, when participants received a message first, it validated other users' interest in them. Once one user messages another, they must decide on the content of the communication.

Opening lines. The topic of communication initiation opened discussions about what was said and from whom in order to begin a conversation on the app. The opening lines are of major importance for starting a conversation and are the first steps to initiating a romantic or sexual connection or even a friendship. How a user attempts to initiate a conversation is important because of the quick nature of the app as well as the number of messages many users receive. Justin compared navigating Tinder to speed dating, saying that he and others made quick decisions regarding the possible life of a connection once a conversation began. Justin asserted, "If you don't captivate me within the first ten messages I'll kill the conversations. And maybe that's not super fair, but you're a stranger online anyways." Clearly, the initial communication was fragile; users expected to be beguiled quickly, and if they were not, they would cease to entertain a possible connection. It is necessary to examine the ways in which users initiated communication to assess which tactics have been successful and which have not.

As the last section discussed who started the conversations, this portion discusses the opening lines presented in hopes of making a connection. Five main categories emerged from the data: short and generic, specific greetings, pick up lines, compliments, and sexual/offensive messages. Each is assessed for its effectiveness according to the participants.

Short and generic. As previously noted, women tended to be on the receiving end of communication initiation. A simple "hey" or "hi," according to the women

interviewed, was how males tended to try to spark a conversation on Tinder. Chasity explained she usually just got a “hey,” from men as did Tiffany. “It’s just ‘hey,’ so many times. It’s just like ‘hey.’ And I’m like what? I don’t even know how to respond to that,” stated Tiffany. Dominique also received just a “hi,” from several men and she said this usually would not lead to a connection. “So usually if you match with someone, most of time I would get a “hey” right away from the guy. And if that were the case, if it was just a “hey,” I sometimes wouldn’t respond.” The short and generic opening lines did not lead to connections as the conversations died off soon or failed to even launch at all from the opening line of “hey.” Men both gay and straight also talked about their negative experience with simple opening lines.

Honestly if I got matched with people I would just kind of look for someone who would look like they could have a conversation who I could actually talk to. And I would just kind of message them and say “hey.” But honestly a conversation never really lasted past five messages.

William’s opening lines did not lead to developing a conversation, which is needed to connect with others and eventually meet offline. Colton and Adam also discussed the struggle of striking a conversation with someone and also referenced the simple greeting of “hey.”

I always feel awkward like what do you say? I’m always like “hey.” That’s so stupid so I tend to comment or message when there is something I can, you know like the friend in common thing, that’s a great lead in.

Colton remarked that “hey” is an ineffective way to open a conversation, but that it is often times hard to think of something else to begin with. Adam commented on this as well, saying that so many people online are terrible communicators.

That's one thing that really sucks about communicating online is that you don't get people that are conversationalists. They're very, “Hi.” And that's it. So then I say “hi” back. And then it's either nothing or they'll say, “How are you?” And I'll be like, “I'm fine. How are you?” And I always try to end my answers with a question so that they have something to respond back and for some reason, I don't get responses sometimes.

According to participants, most Tinder users greet others with “hey,” but overall it is an ineffective way to begin a conversation. Users may not be putting much effort into their greeting because there are so many users on Tinder they figure one is bound to respond. Ethan offered a reason why he will sometimes open with “hi,” which has to do with him being unsure about his interest level in the other person.

Part of the reason you start off with ‘hi’ is maybe, I might be on the fence about the person, but if the person reciprocates and not only says hi, but expands upon that then I'm like okay that person at least wants to chat and makes me want to chat with them.

Ethan used this generic line to open with women he was mildly interested in. If the woman was more engaging in her response to him, he took that as she was interested in him, which in turn led him to be more responsive.

In some cases, participants mentioned that simple opening lines could be conversation starters while in other countries. Thomas, an American in China, said it was easy to start conversations on Tan Tan.

I would usually say, “Hello” and “How are you?” in Chinese. And then usually the response is, “Oh my god, you can speak Chinese.” And that’s usually how it started. It was a pretty easy to start conversations.

Dmitri discussed the same concept and noted the cultural differences regarding opening lines in America versus their success rate when he was in Israel using Tinder.

There’s a game that’s played. These weird Western American rules of if you just said “Hi how are you?” That’s enough to get you no response back because girls have told me that’s such a boring way to start a conversation and it doesn’t tell me anything. Well I don’t know what else to do because you have to look at their profile, their photos, what they say about themselves, and then extract something cute or clever to say to them to capture their attention out of the sea of hundreds of other guys who are probably messaging them. It’s like this dating ritual – it drives me absolutely crazy and it’s why I actually deleted Tinder at one point because it’s so frustrating, having to play this song and dance that gets you absolutely nowhere 90% of the time. And it’s not like I had to play the game of trying to figure out something clever to say about their profile in Israel. I could just start talking to them. I could say hey I’m new, I’m traveling through, how are you? And it would usually start a conversation.

Dmitri noted his little success with the generic opening line in the U.S., but how it worked while in Israel. He referenced the large number of messages women get on

Tinder in the U.S., also supporting the “kid in a candy store” description of Tinder. He also noted how frustrating the Tinder game could be due to the lack of success of using “hi,” as an opener in the U.S. Zack also discussed cultural differences in opening lines and the expectations of Tinder users in the U.S. compared to women on Tinder in South America.

Here [in Colombia], women would communicate with me first. In the States I think women expect you to talk to them a little bit more and they expect a higher level conversation. So you can't just say, “hi how you?” and expect something. They expected you to say something substantial right away and it's not very easy to do. So all I had to do [in Colombia] is say, “Hey, I’m a gringo, I’m living in this country, I’ve been here for like five years, six years, and I’m a teacher.” And so people would be interested in talking to me because I’m from a different culture. You could just say, “hi how are you?” and then the conversation would kick in.

General salutations led to more conversations and connections in other countries, but in the U.S. they were largely failures. Lines that led to more conversations were ones that were specific or more open-ended.

Specific greetings. On the sending and the receiving end both male and female Tinder users talked about writing more specific opening lines to start a conversation. Tinder conversationalists looked on their match’s profile and commented on something specific to begin a conversation. Josh stated female users would start a discussion with him by looking to his profile. “They’d say something about one of my pictures or they’d say they liked the quote in my profile.” Elizabeth also pointed to this practice when

trying to get males' attention through Tinder. She noted its' success: "The one guy liked the Red Hot Chili Peppers in his bio, so I sent him lyrics that were kind of catchy and funny in like a hello way and it got his interest quite a bit." Another female Tinder user, Kasey, also found a more specific way to talk to a male on Tinder when she was intrigued by his profile. "If it was a guy that I thought was cute I would find something in his bio to message him about," said Kasey.

Making sure a conversation did not fail to launch or die in a few messages was important to the interviewees, as they wanted to make a connection through the app. Ethan talked about the specific scenarios he presented to women he was interested in that was a much better alternative than beginning with "hey."

Sometime I will say something like, you have a plane ticket going out Miami this afternoon. It's going to London or Paris. Which one are you going to go on?" Give 'em scenarios and then start the conversation going around there about traveling. Or I've used tell me three things about yourself, two of them being the truth, one of them being a lie. And that is something that they might find unique and would expand upon and they give you more information for you to keep chatting about.

Ethan altered his opening lines based on whether he received responses from using them, as many other participants mentioned. The more specific greetings provided users with a lot more conversation and opportunity for meeting offline than did starting with "hi."

Pick up lines. Another means of initiating a conversation was through pick up lines, which a lot of Tinder users shared in their interviews. Nick argued that "hi" was ineffective, but that it was too time-consuming to write a specific line to each woman.

I'm not gonna like – cause the time it takes to write a personal message, they're not gonna read it, you're competing with hundreds of messages for a woman. They get tons of messages, you gotta find something that's humorous – that's quick! And isn't like "Oh I'm a nice guy you should write me," or, "Hey."

This led Nick to create a blanket pick up line that he copied and pasted to all of his matches on Tinder.

I got this specific pick up line I use on every single one. I get a 60-70% return rate on it. It [Tinder] tells you that you matched, and then I say, "So does this mean we're bf and gf? I'll go ahead and save the date." And there's an emoji of a ring and then it's like "I'll go ahead and book the VFW." And you know some people don't respond, but some people think it's hilarious like they write back and they'll play into it and go like, "I was thinking you know firehall," or "cheap beer," or "that sounds so romantic."

Nick used this humorous pick up line to prompt responses from women on Tinder, which worked a good amount of times. It allowed him to message a large number of women at once and not have to take the time to look at each individual's profile. This method worked well for him and he continued to use it.

Female interviewees did not have as positive of a reaction to being sent pick up lines. Many female Tinder users said they received pick up lines ranging from corny to sexual, in which they would not respond. Sabrina said, "They would message me some crazy things like one guy said am I a parking ticket because I'm so fine." Chasity also remarked on pick up lines and said, "Some of them would just say a corny pick up line, and that's when you just don't answer, but if someone messages me normally that's when

I answered.” Finally, Dana stated, “Some of them were really weird pick up lines. Yeah they were really creepy, so I ignored them.” Women who were interviewed overwhelmingly said they would not reply to pick up lines guys sent to them on the app. Some men and women said a few of the pick up lines were funny and not offensive, but that even then they would not respond. Pick up lines were largely categorized as an unproductive means of opening a conversation through Tinder for those who wished to secure an offline meeting. Those receiving pick up lines on Tinder could have been sent the opening line from someone who was using the app purely for entertainment and not for securing a romantic, sexual, or platonic connection.

Compliments. Compliments were the next kind of opening line participants sent or received on Tinder. Attempting to launch a connection by beginning with a compliment was regarded as positive. Bryan explained,

I would always try to compliment them in the first line just because when people feel good about themselves, when someone makes someone feel good about themselves, they usually like them.

Bryan’s statement played into users’ egos, which is a theme that had also emerged from this data. Participants enjoyed an ego boost from using Tinder, which could be why complimentary initial messages received responses. Justin discussed using compliments as opening lines that led to more conversation. “A lot of times people will compliment me, or compliment my piercing, or my tattoo and then we’ll talk about that,” he said. Many female interviewees also talked about the compliments they received on Tinder. When asked about the approach men took to starting conversations on the app, Deborah said, “They would just comment on attractiveness and say I’m attractive or something

like that.” Sandra’s experience was similar in that she received Tinder messages from men that began with a compliment. “I feel that the conversations usually start with like – sometimes a guy will message me, he’ll say something like wow, you’re so beautiful,” Sandra said.

Just as the men categorized compliments as generally being effective as opening lines, women agreed. Dana expanded upon this concept in the following answer:

Some of them would give compliments at the introduction. Like oh you’re really pretty, like oh my god. And compliments – I’m more willing to keep talking to them. I’ll take compliments any day.

Of the different strategies that were used to seek someone’s attention through a message on Tinder, compliments were linked to positive results. On the opposite end were sexually explicit lines, which women received frequently.

Sexual/offensive lines. Sexually explicit lines included messages that referenced sexual acts or someone’s body in an offensive manner. Several females talked about the sexual messages they received from men that led to nothing. Dominique believed most men were using Tinder to secure a hook up because of the messages she received. “Their initial messages were very promiscuous,” Dominique recalled, which was inconsistent with what she was looking for by using the app – meeting new people or garnering dates. Melody agreed that most men were on Tinder looking for casual sex.

I’ve gotten a lot of raunchy messages from people I’ve never even talked to before. The first message was not even saying hello first, it was just you know something about my body or something they wanted to do – and it was just ugh creepy. I got one guy a while back, he had messaged me first and he said, ‘Hey

girl, what can that mouth do?’ I got comments on my body like hey girl, nice boobs or nice ass or something like that. Do you wanna go fuck?

These offensive approaches to opening a conversation warranted no response from the women. Demi, a Tinder user looking for dates or a long-term partner, recalled similar opening lines. Demi shared, “Yeah this is so bad but someone said something along the lines of ‘How do you hold those with that tiny body.’” Demi ignored this type of content and did not begin a conversation with that user based on his opening line. Sexually explicit opening lines would often lead women to unmatched with that person, thus terminating any further attempts of communication. No males from this study said they sent sexually offensive messages, but some did say that they received initial messages from women proposing hook ups. They did not deem these to be offensive, though.

Summary of Initial Communication

While some opening lines, such as sexual advances or raunchy comments about one’s body, pick up lines, and overly simplistic and generic greetings were regarded as futile attempts to seize another user’s consideration, other communication, such as compliments or messages that were specific to one’s profile produced more favorable outcomes. Gender stereotypes with heterosexual couples were present in that women expected men to message them first in most cases. As new ways to develop relationships become available, men and women still turn to the traditional rules of society to form a relationship, regardless of the medium. It was clear that the initial communicative exchanges are vital pieces of the cycle of a relationship that are critical to execute effectively in order to make it to the next round of communication: escalating the

conversation. Those who made it past the initial communication next had the challenge of developing the conversation to the point where it would lead to an offline meeting.

Escalation

During this portion of the life cycle of connections, users spent anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks talking with their match and attempting to move the conversation forward. The goal for most (84%) was to meet someone in-person, so they had to speak online first before getting to that stage. The content was important in developing a conversation, just like it was for the opening lines. Most initial communication ended after pick up lines, “hey,” and offensive sexual comments, but for opening lines that were effective, the next step was figuring out what to say to keep the other party interested and hopefully transition into setting up a time to meet. Participants shared their stories of conversation development on Tinder and argued that time was not on their side. Tinder users had to carry interesting conversation long enough so that the other party felt comfortable meeting them in person, but not so long to the point where the other person lost interest or neither could further continue the conversation.

Participants said they sustained generic conversation in this portion of developing a romantic or sexual partner, or friend. Tinder users would ask about each others’ hobbies and interests and not delve in to anything too personal at this point. As Tinder users began to develop a conversation through the platform, the way in which they chose their words was a topic of contention. Some participants revealed they wanted to present themselves in a very favorable light online with their words, while others said they did not think about it – they just typed. This idea of selective self-presentation is reviewed next.

Selective self-presentation. Selective self-presentation refers to a person strategically choosing their photographs and/or words to sound a certain way or portray a certain image of themselves that might not necessarily be accurate. Earlier, participants chatted about their profile pictures and most respondents reported that they accurately represented themselves through choosing up-to-date photographs that included their face and body. However, when talking about the written component of selective self-presentation, several Tinder users discussed during which times in a conversation they edited their words to paint a particular picture of themselves to the receiver. Michelle said, “A lot of the times mine were very crafted because I wanted to sound cute and flirty, but in reality I was doing my dishes.” Michelle took advantage of the platform and crafted a message that she thought would help to develop the conversation in the direction she wanted. Michelle went on to talk about the challenge of making herself seem appealing through text. “You want to seem attractive to the other person. And if you’re interested you try to really make yourself sound good in text and it’s really hard to do.” Dominique also wanted to sound a certain way to her receiver and noted the difficulties in doing so.

I would say that I actually did think a lot about it, like trying to be witty. So I felt like I was spending a lot of time trying to think of what to say. It wasn't a generic like “Hey, how are you” type thing. And I didn't want to sound like a creep either so that was another thing that made me really think about it.

When developing a conversation with a man on Tinder, Dominique wanted to be sure her responses were crafted to her standards, which often took a lot of time and thought. Because it can be easy to misconstrue words online, Dominique wanted to be sure she

communicated her personality to the best of her ability, which meant she crafted her messages thoughtfully.

Jake noted that in the beginning he would not think as much about what he was typing to develop a relationship, but later he put more thought into it. Jake commented, “After the beginning like if we've been talking for awhile then I'll read it carefully and be like okay grammar's good, spelling's good, I look pretty sophisticated so I can send this.” Jake was looking to secure a long-term partner from Tinder, so part of the development process was to communicate his sophistication and fit as a potential partner. Because of this, he took time to be sure his messages reflected that.

Other users also said they wrote messages that were carefully constructed only if they had a lot of interest in the person they were messaging. Justin elaborated upon this during his interview:

I usually just flow. I don't think too hard about it unless I actually am interested in meeting that person then that's when I start to overanalyze it and start to kind of craft the messages more. A lot of just trying to be witty without seeming like I'm trying to be witty. I'm a very humorous based person so I try to use that a lot and I don't want to make it seem like I'm trying too hard, even though I'm trying too hard.

Justin would mostly just type and not put too much thought into it until he was speaking with someone with whom he thought he could truly have a meaningful offline relationship. At that point, developing the relationship online was crucial so it could move offline; therefore, he began to deliberate more strategically when composing his messages.

Bryan was in a similar scenario in that when speaking to someone he was very captivated by he wanted to render an illustration of himself through his words that made the receiver think he would be a great boyfriend or friends with benefits.

I like to just say what's on my mind. But if I'm really interested or I think they're really cute, I try to make myself look like the type of person they'd be looking for, like a good person that will be good in a relationship or in a friends with benefits relationship that you know could just be a cool person.

Although many Tinder users talked about how they used the platform and time to their advantage when writing messages, other participants said they did not attempt to make themselves differ from their offline self through the words that they sent to another Tinder user. Fitch expressed, "Yeah just typing. It's better that way because they're going to get to know how you operate eventually anyway if you start to date." Fitch did not try to create a persona online that did not match his personality in person. He did not develop relationships like this online because he said sooner than later they would meet in person, so he wanted to accurately depict himself from the start. Zack had similar thoughts to share:

I'm not trying to put on a façade for somebody. I'm not trying to sound one way more than the other. It is what it is. So I tried to represent me for who I was down here. So about me I just wanted them to know who I was I suppose.

Zack was careful not to misrepresent himself online while in the initial stages of communication escalation, as he did not want other users to gain the wrong impression of him from their online interactions and be surprised when they met in person. Whether users decided to selectively self-present themselves or not, the conversations came to a

crossroads where one asked to communicate in another channel (e.g. texting, Snapchat) and/or initiated a time to meet offline, or the conversation faded away and they moved on to other matches.

Unsustainable conversation. There came a point when users needed to exchange other means of communicating, such as phone numbers, or plan a date and time to meet over the Tinder messaging system. If this did not occur, the connections would end. Josh explained how this happened:

It would just be this endless loop of throwing quotes at each other or they'd just start giving shorter and shorter responses so you could sort of see it fade already.

At that point, you've already got numerous other matches or potential matches out there so you know you don't wanna necessarily waste the time continuing with it.

While Josh and his Tinder match made it past the opening lines and were beginning to develop a conversation on Tinder, it quickly decreased and neither could continue with engaging communication. At that point, the connection ended and they moved on to other matches. Jake also described a make or break point where a user asked many closed-ended questions

and the two went back and forth, but the exchanges never developed to an offline meeting.

It's always really awkward at first because they wanna do the name type questions. It's like what's your name? What's your age? What's your major? Where do you go to school? What sports do you like? And it gets awkward because they ask questions and then you just give an answer and you're like what about you? So eventually you run out of things to talk about so those just don't

usually last. Now if someone starts asking open-ended questions, like tell me about the dog in your picture, what's her name? When did you find her, like tell me her story. Then those conversations tend to go a lot better because you're able to talk not only about you but about the person you're talking to and one of your interests.

The statements from Josh and Jake illustrate the importance of open-ended questions and their ability to assist in advancing the escalation of the relationship between two people on Tinder. Exchanging several quotes from a favorite television show or playing "20 questions" did not lead to offline dates in most cases. While some Tinder matches ended during the general chatting stage, others moved forward. The next step was normally to ask to communicate using a different medium, such as texting or Snapchat.

Channels to escalate conversation. After swiping on users, making matches, assessing their authenticity, and beginning an opening conversation with them, users began to decide whether they would want to meet in person. For users swiping and talking to others online for entertainment, their connections would end at this stage and never move from Tinder. For those who wished to meet others in person, before bringing their communication offline, users went through a few steps in between initially communicating with someone and developing conversation and meeting in person.

Usually the communication would leave Tinder and go to another medium such as Snapchat or texting before two Tinder users decided to meet in person. Many participants talked about the other channels being easier to use instead of Tinder, which is why they decided to escalate the relationship through those means instead of continuing to talk on the chat portion of the app. Dmitri would say, "Alright Tinder is kind of a pain

in the ass can I get your phone number, let's text." Getting someone's phone number was not necessarily making the communication more personal, it was just easier to use.

Snapchat was also popular because users could send real-time photographs or texts to another. Jake elaborated upon this,

So what I do is I talk to them for a bit on there [Tinder] and once I feel like this could go somewhere, they're pretty cool, I send them my Snapchat. Then we add each other on Snapchat, we talk through there because Snapchat is easier than Tinder. And then I will spend a few weeks or so on there and then when I feel a little more trusting toward them I'll give them my number and then we'll text for a bit and then finally one of us will be alright, it's been a bit, we've been talking, let's meet up.

Jake referred to Snapchat as being an easier, but not more personable medium, whereas a phone number was given after trust was earned. Dana also talked about these two popular channels when discussing how she developed communication with males on Tinder.

For me I have to make sure that they're talkable, so I have to make sure they text well and communicate well. So if they communicate well on Tinder, they respond in reasonable time, I've given them my Snapchat or cell phone number. Then they'll text me back reasonably on time – we'll meet up. So within a week we could meet up if we text back a reasonable time.

This stage was important in the escalation of a relationship because most users did not remain on Tinder for their entire initial conversation. Moving to another channel, such as text or Snapchat made it easier for the two to communicate. These channels also allowed

the users to feel more comfortable with the other person, as Dana stated, and get to know more about their communication habits, which were important. Along with using different media to continue talking, the timeline of the conversations was noted in terms of how long users talk before they meet in person.

Timeline. As far as the elapsed time that people talked online before they meet in person, it varied from a few hours to a few weeks and was impacted by the two parties' relationship goals. Users wanted to give the conversation enough time to vet the person on the other end a second time and reduce the uncertainty they carried about the other person. This was the case for people who wanted to date and find a partner; those looking to hook up did not spend as much time talking online.

Melody and Kasey spoke about developing a conversation on Tinder in terms of vetting the person again. Many participants talked about being sure the profile was not a catfish in the swiping portion; during the conversations, interviewees talked a lot about their concerns of the person on the other end doing physical harm to them.

I really need to make sure I was talking to the person for at least a couple of days to a week before I offered to meet up with them. Because you really want to make sure basically they're not a serial killer and you try to get a feel for who they are and if you seem to be hitting it off or you at least are interested for whatever they want to do whether it's a one night stand or a date. So I'll say hey do you have Snapchat or hey here's my phone number.

Melody needed time to feel out the conversation and see how their interactions developed over Snapchat or text before she would agree to meet anyone offline. The minimum amount of time she spoke with others via text or Snapchat before meeting was a few

days. This gave her comfort because by that time she had determined whether the person was safe.

Kasey had given the same information in her interview and was also concerned about meeting someone who might actually have ill will toward her. She said she also needed speak with someone online for a few days before scheduling a date and time to meet.

Probably 4-5 days I think. That was another thing - I wouldn't respond if a guy right away would be like hey let's meet up and I would be like no I don't know if you're a serial killer. So it was probably 4-7 days?

Participants expressed their hesitation concerning meeting people from an app. Even when getting past the stages of swiping, matching, and opening lines, there was still apprehension about continuing to advance the relationship. Because of this, users, especially women, wanted to talk for a few days to a week before progressing the relationship offline to be sure they were not meeting someone who would physically harm them.

However, the anomaly was in hooking up. When two users matched and wanted to meet for casual sex, this process was hasty. Users did not seem as concerned over who they were meeting and seemed more trustworthy of the person on the other end. Shaun said he would converse with someone for a day or two if that when wanting to hook up with someone and many other interviewees gave the same timeline. Zack explained this speedy procedure:

For the hookups I mean it could be anywhere from a day or two to like an hour later. So you could talk to them a little bit, tell them what you're interested in and if you were both free, it could possibly happen later that day.

Justin described a similar situation where he wanted a quick hook up to get over his ex-boyfriend.

There was one person where I was just getting over a breakup and I was being a little reckless. He messaged me, we talked for a day and then that night I gave him my phone number, which is something I don't usually do until the day after. We texted and the next day he said he's alone in his room and I was like okay. It was a hook up.

The nature of the app allowed two people interested in meeting for sexual relations to match, speak, and meet quickly. More males than females spoke about this quick timeline for hooking up, but more males in this study stated they were using the app to hook up, whereas fewer females indicated this was their ultimate goal.

Summary of Escalation

Content and timing were important in the process of escalating conversations. Still undergoing apprehension of meeting someone from a dating app, users wanted to converse with others for enough time for them to assess their personality. Several users were worried they may be speaking to someone who was crazy or dangerous and wanted to have enough conversation to feel comfortable meeting another user. Although technology has saturated our culture, especially with young users, participants were not more trustworthy of online dating. They were highly skeptical of others' profiles and took several steps of verifying a user's true identity before agreeing to meet offline.

Some conversations moved forward, while others exhausted the conversation to the point where it could not be sustained, thus leading to a termination of a connection before moving to the offline stage. For the conversation that continued, users talked about reasons why they may take ample time to carefully compose their message to sound a certain way, while others indicated why they did not put as much editing in to what they were communicating. As most participants expected to meet others in person, this only influenced some participants to type without trying to form a persona of themselves that was not accurate. Finally, participants talked about how a conversation that properly developed eventually led to communicating for a few days on text or Snapchat, and then to an in-person meeting. The development stage is necessary to explore because this is the stage directly before users meet in person. Users who are not able to secure an in-person meeting are likely experiencing poor conversation development in terms of content, timing, and/or channel.

Offline Meetings

Once two Tinder users became interested in one another and felt comfortable meeting in person they usually met in a public place, unless they were engaging in casual sex, in which case they met at a hotel or someone's home. Both men and women were hesitant about meeting someone in person even though they had vetted the user several times beforehand. As an extra layer of protection, they met in public spaces for the initial meetings as described by Nick.

Usually a bar, getting a drink or dinner, I've had some coffee, like you meet for a non-threatening 12:30 coffee or something. I've had one, just met directly at a baseball game. So a public place because you never know, right?

Participants said if they were meeting to spark a friendship or potential romantic relationship they would meet in a public place. Users were still worried that the person they were meeting might physically harm them and though it seemed like an unlikely scenario, some described scary meetings.

The one I talked about in the Giant Eagle parking lot I didn't realize how - this was like the worst thing I had ever done -he was extremely crazy and for a while I was honestly genuinely concerned that he might be a serial killer. Because I was suggesting all these things we could do like the Indiana fair was there, Eat 'N Park, like we could go and see a movie, and he's like no, let's go to this park and I'm like let's not!

Melody was telling a story of when she met a creepy man in a parking lot at night and he had convinced her to hook up with her. Melody had wanted to meet in a more public place with more people around, but she did not. After this scary encounter, she blocked the male and would only meet in more populated areas in order to keep herself safe.

Tinder users said they met offline at coffee shops, restaurants, or bars on their dates unless they were meeting for sex. During the initial offline meetings, many of the users said the person they were meeting surprised them in terms of their physical appearance and/or their personality; however, other encounters were as expected. These reactions are recounted in the following segment.

Expectations. Participants were aware that Tinder users could edit their photographs and write in a fashion that made them appear to be a certain way as far as their personality and appearance was concerned. In this section, participants discuss their

reaction to the person they were meeting. Some meetings went as expected, while others were more of a surprise.

No surprises. Numerous respondents did not meet anyone from Tinder in person who violated their expectations physically or personality-wise. Some Tinder users looked slightly different from their photographs on their profile, but overall many said their offline encounters went as expected. Many participants talked about the matches they met in person looking exactly like their profiles and seeming the same as they were when chatting online. Zack used WhatsApp to chat with women before meeting them in person and said that also led him to having no major upsets in person.

I've never had any real surprises. Most of the time they're exactly how you expect. In WhatsApp, you can actually send voice notes as well, so if you're communicating via WhatsApp they're always interested in hearing your voice.

Do you sound like a crazy person, do you sound like somebody nice? So that was never a surprise either.

Different platforms aside from Tinder helped participants to verify what their potential partner was like before meeting in person. Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp have been used as pre-screening social media to be sure the person on the other side matched what their profile was portraying, thus giving them better chances of having a successful relationship.

Other men and women shared their happiness of when the Tinder matches they met in person looked like their profile. Thomas said, "So her pictures online looked like she was a model and then when she showed up she also looked like she was a model."

Thomas was pleasantly surprised that this female completely met his expectations. Their

meetings continued for awhile as there were not any physical differences he saw in person that would lead him to not want to meet with her again.

Fitch talked about meeting someone from Tinder who eventually would become his boyfriend.

I wasn't unexpected by anything. He was a skinny guy with dark hair with a little bit of a five o'clock-y shadow. Which is exactly what the most recent - the black and white photo looked like.

Earlier in his interview, Fitch pointed out the importance of being physically attracted to his significant other. Meeting his Tinder match in person and having him look like he expected helped to move the relationship forward. While there were not any huge surprises for Ethan and Anthony, they touched upon small differences in physical appearance of women they have met, but said it was not anything that put them off.

Ethan explained:

I don't find that girls are too different from what their pictures are. If I match with a woman and see their picture and meet them in real life – for the most part their face is very much the same. Now they might have made sure that in their body type pictures that they stood a certain way where they might not be as skinny or as robust whereas in real life there might be a few more pounds of what they were showing on their picture.

Ethan said for the most part his offline experiences with women have been nothing to be surprised about, as did Anthony. Anthony stated:

I think I ran in to a few occasions where the girl maybe put on a few pounds since those pictures were taken. A few of these girls are pretty good at getting the

perfect picture of themselves and then maybe doing some Photoshop, or maybe I just convinced myself that they looked better in their picture, but for the most part I've never had any crazy surprises like you know a totally different person - and I've heard about that where it's like holy shit, you just basically stole pictures off the Internet, put 'em up on your profile and said they were you. I've never had that.

Like Ethan, Anthony met a few women who may have physically looked slightly different from their profile, but he noted how he never was catfished in person. This helped the life cycle of the romantic relationship to continue. Had they looked vastly different in-person, the life of the relationship likely would have ended after the first meeting. Even though many Tinder users had no real surprises with matches they met in person, there were others who were disappointed.

Differences. Participants pointed to physical appearance as being an aspect of their match that was not as expected. Several women pointed to men's height as being a surprise in person and several men talked about women's weight as being different in person.

Sabrina was one of many women who talked about men being shorter in person than what their profile depicted. "You expect them from their pictures – you think they're tall and they're really not. They're the same size as me or even shorter." Tiffany's offline meeting mirrored Sabrina's as she said, "I would say every single guy I went out with lied about how tall they were." From the data, height was stated as an important characteristic of a man. Male interviewees talked about how they would view females' profiles and women would write the height they desired from a match. Men

attempt to make themselves appear taller in their photographs and hope that once the women meet them in person they will be happy with their other features and height will be a non-issue. Sabrina and Tiffany did not state height was a deal breaker once they met these shorter men in person; they simply said they were surprised. Although Tiffany did not meet her current boyfriend through Tinder, but another dating site, she said he also lied about his height, but she was interested in him and other attributes so she continued the relationship.

Miley and Demi talked about their disappointment of meeting shorter men in person. They said they were upset but also did not say they ended their connection with the person because of his height. Miley shared a story of the time she met one of her matches through Tinder and he was much shorter than she thought.

He was way shorter than I expected. Cause in the picture with friends and family he was average height with them and he seemed taller than his parents, so I was like okay he has to be somewhat tall because I'm 5'8. And he came over and he was 5'6 and I'm 5'8 and I was like whoa.

Miley's thought process of examining his picture and assuming he was a certain height led her to being shocked in person about her connection's height. She had a conversation with him in person about it and in the end did not let it deter her from continuing with the relation.

Demi went on a date with a male from Tinder who also did not meet her expectations height-wise.

I showed up and he was probably an inch taller than me. Not even. I went back and looked at his photos and realized oh, he doesn't really have any photos of him

standing next to anyone. That was interesting. I didn't love that. But then it turns out when we were talking that we both didn't connect as I expected we would. So it ended up not working out anyhow. So that was kind of a surprise. Demi realized she had assumed he would be taller, but after looking through his profile again she saw that he had no pictures of himself next to anyone, which eliminated any reference she could accurately make regarding his height. This is interpreted as his attempt to selectively self-present himself as appearing to be taller than he was. Despite Demi feeling letdown in person about his short stature, it was ultimately their lack of emotional spark that led to them quitting their communication.

Ladies talked about other attributes of their matches that they were dissatisfied with while meeting offline. Sabrina felt she was catfished with some of her Tinder matches.

I definitely feel like I got catfished a couple times because I mean they kinda look like their profile but then they don't. They're photogenic in a way. And say someone was masculine. I pictured them having a very masculine deep voice and then I meet them in person and it's not like that at all. I met some guys who have some pretty high-pitched voices.

Sabrina had not used WhatsApp or a phone call to talk with her match before meeting him in person, which led to her being unimpressed with some of his attributes. She also mentioned men being more photogenic in their photographs. Sabrina was not looking for anything romantic from the app though, just like Michelle, who also said men did not look as they did in their profile. "Usually they looked a lot more tired, and kind of like ew I don't want to go near that person. Because pictures, you can give your best angle

and lighting and all that jazz.” Michelle was using the app for entertainment and for something fun to do like Sabrina, so even though they did not meet people who accurately matched their profile, it is assumed that these ladies would not have advanced these meetings into anything romantic anyways.

For males, weight was the biggest surprise of women whom they met in person. Dmitri explained his exposure to this deception:

She did not look exactly like her profile. She looked like a girl that once upon a time used to be – this is so shallow, but – looks like she used to be in better shape and then she kinda let herself go and maybe that’s where the photos were from. But I mean not enough that it was like a deal breaker for me. I would not say her profile gave a good snapshot of how she actually looked in person.

While some males in the previous section had described slight differences in weight when they met females in person, Dmitri described this female as being a lot different in person in terms of her physical appearance. Dmitri had labeled himself as not the most attractive person, so he did not expect to secure a very attractive person through Tinder. The woman he met was heavier than he expected but he still wanted to give the relationship a chance. Shaun had different feelings, though. He initially used the app as a game, but eventually engaged in hooking up with Tinder users. He described his unfortunate offline meetings with some women:

It was just worse. I guess they’d edit their stuff. They’d be heavier set and there’d just be something off. I guess you could say if they had acne real bad or something then they’d just clear it off. I don’t edit stuff that much so, but

they do all this stuff and it looks like they're really good looking from what you think and once they come over it's like oh. This isn't what you looked like. Because Shaun wanted a physical and sexual relationship only, physical appearance was important. If they did not meet his expectations in person he would try to alert his roommate and exit the situation. When meeting users in person, both sexes described times when they were alarmed with their match's physical appearance. Tinder users seemed taller to women and skinnier to men based on their online picture. Not only were many Tinder users' physical characteristics different in person, their personalities were too.

As mentioned earlier, interviewees said they would extract certain aspects of users' profile pictures and make judgments about their personality from what they were doing in their picture. Sometimes their assumptions were wrong, as was the case for Jake, "It was more in their pictures they would show how adventurous they are and when you meet they'd be like oh I just went there with my friends but I'd probably never go back, like things like that." Justin had gathered that if a female was doing an adventurous activity in her profile then that described her interests. From his experience, women would create a certain image through their photographs online that would not match their actual hobbies.

Many interviewees also pointed to the lack of communication in person compared with online as being something they did not like about the person they were meeting. "So personality - some people just weren't able to hold up a conversation like they were over text. In person they weren't talking as long, they weren't giving thoughtful conversations." Dana used the app to find dates, but nothing materialized from the app

aside from a friendship with someone. Being able to hold a conversation in person was important to the development of the romantic relationship. Lackluster conversation was something that occurred several times in person in addition to meeting shy and awkward people.

Sometimes the guys act like they're all for it and they're interested in talking to me and stuff like that but then I meet up with them and they're so shy. They're more outgoing on the app than they are in person.

Sabrina acknowledged that talking over Tinder allowed users to open up more than they would in person. Miley also recognized the differences in conversations with men she had on the social platform as opposed to in person. "The other guy was definitely more talkative and more outgoing like you know all that jazz online. Then he came in person and he was like really awkward and quiet." These differences made it difficult to continue an offline relationship. The conversation may have flowed online, but for those looking for a romantic relationship, talkativeness in person was important. Dmitri told a story of one of his Tinder dates who was much more conversational and social online, "The weird thing about this girl is compared to how she was over texting, she was actually kind of stale in person like she was very, very shy, and it was really hard to get her to talk." Dmitri was looking to date or find a partner from Tinder, so it was important that they connected well in person. He gave the female he described above a few chances in person, but every time they met offline, she was very awkward. Once they continued speaking online, she was a great person to talk with, but every time they spoke offline, their connection was disappointing. This ultimately caused the demise of their communication both online and offline.

Stefani also talked about a time where she met someone from Tinder and it only lasted one meet up because the person she was seeing did not hold a conversation well. She explained, “She was more interesting to talk to on Tinder maybe because she was like – it’s just like easy to communicate via text and stuff whereas in person you have to be yourself.” Stefani’s words allude to selective self-presentation online. The person she was talking with on Tinder created an online persona that did not match her actual personality. Melody’s Tinder date also was more shy in person, but she said she was also nervous about meeting him in person.

It's a little easier to be more intimate in conversation online because you're not standing in front of the person. When we first met it was very awkward, at least he was - I could tell he was terrified but he was so nervous and I was nervous too but I just talk talk talk till he was comfortable, but it's a little bit easier to say things when you're behind a screen and you can just kind of give your details to this person because you know in the end if you really want you can just block them and never see them again.

Although speaking was easier online, Melody did not give up on her Tinder date who was less talkative at first in person. She continued and developed a romantic relationship with the person she described above.

While many Tinder users thought they had a good sense of another’s personality from their online communication, others said they were not capable of judging a person’s personality from communicating online. Zack referred to the quick chats online as having the inability to communicate someone’s personality. He specifically said this was

an issue for people with whom he was meeting for casual sex because those conversations were especially limited before they met.

The hookups, because those were such a limited conversation, you could meet them and be like this is this is completely different in conversation than I expected it to be. The physicality part was the same but the conversation changed during the hookups. Cause you don't get to meet a lot of their personality over the Internet on quick, concise conversations. For the long-term ones that you want to actually set up a relationship, you get to know who they are and you ask specific questions that will kind of gauge who they are in their reactions and things like that and so it was a little different, but yeah I would say for real relationships, for people really wanting to meet, yes I would say that it translated perfectly. For hookups I would say that it varied significantly.

Because of the few interactions Zack had with women he was engaging with online for hook ups, he often was more surprised at their demeanor in person than the females he would talk to for potential romantic relationships. Ethan had the same remarks about this subject in terms of the inability to accurately assess someone's personality from brief online interactions.

I don't find that you can really gauge too much on personality online. I always figure when I meet them in real life, that's when I'll actually meet their personality. I might get to know information and their interests that we have in common, but in terms of their personality, I don't – the first time I meet them is when I feel like I get a fair chance to see their personality.

Ethan did not make assessments about a woman's personality through his online interactions, but instead learned about her in person. Similarly, Deborah also said it was hard to read a user's personality through their online exchanges. "I think more personality wise because you don't really know how people talk and act until you're actually around them. It's totally different when you're just sending messages back and forth." Those who did not have an expectation of what someone's personality was going to be like were less disappointed in person because they did not have a standard in mind before the meeting.

Finally, participants noted that they read text a certain way and create a person in their head which is not authentic to who the person truly is. Justin spoke about one person he met on Tinder:

Personality wise I think he texted a little different than he spoke. He texted very formally and he didn't talk as formally. But that also could just be the person reading in my head, like how I was reading it.

Justin was referring to this person's formal writing and use of commas and how he interpreted that a certain way, which was not the same as this user was in person. While many Tinder users did not meet participants' idea of what the match was going to be like in person, others worked out well and continued to develop.

Continuation. For those who had successful first dates or meetings, they continued to escalate their relationship. Some became close friends, while others secured romantic relationships, thus reaching their goals. Many of these participants reached the final stage of relationship escalation according to Knapp's (1978) model, where they officially became a couple and deleted the Tinder app. Once that stage was reached,

users maintained their relationships by engaging in open and consistent communication, following the traditional cycle of relationships. Many participants reached their relational goals because they were able to secure a friendship or an exclusive romantic relationship.

Dana talked about a lasting friendship with someone who she matched with via Tinder.

One is actually my friend now. We met up and were like oh you're pretty cool.

We should just hang out all the time and be friends. We started hanging out and we do a bunch of stuff together now as friends and it's actually really funny because we found each other really attractive at first.

Dana talked about how she maintained her friendship in-person with someone she met through Tinder. They met offline and decided to secure friendship and continue their connection in a platonic manner. Justin also said he sustained an offline friendship formed from Tinder that included a sexual component.

We had our inside jokes and we were able to be friends. It wasn't like we would just fool around and I would just leave. I would stay and we'd watch a movie for a few hours and then go back. So we were able to grow a friendship even if it wasn't outside of that bedroom.

Not only were friendships successfully developed and continued from Tinder, so were exclusive, romantic relationships. Zack was one of many who met his significant other from Tinder and still communicated with some other users he had met through Tinder. "I've made some good friends through it. I still communicate with some of the people that I dated," said Zack. Melody continued with her Tinder relationship and plans on moving in with her boyfriend soon and Fitch had also found his boyfriend via Tinder. Thomas too discussed his romantic relationship that began on Tinder, "I met my

girlfriend on it [Tinder] and I'm *really* happy with my relationship with her and I thought it was actually an awesome tool to find someone who I just kind of connected with immediately.” Kasey, another participant who had a boyfriend from Tinder talked about how their dates progressed to an exclusive romantic relationship.

It just kind of evolved into a relationship. I remember when we first went on a date, he was like what are you looking for? And I was like this is a really serious Tinder date question. I guess when he asked me that – and he asked me other questions too, about past relationships that were a little more serious than just a random Tinder date. It was pretty natural like at first we would talk on Tinder, and we texted, then he would text every night, and then we started Snapchatting during the day and texting at night and then we started texting all day every day.

Kasey mentioned the progression of the communication and how it developed in to a romantic relationship that continued for a while. Although at the time of the interview they were not together anymore, she did have a relationship with him for a year.

When romantic relationships became official, participants said that deleting the app became important and was often a topic of conversation between the newly formed couple. Thomas shared the discussion he had with his significant other,

The use of Tan Tan or Tinder became a topic within the relationship. It's a very interesting kind of dichotomy between like this is how I met my girlfriend, so it's a very useful tool then, but after the relationship continues this [Tinder] is no longer okay to have on your phone. And it seems pretty common to delete it and ask the other person to delete it.

When the relationship continued and an exclusive relationship formed, it was assumed that Tinder no longer had a use on someone's phone. Both parties were expected to delete the app. Kasey shared her experience with her boyfriend and the deletion of Tinder,

I deleted the app. He didn't delete it right away. He got a push notification one day that was like, "You have a new match!" And it was just like a dumb boy thing where he hadn't deleted it. There was no question in my mind that we are exclusive...but I think when that happened he did delete it.

While Kasey trusted her boyfriend was not cheating on her via Tinder, there was still an expectation that both individuals should not need to use the app after forming a committed relationship.

Summary of Offline Meetings

Once the relationship reached the offline meeting stage, users usually decided after the first meeting if the connection was worth pursuing. Some users looked and acted like participants thought they would offline based on their Tinder profile, while others surprised participants with their physical appearance and personality. The biggest surprises were men's height, women's weight, and the inability of either sex to sustain an engaging conversation. Many of these characteristics were deal breakers in that the communication would cease, while other interviewees said the meeting did not go as expected, but they continued to develop a relationship to see where it would go. This was a turning point in the life of a connection as many connections ended quickly once two people met in person. Much of this was due to inaccurate portrayals of one's self online,

but also attributed to how a user interpreted another's profile in terms of their personality, interests, and appearance.

While many users could sustain long-term platonic, romantic, and sexual relationships that were initiated on Tinder, others were short-lived. The final stage of the life of connections is the de-escalation of a relationship.

De-Escalation

The de-escalation phase was the final stage of a relationship. For the relationships that continued, this stage was never realized, but for many participants, this stage occurred multiple times during their time on the app. For those who went on a date or multiple dates, started to form a romantic relationship, or had sex with someone from Tinder, the relationships ended in one of three different manners. The acts of de-escalating a relationship were classified as fizzling out, bluntly being told the relationship was not going to work, or being ghosted or ghosting someone and never speaking to them again.

Fizzle. Participants named communication that trailed off “fizzling.” This in vivo code describes two people having fewer exchanges with more time in between the communication. Eventually, they would meet fewer and fewer times until they discontinued the communication. Shaun described this process with Tinder users he had met for casual sex.

They would just stop coming over and you'd start texting less and less and then eventually you don't really communicate. But I mean if you see them in person you say hi or whatever, talk to them a bit, just move on about your day.

In Shaun's case, neither him nor his partner gave a reason why they were not meeting any more. The relations were terminated, but they would still be cordial if they happened to see each other in person. Josh, who had gone on multiple dates with a woman from Tinder, also had the relationship end by means of tailing off.

She started fizzling out and what I later found out is that I guess she had met somebody else. I'm pretty sure it was from Tinder. We talk and Snapchat periodically and really started fizzling out because she even said this – she felt that the spark wasn't there and then she said she wanted to be friends and then you know she started dating this guy and didn't want to bring me and have to explain that she met me through Tinder because I guess it had a certain connotation. So eventually we just parted ways.

The communication began to wane with Josh's Tinder date, which led the relationship to stop progressing and eventually end, as she had met another person. Josh explained he only wanted to go on dates with one person at a time, but the woman he was seeing was still actively using Tinder and found another match who she wanted to pursue.

Blunt ending. While some users allowed the decreased communication speak for their decreased interest in the person, others were more upfront with how they were feeling after a date.

I was just very frank with them, I just kind of said listen you seem like a great person, you're very genuine and you know a lot of compliments, but I just don't see a romantic future between the two of us...I was very upfront from the beginning – you know as soon as the date ended let him know that I wasn't interested via text message.

Tiffany took a straightforward approach to how she ended communication with men with whom she saw no future. After the date, she would text them because it was only their first meeting and she did not feel as though it warranted an explanation in a richer channel, such as face-to-face communication as would something like a long-term relationship.

Jake was also upfront about ending Tinder relationships. He did not allow the relationship to continue and fizzle out as he wanted to give the person closure. He had been ghosted before and did not enjoy that experience.

I'm a very straightforward person. If I'm not interested in you, I'm going to tell you. I'm going to come out and be like listen, thank you, this is nice, but I'm just not feeling anything between us. Cause I don't think you should just ignore somebody as in 'going ghost,' which means you just stop texting someone, you just stop talking to them altogether, block them on Facebook, just completely fall off the face of the planet. That has been done before to me.

Jake took the liberty of giving his Tinder dates reasons why he did not wish to see them again because he thought everyone deserved to know an answer and not be ignored as he had been in the past. Ghosting was a term that many participants talked about regarding ending a Tinder relationship and is expanded upon next.

Ghosting. For the participants, ghosting (an in vivo code) is the act of exiting a relationship by means of halting all communication and failing to give the other person a reason why. Participants ghost others from Tinder because they did not feel an obligation to give them a reason why they did not wish to continue their relationship. Dana's words explained this concept. "If it did not continue I just wouldn't talk to them again.

Because it's not a big deal if you don't talk again, it's one date." Anthony also did not feel he had a duty to alert the other party as to why there would not be a second date.

The ones that tend to be abrupt stop talking, that's almost like – that would be a case where I met a girl and there just wasn't the connection and you know, honestly anything that doesn't go beyond a first date, it's acceptable in my mind on both ends, for the conversation to just cut off if one person wasn't interested.

That's happened to me and I've done that too.

Anthony was on both ends of ghosting and found it to be an allowable practice to terminate communication if the relationship had not gone beyond one date.

Dmitri, who had ghosted ladies on Tinder on several occasions talked about one time where he ghosted someone who was less talkative in person than on Tinder and he did not see the relationship moving forward.

I was not able to get over that [her shyness] after the third date; after that it kind of died. I did a classic Dmitri move. I did what we call I ghosted her. I stopped texting her altogether and she might have texted me once and I responded and then basically when the conversation ended I just would not text her again. And eventually I'm assuming she got the picture. It's not like she starting calling me asking what happened, she just did not respond anymore. And luckily, ghosting's more painful when the other person doesn't get it, you know she wasn't like why won't you talk to me? What's wrong? It wasn't like breaking up with somebody. It is just you both don't really talk – she doesn't text me and I don't text her. And then more and more time passes and that's kind of where it ends.

Dmitri saw this as an acceptable practice and said it is nothing like breaking up with someone from a long-term committed relationship. Like other participants, Dmitri turned to the fact that he had only been on a few dates with this person and that he did not feel he needed to be forward in his communication style about why the relationship was not going to develop any further.

Kasey described a ghosting scenario where she was the one who was left without an explanation.

So yeah we met up for dinner once and it was great and then we met up for dinner again and everything was great, and then I just never heard from him again. It was like ghosted 100%. I texted him the next day and was like I'm in the mood to go to Sandbar, do you want to go drink sangria? And he was like oh I would love to. Which now telling the story back, I feel like it sounds like, obviously he was gonna ghost you. But he was like oh I have to fix my dishwasher, it's broken.

And I was like oh okay well another time. And then I think I texted him – it might've been the whale gif on Tuesday night and just didn't hear anything back.

Kasey had described the dates as going well or so she thought. Being ghosted was a sign that her date did not want to continue to progress the relationship, but she never received a reason why. Their relationship involved some “fooling around,” but they did not have sex. Kasey's advice from friends was that her Tinder date got what he wanted and left; however, Kasey did not have sex with him. She would have preferred that to be the case because then they both would have got something out of the situation and the act of being ghosted would have made more sense to her. Being the ghostee can be frustrating, as in

Kasey and Miley's situations. Miley was ghosted from a Tinder user to whom she lost her virginity.

So he came over and we kinda did everything but and then we hung out again a couple days later and we hooked up. So someone was knocking on the door, and they wouldn't stop and I was like okay this might be my sister, maybe something's wrong. So I told him just stay in my room and I answered it. And I'm like hey is there something that's wrong? And she's like no I just wanted to talk to you. Okay I'm kinda busy right now. So she left and then I went back and he was so embarrassed that I answered the door, he got so weirded out. He's like okay I'll text you later, I'm gonna go now. And I was like okay. And I never saw him again. Like yeah. It was pretty weird.

Miley's circumstance is especially unpleasant as she had hooked up with someone from Tinder and did not receive the responses she thought she should concerning communication after hooking up. Miley said he eventually had texted her to see if she was still mad but that did not help the situation. It was a ghosting situation where she was not given a true explanation why he would not continue to talk to her or see her again.

After experiencing different ways of ending a relationship, many users re-examined if the app was useful for them after giving it a shot. Many decided to discontinue the use of the app because they were not able to reach their romantic or sexual goals.

Discontinued use of app. After discussing their full experience with the app, Tinder users reflected on how they felt at different points using the app and would often

say that they would not continue to use the app. For some, they could not secure a connection. Others could not find matches with the same romantic goals as them. Gina stated she would look to other means to connect after a Tinder date gone wrong,

The one guy who I met on Tinder, we went on a couple of dates together and he seemed really into me. We spent a lot of time together and he was very nice but yet he was still on Tinder. And I remember sitting with him and I was like what do other girls look like on Tinder? And he's sitting there scrolling through and he's swiping right on some of them and I'm like Oh! I'm sitting next to you and I can see what you're doing! I don't know I feel like a lot of people who are on there maybe have an addiction to it or they want to just keep looking and looking. So I don't know if you can ever really trust someone who you meet online because are they always going to continue to look.

Gina had wondered how many users would continue to be active on the app after establishing a relationship and that made her hesitant about continuing to use it after her date. Additionally, she was not convinced the app could be used for relationship purposes.

It was fun. I think if you just want to meet people and hang out and get drinks and just have fun together, it's the type of app for you. But if you're looking for something deeper than that, it's just not good.

The above quote from Gina illustrates Tinder as a place to connect for casual relationships, but not for committed romantic relationships. William's standpoint mirrored that of Gina's when he said, "It wasn't really a valid relationship app, it really didn't do that. It was just kind of like a place for people to go to say whatever they

wanted to and try to find hookups and stuff.” Michelle also believed it was not the most effective way to form a romantic relationship. She stated that she would prefer meeting a partner in person rather than over the Internet. “Honestly I would never use it for a relationship cause I’d rather meet someone the old fashioned way you know through friends or actually going out somewhere and actually talking to a person rather than like social media websites.” Michelle was not alone in her preference of meeting someone in person rather than through social media. Ethan also noted the imperfections of connecting through Tinder.

You don’t get - you can’t really type in what type of personality they are. You can’t see if you’re gonna mesh whereas on an organic level of meeting someone at the bar, you can kind of sift who they are from the get go. Whereas Tinder is more of a trial and error type situation. On paper they might seem to have all the attributes and qualities you’re looking for, but in real life it’s simply just not a match. Whereas on an organic level you can kind of assess that out more at the get go than you can on Tinder.

Ethan’s words describe the disconnect between meshing with someone online versus feeling the same connection in person. He noted that when approaching someone and talking with them in person, you can better assess whether you will match.

Summary of De-Escalation

Three primary ways to end a relationship that began on Tinder included fizzling out, a blunt ending, and ghosting. Participants who discussed fizzling out and ghosting did not think their match deserved a reason why the relationship was not continuing. The fleeting nature of the app and the short-term relationship gave users reasons to either let

the conversation die out slowly or disappear from the conversation and never return. These ways of ending a connection are frustrating because users are not left with an explanation as to why the relationship did not continue. Even if they only saw the person once, many felt they should have some type of explanation as to why it did not work. However, for those participants who used these tactics, they said this should be expected and it is not hurtful because they only met once or twice in person and the discontinuation of a relationship did not warrant an explanation. For those who gave an honest, blunt ending to the conversation, many had experienced ghosting themselves and did not enjoy the way they felt and therefore would not ghost another user. A relationship that fizzled out more closely followed Knapp's (1978) five steps of de-escalation, whereas ghosting skipped to the final step: Termination.

Finally, after considering the ups and downs of the process, several respondents said they had stopped using the app and/or would not open it again. After going through the cycle of a relationship, participants decided that users are often not trustworthy on an app that has seemingly limitless options, it was not effective in building romantic relationships, just casual sexual ones, and users would rather begin a relationship with someone not using an app, as their true personality may be better determined from the start that way.

Summary of Theme Two: Life of Connections

The life cycle of a romantic, sexual, or friendly relationship was depicted in six stages: creating the online profile (a precursor to being able to make matches), the swiping process (the pre-communication stage), initial communication, escalation of a conversation, offline meetings, and de-escalation. First, the online profile was critical in

determining the success of one's Tinder experience. Many users swiped based on first instinct, so having an attractive profile, both in terms of showcasing physical and personality traits, was important. Users' romantic, platonic, or sexual goals drove the creation of the profile and what material and photographs they wished to share. Also influencing their decision to share certain information or pictures was the users' friends. Participants sought advice from their peers on how to improve their profile to receive a better swiping rate. Finally, users chose good-looking pictures to represent themselves, but tried to be as accurate as possible regarding their body type and features. It was important not to deceive others as deception could lead to disappointment in-person and the discontinuation of a relationship.

After producing a profile of their own, it was important to be sure others' profiles were also not deceptive. Fake profiles, such as catfish and bots, were on Tinder, so users had to assess the authenticity of a profile before swiping. Participants did not want to waste their time or be disappointed if they matched with a fake account. Upon attempting to vet other users, swiping on Tinder would include an assessment of profile pictures. It was important for users to see multiple photographs of a person and sometimes read their biography if they had one. The first picture is often the best, so looking at more photographs gave them a better overall description of the user. Of utmost importance was to determine if they were attractive based on the picture. A profile picture communicated both physical attractiveness and one's interests and hobbies, which were equally as important to know. The first two steps of creating a profile and swiping were important to understand as they influenced whether users

matched and communicated. These steps should be included in a model of how digital relationships begin and develop.

After deciding on whom to swipe, users made matches and would move on to the third step, initial communication. Gender norms dictated that heterosexual men should message women first, which was often frustrating because women received so many messages on Tinder. It was annoying for both genders; women were tired of receiving so many messages and getting several notifications, and men found it to be irritating because it was difficult to break through the clutter and have a female read and respond to a message. Although frustrating, this did not deter users from sending opening messages via Tinder. Effective opening lines that were used in hopes of beginning a connection included specific greetings and compliments. Those being interviewed said they expected to receive specific messages and they enjoyed them more than generic messages. Looking at a person's profile and commenting on something that was unique to his or her profile made the user feel as though time was taken on them and more effort was exerted, which led them to be more likely to respond. Users also liked compliments as long as they were not sexually explicit. Sexual messages were not well-received in addition to generic opening lines, such as "hey," as well as pick up lines.

If communicators could make it past the initial lines of communication, their next challenge was escalating a conversation that would lead to a date or hook up in person. In an attempt to bring a connection to fruition, users carefully worded their messages so they presented themselves in the best manner possible. While many participants took part in this behavior, others said they did not try to make themselves sound a certain way because they would soon meet in person and the jig would be up. For many, the

conversation may have started effectively, but it could not be sustained. At this point in the cycle, many conversations ended because no one was asking open-ended questions, or one person was not responding. For those conversations that continued, other channels, such as texting, WhatsApp, and Snapchat were introduced and the communication moved to these media instead of Tinder chat. Within a few hours to a few days for hook ups and a few days to weeks for dates, users would meet in person.

The next stage, offline meetings, would either go as expected or be different from what the participant had originally imagined. From looking at Tinder profiles and interacting with that user, participants began to get an idea of what the user would be like in person based on their conversations online and the pictures they had viewed. Often there were no surprises and the relationships continued. However, other Tinder users experienced surprises in person regarding the user's personality and/or their physical appearance. Men thought women tended to use older pictures as well as edited photographs, and use lighting and angles to appear more attractive. They discussed these deceptions and their shock when meeting matches in person. Women were surprised at men's height when they met offline, namely that they were shorter than expected. Collectively, respondents noted several times where users were less talkative, more shy, and overall awkward in person, but not online. This was a letdown and often a deal breaker with the relationship. However, some relationships developed smoothly during the first meeting and the relationship continued. Participants talked about friendships they had sustained from Tinder and significant others they secured from using the app. Some had realized success, but not all.

The final stage of the life of connections was the de-escalation phase. Participants disconnected either by slowly de-escalating their communication and how often they saw each other in person, gave the other person an honest reason as to why they did not wish to continue meeting, or did not communicate after one or a few dates, but did not give a reason why they were not seeking any more interaction. The endings without a reason left participants feeling frustrated because they were seeking a reason why the communication ended, especially when they thought the dates were going well. Finally, after using Tinder and trying to make connections, many participants said they realized the app was not for them and they would not use it again to try to find a partner. Users who did not take the app seriously, experiencing ghosting, and users not meeting expectations during the in-person phase were some of the reasons participants stopped using Tinder to make connections.

During this entire process, Tinder users spoke about different stages that affected their self-esteem. Sometimes they felt better about themselves by using the app, but at other times they felt worse. The final theme, Impact on Ego, is addressed next.

Impact on Ego

When discussing the process of using Tinder from start to finish, users had a lot to say about how being active on the app affected their ego. One's ego was brought up several times by many participants in terms of their self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth. Being notified of having several matches, receiving messages from others, getting compliments, and making successful connections through Tinder were all ways in which users found an increase in their self-esteem and confidence. However, these same acts could lead to a decrease in self-esteem when users would not make many matches, would

not receive messages and could not make a connection flourish outside of Tinder. Two main parts are addressed in this section: decreases in self-esteem and increases in self-esteem from using Tinder.

Decrease in Self-Esteem

Throughout the process of using Tinder, participants described times where they felt a decrease in their self-esteem. Tinder users took protective measures to shield themselves from feeling hurt or less confident from using the app, but even those precautions could not safeguard one's self-esteem at all times. The ways in which Tinder users attempted to protect their ego and experiences on Tinder that bruised their ego are discussed next.

Protective measures. Because many users were on the app to find a romantic partner or a sexual hook up, they knew that their emotions would be involved and that their confidence or feelings of self-worth could be altered from using the app. Colton defined Tinder as a dating app and not a hook up app and therefore felt like he was more susceptible to unpleasant feelings from using the app to try and secure a date.

I feel like there's less at stake on those [hook up apps]. I feel like on Tinder there's a little more, you know because it's - people use it for dating and stuff like that so I feel like you're putting more on the line.

Because there was potentially a lot on the line concerning one's emotions when using Tinder, users took protective measures to minimize hits to their self-esteem.

Nature of the app. Users felt more comfortable being active on the app because of the seemingly protective measures that were already built in to the nature of how the app operates. Fitch and Zack called attention to the restrictions on matching and

communicating via the app as helping users manage their egos. Fitch stated, “If one of us swipes ‘no,’ you’re not notified. There’s no neener neener that person doesn’t like you,” while Zack said, “You got to make a judgment without really having an immediate effect on somebody’s confidence. It wasn’t like you’re walking up to somebody and getting shot down or them walking up to you and you shooting them down.” Dana also noted that she knew everyone on the app was available so that took the apprehension out of part of the process.

So in person you don't know that the person’s interested cause on the app it automatically tells you they’re interested. So it kind of takes off the first step of being awkward of asking if they’re interested. And everyone’s already on the app so you don’t have to go search out is this person available or not available.

When searching for a partner offline, part of the process is wondering if the other person is single and interested. If they are not available and/or interested, the result can be a bruise to one’s ego. On Tinder, users have knowledge of this, so this serves to protect their ego in that sense.

The app’s settings for revealing matches provided a protective layer to users’ egos. If the other user did not “like” the person back, the user who swiped right was not notified. This aspect of the app sets it apart from offline initiations, which Tinder users noted as a positive feature of the app.

Swiping concerns. Although users do not get notified if another person swipes left on them, users still had their concerns about swiping right on other people in terms of how it would affect them. Participants explained they would hesitate on swiping on someone they were interested in because they were worried about how they would feel if

the person did not swipe back. As mentioned earlier, users will not receive matches if the other party has not seen their profile yet or they are not using the app anymore. But, those who were interviewed did not think of that when they were talking about how the lack of matches made them feel. To avoid those feelings of decreased confidence when users do not have others swipe right back on them, participants said they simply would not swipe right on the person they were intrigued by. Participants said they would often swipe left on people who were much better looking than them because they figured that user would not be interested in them. They did not want to find out and have it impact their confidence, so they simply did not swipe right on these users.

I usually will only swipe right if I think that they're chubbier like me. And even then it's very rare that I swipe right - I swipe left a lot more than I swipe right. I would say 95% of the time I swipe left and it's not because I'm not interested or I don't find the person attractive, but I can just tell that they're not going to be into me.

Adam did not take a chance swiping right on anyone who he thought would not be into him or was not a similar size as him. Adam was able to protect himself from possible rejection if he took the approach to swiping on Tinder he described above.

Colton also said he usually swiped left on very attractive people and said that even when he took a risk and matched with an attractive person, he was still unsure if the user actually liked him because he heard that some people swipe right on everyone.

If a guy's really, really hot a lot of times I do second guess myself. I'm like oh he's way out of my league. Ugh there's no way. If they're too pretty-boyish, I'm like oh there's no chance. I would probably swipe left on them. I mean

sometimes I'll swipe right just to see. Cause every once in a while it's always fun like Oh! That's a match! That's weird! But some people told me that they swipe right on everybody. I'm like well that makes me feel bad because I always thought when I got a match that it was a good thing! And if people are just swiping right on everybody, then, how are you supposed to know?

Some doubt entered Colton's head when he matched with an attractive person. He still was not sure if that user was interested and would hesitate to message him. For that reason, as he stated earlier, he usually chooses not to swipe right on those users to avoid situations like that and protect his feelings.

Confidence to message. Continuing with the same situation, users like Colton were hesitant about messaging first because of the fear of not receiving a message back. Colton explained this in the following:

I don't message them because I'm afraid they won't respond or something because I get in my head like oh they just swipe right on everybody then you know? I'm really bad and really good at talking myself out of things. I'm my own worst enemy in a lot of these situations because I have some bravado, but the real confidence isn't always there.

Users were aware of their own levels of confidence while navigating through the app and often times did not take chances on someone because they were worried the user would not reciprocate the same feelings even after they matched. Justin had also agreed with this mantra and said, "I usually never message first. I don't have the confidence to do that." Both Colton and Justin recognized their self-confidence and did not want to hurt

their self-esteem by attempting to message a match first and possibly not hearing from them, thus affecting their ego.

Nick had a different way of protecting his ego when he did not get a message back from a female on Tinder.

You don't take it personal, you know at least you tried. Like I don't get upset about it like oh well why not, why don't you like me? Like okay that's fine. You know, I got 50 more matches, I'll find somebody.

Nick told himself that he had many other matches, as did other participants and they used that as a way to manage their self-confidence. If one user did not work out or message back, participants remembered they had several others to choose from and moved on quickly before they could feel any negative emotions from the event.

Bruises. The previous section described how Tinder users made choices while using the app to protect their egos; however, respondents also said the way Tinder operates can lead to a decrease in self-confidence. The profile pictures, matching, and messaging can all impact how a person views their self-worth.

Profile pictures. The visual nature of the platform was pointed out as having an impact on users' confidence with respect to the users' profile pictures and the ones they were swiping on. Adam described how thinking about his picture brought forth his feelings of being self-conscious about what his picture is communicating in terms of his size.

It's too straightforward in that it's just about pictures. In your profile, you can say as much as you want, but if they're just looking at your picture, they don't have the idea in their head that this is a bigger person, even though the picture might

look like you – when you're going on there you put your best foot forward and you put your best pictures on there and some of your best pictures might not appear as a bigger person. And so I always try to point out I am a bigger guy. I'm not thin. This is my waist size and I'm definitely bigger than a football player just so you know. My face pics are very flattering and so I have that whole self-conscious type thing going on. So I sort of wish Tinder had something that had big and curvy or something like that.

Adam stated that his self-confidence is at the forefront of his mind when using Tinder because he was worried that users did not understand his size and worried they thought he was smaller. Like others, Adam put his best foot forward, but also recognized that in doing so, others think he is smaller than he is. The fact that Tinder is so visual in that users focus on the photographs versus the words made Adam self-conscious about using the app and interacting with others.

Chandler described a similar scenario and said that he is not using Tinder anymore because the platform is all about photographs and he did not think he had any attractive pictures of himself anymore. He said now that he is older he has gained weight and his hair is receding, so he did not feel confident putting himself online. It did not help that the previous time he used Tinder, he could not make any connections work offline and received very few messages back from women. Overall Tinder was described as a superficial and shallow app because of the emphasis it placed on visual beauty. This aspect of the app made some users question their confidence to even continue using Tinder.

Pictures also had an impact on how users' viewed their own attractiveness. In the previous section, users described not swiping on other profiles of people who were very attractive, but for Justin, even seeing a profile of a person who he deemed attractive and confident negatively affected him. He explained, "I don't like shirtless pictures. Honestly it's more about me. I feel intimidated. I'm like oh they have a much better body than I do and also they're more confident than I am." Justin's ego was involved as he said the experience was about him. Justin found the male to be good-looking, but did not like that the user was shirtless and confident, as Justin is not. This made Justin feel intimidated and it lowered his self-confidence.

Matches. In addition to the visuals having an impact on one's ego, making matches or having a lack of matches decreased participants' self-esteem. Nick revealed the matching process served as a means of lowering confidence if he failed to receive matches any given day.

Sometimes I'll go a day or two without any matches, and it's like I don't really have much incentive to keep signing in and because it's like oh I'm a loser I don't have any matches. It can be kind of addictive. You kind of start to place self-worth or self-value on the number of matches that you have. There's this little like thing in the top right screen, and it looks almost like a quotation mark or a thought bubble and a little orange dot will appear if you have a new match or if you have a message. So you'll sign in and it'll tell you right away if that's blinking or it's not, that means you have a message or you don't. So if you go a day or two without having it then it can mess with your psyche a little bit, like oh man I haven't met anybody or I haven't had matches with anybody and I swiped

right on 30 profiles, I mean none of those 30 profiles swiped right on me, am I just not attractive or what am I doing wrong with my profile, or maybe I'm not as cool as I thought I was, or you know, those types of thoughts.

Nick placed importance on whether others swiped right on him, as did Jake. "Let's say you are trying to match a lot of people and you don't match with them," said Jake. "It can lower your self-esteem and really hurt your self image, making you feel like you're not pretty enough or not handsome enough." While many interviewees felt similarly to Nick and Jake, other Tinder users stated that some people on the app are not currently using it yet still have a profile or the user on the other end did not see your profile yet, which is why they have not matched. Despite these reasons as to why a user was not making matches, interviewees still perceived not having any or many matches as a bruise to their ego.

Messaging. Communication was also part of the cycle of connections that affected users' self-esteem. Another user messaging first indicated their interest, but if they were unattractive that influenced how someone perceived their own attractiveness. Nick discussed this during his interview.

And I've noticed that the ones that communicate with me first are the ones that you don't ever really want to communicate with. So it's kind of depressing cause you're like man is that my level of attractiveness? Because this is the only type of woman that's trying to talk to me first.

Even though Nick matched with this user and she communicated with him first, he felt poorly about himself because she was not as attractive as he had hoped. This influenced the way in which Nick viewed himself and questioned his own physical attractiveness.

Being presented with messages from unattractive users can lower users' confidence and so can failing to communicate with others to the extent in which the Tinder interactions do not lead to offline meetings. Chandler could not launch any type of face-to-face encounter by using the app, which affected his emotions. He described the app in one word: "depressing."

It never really went anywhere. Couldn't make any sort of communication with anyone which considering the entire purpose of it is to talk to people to eventually go out, hang out, and do things, um whether that leads to anything or not the fact that nothing ever happened, that it seemed like nobody was ever interested in me in any way, shape, or form was just, I guess disheartening.

Chandler was upset that he could not realize his goal of finding a partner by using the app, because that is what the app was designed to do.

Summary of Decrease in Self-Esteem

Those on Tinder were careful to use the app because of their concerns of how it could negatively affect their self-esteem. They engaged in self-care by putting their guard up during certain parts of the Tinder process. Many said they would use the app because they were not notified when they did not have a match, only when they did. But, the nature of the app was not enough to protect one's ego completely. When pondering whether they should swipe on someone and/or message them, their level of confidence came to the forefront of their decision. Some participants would not swipe on attractive users for fear others would not swipe back. Others did not have enough confidence to start a conversation with someone even after matching. Knowing that some users swipe

right on all profiles was one reason participants were hesitant to move the relationship forward.

While they did what they could to protect themselves from emotional harm, many users took a bruise to their ego while using Tinder. Participants talked about decreases in self-esteem in terms of their pictures, others' pictures, matches they would receive and what kinds of people would message them. Seeing others who were more attractive than they were tended to lower the users' self-esteem and their confidence to make an attractive match. Not matching with many people in a day also lowered users' self-esteem as did the messaging system. When participants received messages from unattractive users, they felt poorly about themselves. Men, both gay and straight, more so than women, experienced negativity regarding their ego from engaging on Tinder. Gay men talked a lot about photographs being intimidating, worries they had about swiping on others, and how they struggled with messaging others. Straight men discussed lower self-esteem when they did not make many matches, did not hear back from women, or were matched or received a message from women they perceived to be unattractive. While women mentioned the protective measures of the app, they did not have concerns about their ego when swiping or messaging. Women received more messages and made more matches on Tinder, giving them more control and fewer opportunities to undergo negative feelings regarding their ego.

The negative impact on the ego can trace back to Tinder being a game for users. Participants described users as profiles and the swiping process as a fun game. However, many Tinder users did not see themselves as being a player in a game, but wanted to be on the app to secure an exclusive romantic relationship. Melody explained, "It's really

annoying to play games when you really want to find someone decent to date.” Part of the game included users forgetting that others on Tinder were humans with feelings and emotions. Dmitri had spoke about women on Tinder as fish where the ones he did not want were “thrown back in to the ocean.” Justin had said that “a lot of the people on there [Tinder] are specifically looking for a relationship not a person; they don’t care who it’s with.” Finally, the disconnection portion can add to these arguments. Users found it easy to disconnect with someone because they were strangers online and had only met once or twice, therefore, they did not believe the other deserved a reason as to why the conversation ended. These quotes can corroborate the point that Tinder is a game where the users are sometimes forgotten as humans. This kind of behavior can lead Tinder users to feel hurt or undergo a decrease in their self-worth.

Clearly, there were many ways in which users did not feel good about themselves when using the dating app, but fortunately there were other times when participants described positive effects from Tinder.

Increase in Self-Esteem

Just as using Tinder negatively affected users’ self-esteem and confidence, the same acts could also serve as a boost to their ego. First, participants asserted that they thought other Tinder users wanted to feel good about themselves by using the app, but participants did not say that was their own primary reason for using Tinder. Throughout the conversations though, participants noted times where they felt a boost in self-esteem from using the app, whether it was receiving a large number of matches or reading compliments from other users. These concepts are discussed in the final section on ego.

Perception of others. The app was conceptualized as being a confidence tool for others. While being interviewed, many participants said other users were mainly on the app to feel better about themselves after matching with other users. Chasity said her and her friends all used Tinder, but did not take it seriously because it was just used to build confidence.

Well some of my friends have it and I feel like no one really takes it seriously.

It's more like a confidence boost for most people or like to flirt. I mean my

biggest thing, I really think that a lot of people just use it as a confidence boost.

Chasity gathered from her friends' use of Tinder that it is used to have an impact on someone's confidence in a positive manner. Anthony agreed and explained his reasoning behind this thinking.

I think there's a good percentage of females out there who are using Tinder as an ego-booster. They're just on there to feel good about themselves when they see there's a handful of guys swiping right, basically affirming that they feel attractive and oh they get the ego boost, oh look a buncha people think I'm hot.

They're not actually looking to strike up a conversation, like, I've been on Tinder before, messaged a number of girls, and I'm not saying stupid things, I'm coming up with genuine things, but yeah I think some of these girls are just not even looking to talk or meet or anything, they're just looking for oh ten guys think I'm hot, so more of an ego boost.

Anthony believed a lot of women used Tinder for confidence boosts because he would message women thoughtful conversations and they would not respond. However, as mentioned earlier, women received an enormous number of messages on Tinder and

sometimes became overwhelmed. Anthony's statement contributes to the idea that many users think other users are on the app to boost their confidence, but this serves as a reasoning behind Anthony not receiving conversation back from women at times. His rationale behind not receiving messages back from women helped to protect his ego from being bruised.

Finally, Dmitri uncovered that on the surface Tinder is a dating app, but he was certain that a true reason behind people using it is to build their own confidence.

I mean if you were going to be naive about it, I would say it's [Tinder] just a cool dating app that's all about face value and swiping right if you like somebody, swiping left if you don't. If you go a little bit deeper, I think it's actually – I think some people use it as a motivation tool. They use it just to see how many people will swipe back with them. Even if they don't have any intention of actually talking to you, I think guys and girls can both use it to be like oh look I've got all these hits. That's my conspiracy theory on people using Tinder – they use it to boost their self-confidence.

Dmitri's opinion on others' use of Tinder is that making matches with others will impact their self-worth and give them more confidence in their ability to attract others romantically.

Users believed Tinder played a role in boosting other users' egos, but those interviewed for this study also reported times when they felt more confident as a result of using the app.

Boosts. Interviewees shared stories of when they felt better about themselves following a Tinder match, message, or meeting in-person. They talked about Tinder

playing a role in their ego and how using the app and getting certain results led them to have more confidence or feel better about themselves in terms of their attractiveness.

Matching. Bryan noted that simply matching with someone attractive on Tinder confirmed his ability to appeal to a good-looking mate.

When you match, a lot of times I feel like you don't converse. You just match to know oh okay, I could get someone that attractiveness as a partner but I'm not going to for some reason. And sometimes I guess I use that for that but you know, who cares. If you're making yourself happy with an app then do it.

Bryan was not alone in his thought process; Ethan also revealed the effects of making matches on Tinder and not conversing with them.

Of the matches that I don't chat with, it's because my, I guess my inhibitions were lower and you kind of get a high about or you feel good about yourself when you get a match and so therefore sometimes they might not be a person that you would necessarily take out, but if you get that match you feel, okay, I'm still desired.

Without even communicating, Bryan and Ethan both had positive outcomes to their ego by simply swiping through others' profiles and making matches. Bryan believed that if users were not misrepresenting themselves and making fake profiles, using Tinder for the sake of seeing how attractive of a match you can make was appropriate.

Thomas talked about matching in a positive light as well and said he was pleasantly surprised when he received a large number of matches while using Tan Tan in China. "I had a ton of matches in the beginning. So it was intense for a little bit, but it was exciting! It was cool because it was like wow all these people want to talk!" While

Thomas spoke with about half of his matches, the sheer act of making a match boosted his confidence and made him excited and happy. He had a lot of success on the app, which contributed to his positive outlook and confidence after using it.

Sandra also talked about an aspect of the matching process that gave her confidence. She pointed out the unique aspect of Tinder in that it allowed users to feel more comfortable to convey their interest in someone compared to offline situations.

You wouldn't go up to somebody and say I'd swipe right on you so you don't exactly know who thinks you're attractive, personality and body wise and whatnot. But over Tinder people just do it. So once you see you have a match it's like oh wow I never would have thought that. And then other people probably think that too like oh wow I never would have thought a girl like that would think I'm worthy enough. So it kind of, it definitely boosts your confidence a bunch.

While the matching process allowed Bryan, Ethan, and Sandra to feel a boost of confidence, Dominique stated that she felt self-assurance while out in person with men she had matched with on Tinder.

In terms of every single date I went on I always got, "Why are you on Tinder? Because like why are – how are you still single?" is a question I would always get. I was like that's a great question! I would love to know the answer to that.

Can you please let me know, that is a great question. So it was actually a boost of an ego sometimes.

Matching was a significant component of ego as users, especially males, talked about how excited they were to get several matches. While females at times did get annoyed by all of the notifications, they still proudly announced that they had hundreds, even

thousands of matches from Tinder. The messaging element was another way users found confidence from being on the app.

Messaging. As stated earlier, compliments were one way to begin a conversation on Tinder. This approach was deemed to be effective as users recognized that others like to be complimented and they were more likely to respond when they sent these messages. Participants on the receiving end of complimentary messages also said they enjoyed getting messages of this nature and were more likely to talk back to that person if they had begun with a compliment. Dana said for compliments she was “more willing to keep talking to them. I’ll take compliments any day.” For Bryan, he often began with compliments because he knew that was a way for others to feel good about themselves, and in turn gave him a better chance of receiving a response. Beginning with compliments stroked users’ egos and allowed users to continue developing a relationship.

Summary of Increase in Self-Esteem

Although there were more times that users felt their self-confidence lowered than raised, there were times during the Tinder process that users reported feeling better about themselves. This would occur when they would acquire many matches, especially good-looking ones, and when they would receive compliments from others. Those who were able to secure long-term connections from the app also spoke in a positive manner about the app and how they felt about themselves and their relationship following the process. While many discussed their own boost of self confidence from Tinder, many spoke of an ego boost in terms of the reasoning why other users create accounts. Many men and women thought people create accounts in order to feel better about themselves and to determine how many attractive matches they could make. Participants said this was

frustrating because that is not the reason people should be on Tinder; users should be active on the app in order to make connections, not just see how many people believe they are hot. A few participants had said Tinder started as Hot or Not where users could upload pictures and see how many others said they were hot. It then turned into a platform where users could make matches and actually communicate from giving someone a “hot” button instead of a “not” button.

Summary of Theme Three: Impact on Ego

Although respondents were not specifically prompted to discuss ego and self-esteem during the interview, this emerged as a main theme that was referred to mostly in a negative manner by men. While participants were conversing about the various stages in the Tinder process, they often referred to scenarios that left them recognizing their current lack of self-confidence or talking about how using Tinder impacting their ego in a way that produced lower self-esteem. From the start of having to choose profile pictures users recognized their lack of self-confidence in that they were worried about having attractive pictures that accurately showed their body. The swiping process left users wondering if the other party consciously swiped right on them or if the other user swiped right on everyone. When matching, messaging also became a concern and a hesitation for many users as again they were not sure that their match had deliberately swiped right on them. Participants did what they could to protect their ego from being hurt, but many still underwent feelings of decreased self-esteem from various parts of the Tinder process.

Summary of Results

Three major themes emerged from the interviewees' data: Functions of Tinder, Life of Connections, and Impact on Ego. Functions of Tinder reported two main reasons for using the app: entertainment and to make connections. Tinder functioned as a social platform that could be used with friends or alone as entertainment in the form of a game or simply as a way to pass time. Tinder also functioned as a convenient app that was used to make a variety of connections, such as friendships, hook ups, and long-term romantic relationships. The simple nature of the app along with its popularity made it a convenient choice to use to connect with others and hope to bring those connections offline.

The second theme, Life of Connections, documented the life cycle of a relationship that began on Tinder and followed the stages until the end or continuation of a relationship. This process was discussed beginning with a profile, where users' goals, advice from friends, and desire to put their most attractive, yet truthfully representative picture forward, impacted their choice of pictures and words. Second, users said they swiped based on others' physical allure and what their photographs communicated about their interests and hobbies, but first everyone had to pass the catfish and bot test to be sure the person on the other end was real. These two steps were important because without them, no communication could be initiated. Third, initial communication commenced according to traditional gender roles, where the males tended to message first in heterosexual relationships. Opening lines that amounted to favorable outcomes were compliments and greetings that addressed something specific in users' profiles, while ones that were less successful included simple, generic greetings, such as "hi," pick

up lines, and sexual messages. Fourth, many users developed conversations by carefully choosing their words and editing their message to sound favorable, while another portion of users just typed whatever was in their head. Conversation that developed in a successful manner soon went on to Snapchat or texting and an offline meeting was set up within a few days to a few weeks later. Relationships were slow to move to offline stages, unless they were hook ups. Fifth, users discussed times when their expectations were met and times when they were not, concerning the in-person meetings. That influenced their decision to move forward with the relationship. When users did not represent themselves accurately online in terms of their photographs and manner of speaking, the relationship was often terminated. For those that continued, users spoke highly of the connections they were able to secure and continue via Tinder, especially those who attained romantic partners. Relationships were not retarded in progression once two users met offline. Sixth, not all relationships continued past the first few dates. Connections that ended did so either by either fizzling out, ending with an honest reason as to why the communication would not continue, or a ghosting situation occurred, where one party disappeared, stopped communicating, and gave no rationale as to why. De-escalating a relationship moved more quickly than what was presented in the traditional model.

The third theme, Impact on Ego, described how Tinder users experienced bruises or boosts to the ego. Participants were worried about how interacting on Tinder would leave their self-esteem and often times would take several precautions throughout the process to safeguard their ego. Some of these attempts were futile, as many described times where matching, messaging, or looking at their own or others' pictures left them

with lower confidence and a decrease in self-worth. Nevertheless, there were also times in this cycle where participants gained self-esteem, such as receiving compliments, securing successful matches, and finding that many users were interested in them.

The findings from this chapter have important implications for understanding communication theory, namely how users experience the cycle of digital relationships and the influence of CMC and hyperpersonal communication on this process.

Additionally, these results provide users with an understanding of others' experiences, both positive and negative. The theoretical contributions and practical applications are discussed in the final chapter along with limitations and future research suggestions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this dissertation was to explore the life cycle of relationships formed via Tinder. Knapp's (1978) relational stage model is one of the few models that proposes the steps of a relationship escalating and de-escalating; however, it has not been empirically tested in many previous studies, especially with LBDA. This dissertation fulfilled calls for studies to explore how new media are changing Knapp's (1978) model, particularly the initiation stages (LeFebvre, 2016; Fox & Warber, 2013), how social media impact relationship development and modality switching behaviors (Fox & Anderegg, 2014), and how social networking sites impact the full model of communication, including maintenance and de-escalation (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013). As a platform that allows users to secure different kinds of romantic, sexual, and platonic relationships, Tinder has altered traditional ways in which people move through the stages of relationships and how users experience CMC. Knowing these changes is important because forming a successful relationship is often the goal of using an LBDA, so understanding how users are successfully forming these relationships and what steps they take to reach their goals, as well as how and why they de-escalate can help users make effective connections. This chapter discusses Tinder's impact on the relational stage model and the ensuing implications. The functions of Tinder, concerns about dating via Tinder, hyperpersonal experiences, impact on ego, and sex differences will also be discussed in this chapter as well as pragmatic applications the research entails for Tinder users. Finally, limitations and future research will be addressed.

Stages of a Relationship Formed via Tinder

Tinder users described relationship escalation occurring similarly to Knapp's (1978) classic model. However, the stages of de-escalation occurred more quickly than Knapp's (1978) relational stage model describes. Additionally, the steps that occur before initial communication emerged as important stages to include in a modified model of the stages of relationships.

Pre-Communication

Two stages occurred before users began communicating: building their online profile (encoding) and swiping on other users (decoding). Participants created their profile based on their relationship goal, advice from others, and desire to put their best foot forward. After creating their profile, the second step for Tinder users was to swipe on other users' profiles. Tinder users were aware of catfish and were careful not to swipe on these profiles. While respondents stated they considered the visual aspect when making their decision whether to swipe right, many participants stated other users' perceived personality was the driving force behind a swipe as opposed to just users' physical attractiveness. These results corroborate LeFebvre's (2016) results on Tinder swiping, where users swiped based on attraction and how interesting they found a person's profile to be. Overall, users wanted to match with profiles that were homophilous to theirs in terms of hobbies, interest, and race. Some swipers were stingy with their right swipes, while others took a "shotgun approach" to swiping, meaning they swiped right on all profiles and then decided if they wanted to communicate once a match was made (LeFebvre, 2016). A handful of men in this study also stated they swiped right

on every profile, especially if they were looking for a romantic or sexual connection, but no females indicated this as their strategy.

After initially creating their profile, users determined whether their photographs and biography were returning the number of matches they expected, as users also do with online dating websites (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). If they were not making a sufficient number of matches, users would seek advice from friends and go back to step one (creating a profile) to strategically adapt their profile in hopes of getting a better return rate. Participants valued their offline connections and expected them to help and be involved in their success making online connections. Participants talked about making the written portions of their profile shorter or funnier, and their pictures more appealing based on their friends' advice. Because other users make snap swiping decisions from looking at a profile, it was important to create a profile that would yield success. While they were looking for success, nearly all participants described highlighting accurate aspects of their personality and not altering their photographs in order to garner success on Tinder.

The two stages of creating a profile and swiping are important in the pre-communication phases of a model of Tinder relationships. First, strategically devising a profile and planning how to swipe has consequences on how many matches Tinder users make. This is the gateway to communication so it is important to consider the stages that occur prior to Initiation. A user does not have the right to message anyone they want to on Tinder, as is the case for other dating sites and apps, so the steps that occur in creating a profile and swiping have strong implications on whether initial communication materializes. LeFebvre (2016) argued that the “pre-interaction step” (p. 24) should be

added to the relational stage model before the Initiation stage. Results from this dissertation also support LeFebvre's (2016) idea, as important communication via the profile and decoding via swiping occurs before the initial communication stage. Without these stages and making a match, Tinder users are unable to reach the first stage of escalation: Initiation.

Escalation

The Initiation stage is the first phase in Knapp's (1978) classic model of the cycle of relationships. On Tinder, once a match is made, the Initiation stage can occur. Participants talked about how they decided whether they should message their matches, as most participants indicated they only chat online with about half of their matches. Knapp (1978) proposed that we intend to communicate with someone based on their attractiveness and approachability. At this point, users would re-assess their matches, especially those who swiped right on every profile. They would view more photographs and read the users' biography, thus supporting Knapp's (1978) Initiation stage of deciding within a few seconds if attempting to communicate with someone was worthwhile.

Interestingly though, many users were hesitant about making the first step of sending a message to a match via Tinder chat. Samp and Palevitz (2008) asserted that the Internet was a safe place to begin a relationship with someone because others' goals were known on their profile. However, even when a match was made, users were still hesitant about communicating because they were unsure if the other user was truly interested and because they wanted to be pursued, not be the pursuer. While many straight females said they would not initiate conversations, there were also straight and gay males who wanted

other users to message them first. Straight men wanted to feel desired and receive an ego boost from having a female message them first. Also, both straight and gay males said they did not have the confidence to message first. They were protecting their ego because they knew there was a chance they would not receive a response. This also could be due to the large number of messages women receive on Tinder. Users should know that they and their match may be contemplating messaging, but ultimately no one messages for the above reasons, even though both were interested. This again illustrates the illusion that initiating communication online is easier than face-to-face.

For those participants who did decide to message another user, they often had trouble devising an opening line. Opening lines were important because they were make or break situations in terms of the conversation's likelihood to continue. Sometimes those on the other end would not respond to an opening message, or the conversation would not go past a few communicative exchanges before it died. Knapp (1978) stated the sender chooses an opening line based on the type of relationship the communicators have, the situation, and the environment. Users sent other users messages they likely would not say in person. Because users were not communicating face-to-face, they likely felt comfortable sending pick up lines or making sexually explicit comments because they were writing over Tinder chat. The online disinhibition effect explains this concept. The Internet creates an environment where users feel open to say statements to others they normally would not say in-person (Suler, 2004). However, most messages followed Knapp's (1978) rules as many users sent general messages, such as short and generic sayings, specific greetings, and compliments. Specific messages and compliments were effective, but sending "hey," to another user was not. Users, especially straight males,

were not interested in taking the time to craft a unique message every time they messaged someone. Following social norms, straight men were overwhelmingly expected to message women first, as was also found in another study on Tinder communication (Seefeldt, 2014). Because there are more men than women on Tinder and they are expected to begin conversations, women often received many messages. Both straight men and women would become frustrated as a result of this because women were tired of receiving notifications of men messaging them, many in which they were not interested, and straight men struggled to compose an opening statement that would grab a woman's attention. Some users deleted the app because of these frustrations or began to put less effort into their message creation. Initial communication has become thoughtless for many who seek to kick start a connection by any means. Users were looking to maximize their matches and minimize their effort on the app. Straight men would say "hey," or copy and paste a blanket statement or pick up line to women. Straight women noted they wanted messages tailored to them to feel special, but straight men had said that even when they sent specific messages, they still would not always receive responses and it wasted too much of their time. These results were also present with a previous study on Tinder (Seefeldt, 2014) and one focusing on a dating website (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). As an app that is designed to have users easily connect, many aspects, such as the struggles of garnering a response from initial communication, emerged as being hurdles to jump in order to make a successful connection via Tinder.

After the initial communication, users would develop the conversation by chatting via Tinder and then converse on another medium such as texting on a cell phone or Snapchatting each other. Participants spoke on at least two platforms before meeting

offline. One reason users left Tinder chat was because it was more convenient and used less phone battery to chat via text message or Snapchat. Another reason users went to another platform after matching and chatting on Tinder was to provide more verification of users' true identity. Sending real time visual snaps provided evidence of users' current physical appearance. This portion of the relationship escalation is most closely associated with Knapp's (1978) second stage: Experimenting, in which communicators seek to reduce uncertainty about each other by discussing general topics and engaging in small talk. Much like Facebook users uncovered uncertainty through Berger and Calabrese's (1975) passive, active, and interactive strategies in Fox, Warber, and Makstaller's (2013) study, Tinder users did too. Passively, Tinder users would continue to uncover information about the other by viewing their social media. Actively seeking to reduce uncertainty, those conversing on Tinder would reach out to friends for advice on the conversation and whether they knew or had dated the person they were talking to. Interactive strategies consisted of directly questioning the other Tinder user. Interactive strategies were executed to develop the relationship, to allow participants to feel more comfortable that users were not "psychopaths," and to learn about others' interests. Participants who wanted to meet for a date would speak longer than those wanting to hook up, who often met within hours or days of matching. Those looking to date or become friends would talk for a few days to a few weeks before meeting in person. The first two stages were generally slow because communicators via the app want to be sure they had a grasp on the other person's true identity, but once they felt comfortable meeting, they had no more hesitations about continuing to develop the relationship if they were interested.

For some Tinder users, the communication would de-escalate at this stage because one or the other was unable to sustain lively conversation. Participants spoke about endless questions that went nowhere, or sending each other movie quotes, which did not lead to developing any further conversation. Users who could sustain conversation met offline during the second stage, Experimenting. For those who got past the initial in-person meeting and wanted to continue their relationship, many described the next stages as flowing like a “normal relationship” would or even rapidly. Past research suggests relationships beginning online will not progress as quickly as those that begin offline because there is more skepticism from an online relationship (Paul, 2014). That was not the case for these Tinder users. Once two users met in person and enjoyed each other’s company, there was no concern over vetting the person further. Trust was established if the offline meeting went well. Participants talked about having a date with someone from Tinder, having sex that same night, having a partner sleep over, and continuing to communicate and see each other as often as possible. Relationships progressed quickly and were not delayed once they met in person. Users described their relationship as moving forward “normally” and that the only difference between developing a relationship on Tinder versus in-person was the initial stages of communication. Many participants realized Knapp’s (1978) third stage, Intensifying. During this stage two people disclose more information and become more personal (Knapp, 1978). Participants’ conversations became more personal in terms of topics and communication became constant and predictable. Some participants described conversations about family, past relationships, sensitive issues they were having, and having communication that was unique to them, such as inside jokes. This was especially true for those

becoming friends from Tinder and those working toward an exclusive romantic relationship, but less true for those hooking up. Communication was more casual for hook ups and usually did not reach an Intensifying stage. This is to be expected, as hook ups are often fleeting and both parties expect the conversation and the sex to be casual.

Research suggests that online daters may never make it to the final two stages of escalating a relationship nor the maintenance phase because there are so many more potential matches online, committing may be more difficult (Paul, 2014). Some people who were interviewed stated their relationship ended because of this, but others could sustain committed relationships via Tinder. Many continued to escalate their relationship according to Knapp's (1978) model. The fourth stage, Integrating, is defined as two people sharing activities, engaging in sexual relations, and acting like a couple, while the final stage, Bonding, is the experience of a committed relationship (Knapp, 1978). About 20% of those who participating in this study said they had a committed romantic relationship from someone they met on Tinder. Some lived with their significant other and some stated they had intentions of marrying the person they met on Tinder. Comparable to being "Facebook official" for those developing a relationship through that platform (Fox, Warber, and Makstaller, 2013), at this point both parties were expected to delete their Tinder account. While interviewed, users spoke about the conversations they would have with their partner about ceasing to use the app. This was an important part of reaching the full Bonding stage. Because they went through all of the escalation stages, couples that were committed were now at the maintenance level in Knapp's (1978) classic model. There was strong support for maintenance behaviors, such as hanging out

with mutual friends, engaging in open communication, showing love for the other, and visiting with family (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010).

De-Escalation

For those who did not continue their relationship, the de-escalation phase occurred next. It is important to note that the de-escalation phase could occur at different points in the connection: after initial communication, during communication escalation, after one date, or after several dates or meetings. Knapp's (1978) model shows the de-escalation of a relationship occurring after the Bonding step, but because some users in this study never reached this stage, they experienced their relationship de-escalating earlier. Results showed that relationships often come apart more quickly than they come together and all five stages of de-escalation proposed by Knapp (1978) are usually not experienced. Dunleavy and Booth-Butterfield (2009) reached this same conclusion on their study on idiomatic communication with the stages of Knapp's (1978) model.

The classic model of de-escalating a relationship has five steps, but those interviewed experienced fewer steps. Fizzling out, giving or receiving a blunt reason to end the relationship, and ghosting were three approaches to ending a connection. Sometimes communication would fizzle out as a "normal" relationship would. Communication would curtail, with shorter responses given and eventually no responses or in-person meetings would come about. This reflected the Circumscribing stage (fewer communicative exchanges and change in quality of the communication), Stagnating (communication is still not progressing), Avoiding (communication is not made and it is clearer that one person or both do not wish to progress the relationship), and the Termination stage (the relationship and/or communication ends) (Knapp, 1978).

The second way of ending a relationship from Tinder was termed a blunt ending. After a first date, a user would make a quick decision about their likelihood to continue the relationship. If they did not see the relationship escalating, they would end it by giving the person an honest reason, which was communicated via Tinder or text. Samp and Palevitz (2008) argued that the Internet plays a significant role in how people end relationships and is a preferred medium because it is asynchronous and not face-to-face. While giving a blunt and honest reason why the relationship would not work, interviewees said they preferred to do this via an online message because they were too cowardly to do it face-to-face. Blunt endings illustrated the fourth and fifth stages of Knapp's model: Avoiding (communicators attempt to end their communication because one or more person does not wish to continue) and Termination (the relations and communication end).

A third way of ending a connection was ghosting. Scott (2016) defined this act as “a means of relationship exit that involves one partner vanishing by ceasing and avoiding all communication with a romantic partner” (p. 3) and participants from this dissertation gave similar descriptions. Several interviews revealed that users underwent ghosting or were the ones who ghosted others from Tinder. Ghosting skips all of the previous four stages of relationship de-escalation proposed by Knapp (1978) and describes the final phase: Termination. With ghosting, the de-escalation side of the model would look more like a cliff than a descending staircase.

Figure 1 shows how escalating and de-escalating a relationship via Tinder has modified the relational stage model.

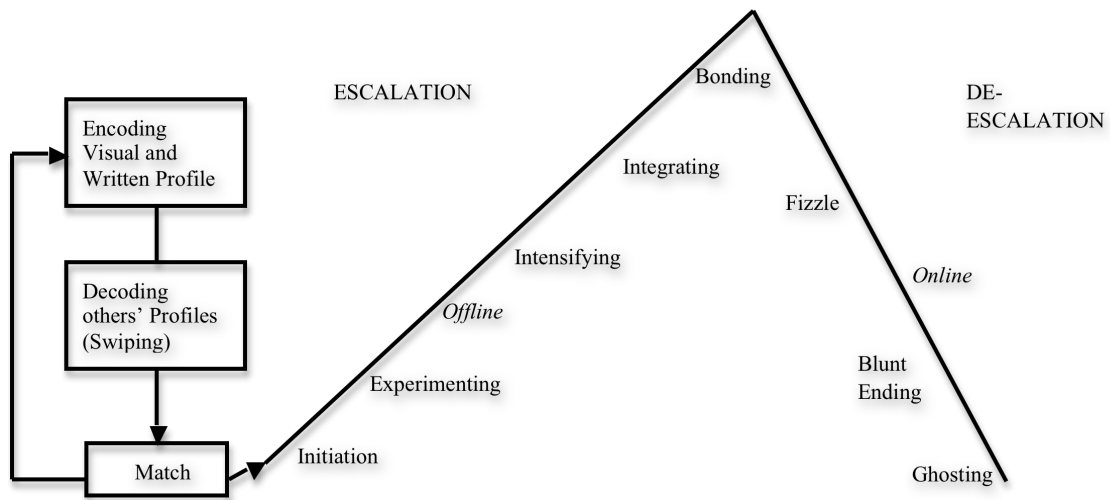


Figure 1. Stages of relationships formed via Tinder.

Tinder Experiences

While this dissertation aimed to discover the stages of a Tinder relationship, the researcher also learned other useful information pertaining to the functions of Tinder, hesitation to form relationships via Tinder, hyperpersonal experiences, impact on ego, and sex differences. Understanding users' experiences with Tinder can help to understand the impact this platform can have on users' success finding connections and how using Tinder affects users' self-esteem.

Functions of Tinder

Participants spoke of Tinder as a fun, entertaining app. This theme can be found in other studies about the uses of Tinder, Grindr, and Facebook (LeFebvre, 2016; Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Whiting & Williams, 2013). More specifically within

Entertainment, this dissertation uncovered Tinder as a game that users play, consistent with previous literature (Seefeldt, 2014; LeFebvre, 2016). These findings warrant further exploration because of the implications using Tinder for entertainment could have on others who are using the app. While Tinder can be an entertaining way to meet people, the idea of it being a game can imply that users are only on Tinder to amuse themselves, not to find serious interpersonal connections, a reason for which many others are using the app. Users interacting on Tinder for interpersonal connections may become frustrated when they engage with others who do not share their same goal, as was indicated in this dissertation. Furthermore, the comparison of Tinder to a game connects to why users dehumanize others (Scott, 2016). An overview of online dating research suggested that online dating could result in the objectification of users and a decline in the desire to commit (Wiederhold, 2015). When humans are viewed as profiles, those swiping and interacting with others may feel no obligation to take others' feelings into consideration when communicating, may make it easier to disengage with someone, and may ultimately hurt the other user emotionally. This notion holds true for dating apps as well; the game-like motions of swiping in relation to objectifying users should be further explored as users' emotions could be affected by these actions.

As Tinder is a game and a form of entertainment for those using it, it also becomes a tool to amuse one's self when bored, similar to previous studies' descriptions of other social media and apps. Studies examining the uses and gratifications of social media found that Grindr users opened the app to pass time (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014), as did Facebook users (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Just like turning to Facebook or Grindr when bored, users opened Tinder as a means to entertain themselves

and to pass the time. In this respect, Tinder was not necessarily a game, but a passive activity in which users engaged when they were bored and wanted something to do. The significance of this result relates to other users who are trying to make offline relationships happen via Tinder. Those swiping on Tinder when bored may have no intention of messaging anyone or meeting in person, yet their matches may assume they do. Again this can become frustrating for those on the other end who do not know the intentions of users who are only swiping for entertainment purposes to pass the time. As an app that was designed for users to connect offline, some may disregard its use for connecting interpersonally. Tinder became lumped in with other apps users go to when bored. This implies many do not view it as a serious relationship app, but as just another app users go to for their own pleasure.

In addition to entertaining its users, Tinder mainly functioned as a medium to make interpersonal connections of all sorts. First, participants discussed previous failures in both online and face-to-face channels. Dating websites, dating apps, and attempting to meet others through work or school had failed many of the users, so they turned to Tinder to find a match because their friends' success stories had given them hope. Similarly, almost half (45.8%) of participants in LeFebvre's (2016) study agreed that finding a match through a dating app would yield more success than offline attempts. However, after using the app, participants who initially had hope were let down as some were unable to make interpersonal connections via Tinder. Participants turned to Tinder because it was the popular means of making connections, but found that it did not give them success either. This implies there are other variables to explore to answer why

some participants are unable to make connections in-person, on dating websites, and through apps.

Second, users praised the simple design and easy set up as one of its greatest attributes contributing to the convenience of the app's function. Participants mentioned this quality as trumping other dating websites that required tedious biographies and lengthy email exchanges. The interface of Tinder was also mentioned in LeFebvre's (2016) study where participants said they used Tinder because of its design, among other reasons. The mobility of apps allows users to conveniently make matches and connect with others wherever they go. At the same time, the design and ease of use also contributed to Tinder being compared to a game. Users did not have to put forth effort to create an extensive biography and in turn view others' in-depth pages. This led users to swiping through others' profiles as if they were just profiles and not humans behind the profile. In addition to being a convenient place to secure connections, Tinder functioned as a place to make a variety of relational connections. Tinder had a reputation of being a hook up app (Seefeldt, 2014) but has since branched out as a medium to connect people who have varying relationship goals. This dissertation reported that many participants (32%) defined Tinder as a hook up app, but some (10%) noted that while it was stereotyped as a hook up app, it is currently used for more than just that. Many (26%) described Tinder as a dating app and also a channel that could allow users to connect as friends. One of the few studies exploring the uses of Tinder also found that users believed Tinder was made for hooking up (42%), dating (30%), and meeting others (14%) (LeFebvre, 2016). Grindr was reported as having similar uses for connections (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). While these apps have a reputation as being a place to

find casual sex partners, this research adds to the support that LBDAs can be used for meeting new people in an area, making friends, hooking up, dating, and exclusive romantic relationships. In addition to what participants thought Tinder was made for, they also described its function for them personally. Most participants (55%) downloaded Tinder to date or find a long-term romantic partner. Users with those goals in mind were mostly older than traditional college age. A significant portion of participants (29%) was looking for friends via Tinder or simply using the app because they were curious about what it was. These users were mostly female and all between 18 and 23 years of age. Finally, 16% of users, all male ages 30-36 years, explicitly stated they were using Tinder to find a casual sex partner.

Third, the number of users on the app made it a convenient medium to jumpstart connections that would continue into the offline world. About 80% of participants met someone offline from Tinder, similar to another study that reported 75.9% of their sampled Tinder users met someone offline (LeFebvre, 2016). The remaining 20% of users from this research did not meet others because of two reasons: they chose not to meet anyone (10%), or they were unsuccessful in making matches (10%). Participants referred to Tinder as a “meat market,” and as if they were a “kid in a candy store,” much like the results from another study in which participants compared online dating to a “supermarket” or “catalog” (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010, p. 434). Online dating and apps have afforded users with greater potential to meet others because of the number of users registered on these websites and apps (Wiederhold, 2015). While the popularity of the app was lauded, the number of users was another part of the app that added to the game-like nature. Users described entertaining themselves by swiftly swiping for hours

without running out of pictures. Many did not value with whom they made a connection, some just wanted to make any type of connection, so Tinder gave them a wide selection of choices and allowed them to rapidly swipe and attempt to make a connection more quickly than they could offline. Those who made connections through Tinder when other platforms failed benefited from the large number of users and ease of matching. But, the wide number of choices also added to the objectification of users. Because there were so many choices easily available, users did not highly value their attempts to connect interpersonally. If participants did not connect well in person, most felt comfortable ghosting the other user, as they did not feel as though they deserved an explanation. Participants knew there were plenty of other users, so they were eager to try out the next. The large number of users and “kid in the candy store” comparison led users to disregard human feelings and view users as profiles. Lastly, the number of users also allowed for ego boosts. Participants excitedly said they received tons of messages and matched with hundred or thousands of users and never thought that many others were interested in them before using the app. This helped to give users confidence that they likely carried to the offline world.

Concerns About Dating via Tinder

While Tinder functioned as a convenient platform to make a variety of connections, online daters are not becoming more trustworthy of using apps to find offline partners. Beginning with swiping, and throughout the process of matching, users are untrusting of others and made multiple attempts to verify others' identity. Users interacted on multiple platforms (e.g. Tinder chat, text, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram) in order to feel more confident and have more trust in who they would be meeting. As

catfish, bots, and scamming are common words in the digital vernacular, online daters showed they were technologically literate and aware of deception. Other studies found similar results, with online daters being hesitant to connect if a user only had one picture (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). Additionally, about one-third (30.3%) of participants in a study about Grindr stated they were concerned about how others represented themselves online (Corriero & Tong, 2016), with Grindr users also vetting others on the app by searching for their social media accounts (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). If a profile was deemed to be a “real person,” then the user swiped based on photographs and one’s biography. Participants of this dissertation were cognizant of fake profiles, which added to their skepticism about meeting someone in person. Users would assess a profile by looking at the number of photographs and if it was professionally taken. Those with few photographs and pictures that looked very high quality were red flags. In an attempt to verify the users’ identity, participants would “Google them,” or visit their Instagram page if it was linked to their profile. They used interactive, passive, and active strategies to determine the users’ true identity and motives. Users were worried they were going to connect with a catfish and be misled, disappointed, or embarrassed in person. Smith and Anderson (2016) wrote that there is not as much of a stigma nowadays with online dating as there was a decade ago and that it is now a more trustworthy environment. Results from this study did not support that notion as both sexes and people of different ages indicated their hesitation about meeting someone from Tinder. Moreover, a large number of younger users were especially skeptical about meeting someone from an app, a result that is surprising considering 18-22 year olds are likely more connected with technology

and have been since a younger age compared with the older participants. Because of their skepticism, users would meet in public places, such as restaurants or bars.

Besides being concerned about whom they were meeting offline, participants were also skeptical about the app itself after using it. Deleting Tinder was common for users, and while some would re-download the app later, others vowed that they would not use Tinder again to form a relationship. Participants realized the users on the other end might have a Tinder addiction, which hindered their trust. Participants knew others who swiped right on everyone for fun and were worried users might be addicted to the enjoyment they received from playing Tinder as a game. Users were also tentative to continue with a relationship, for fear they would lose the person to another of the hundreds of matches that user had on Tinder. Others said it was not a valid relationship app, but a better app to make casual connections. They found that it was rare to find users looking for committed romantic relationships. This is also likely due to the number of users on the app, which provides temptation and curiosity. Even if users found an interesting match, they may wonder who else is on Tinder that may be better or more attractive. Those not wanting to continue with the app because they were unsuccessful at securing a relationship matched the reasons LeFebvre (2016) found for Tinder users to delete their account. Finally, some participants said they would rather meet people organically, in-person, similar to a study about online dating where the “magic” of face-to-face meetings were obviously not experienced from online connections (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). On the other hand, the “magic” online that is experienced with hyperpersonal communication does not follow to offline experiences, adding to the reason why singles would want to first meet in person instead of finding matches online.

Participants would have a better idea of true chemistry meeting others initially face to face compared to online settings.

Hyperpersonal Experiences

Some of the concerns participants have for using Tinder connects with Walther's idea of hyperpersonal experiences. Results from these interviews provided some support for the hyperpersonal perspective. Users overwhelmingly called their profile pictures accurate, which did not support the visual aspect of selective self-presentation. One reason for this is that users were expecting to meet someone quickly from the app, so they wanted to accurately represent themselves (Corriero & Tong, 2016). However, a few participants categorized their profile pictures as misleading (e.g. taking a picture at a certain angle to appear taller). The few males who admitted to being slightly misleading on Tinder had also described themselves as not the most attractive people and shared their struggles connecting with others in the past. Perception of physical attraction is a variable that contributed to engaging in some form of deception in a profile.

Results were mixed regarding selective self-presentation via the written word. Some participants created messages to sound more appealing, but only when they started to like the other user. Carefully selecting words is indicative of hyperpersonal experiences (Walther, 2007). When senders of CMC want to form relationships, they are motivated to take advantage of the platform's capabilities to make themselves appear most desirable (Walther, 2007). Some participants said they would spend time editing and writing to sound appealing when creating messages, while others said they would just type because they would likely be meeting that person soon, so there was no reason to act differently. Although all users wanting to form a long-term romantic relationship or

casual hook up expected to meet others quickly from the app, those looking to hook up did not craft their messages to sound a certain way. Those looking for a relationship put more effort into creating a persona of themselves that appeared to be very desirable. Users thought their personality was valued more if they were looking to engage in a romantic relationship, but for casual sex relationships placed more emphasis on physical attractiveness.

As stated from Walther's (2007) hyperpersonal perspective, senders have the ability to edit their message and take time to re-read it before sending, thus creating their ideal message. In return, those receiving the message have an ideal idea of the sender in their head and the loop continues with exaggerated thoughts of one another. When respondents described their role as a receiver of information, they over interpreted photographs and others' words. Making quick stereotypes about the users was common. Participants would get an image in their head of the person they were meeting as far as how their voice would sound, and when this did not match in-person, they were surprised. Computer-mediated interactions can lead users to over interpret the information they are given (Walther & Parks, 2002). For instance, if speaking with a masculine looking man, the other user may assume he has a deep voice, just based on the information that is available. With CMC and hyperpersonal occurrences, communicators fill in the information they do not have with stereotypical and ideal impressions of the other. This extends to interpretations of users' hobbies from their photographs. Tinder users would make snap decisions whether they had similar interests and hobbies with another user based on what that person was doing in their photograph. For example, someone shown hiking was deemed to be adventurous. In reality, they may have hiked

only once with friends, but used it as a profile picture because they thought others would find it to be intriguing. How users de-code others' profiles has an impact on the success of their in-person meeting.

Because of the platform, editing of messages, and idealization of a partner from reading into a written message, many users experienced hyperpersonal communication and were disappointed when they met their match in person. Their experiences were hyperpersonal in the sense that their communication reached a level that could not be achieved in a paralleled face-to-face situation in the same amount of time. Overall, men were shorter and women were heavier in-person compared to their profiles. Users may have tried to conform to typical social stereotypes where height is considered a more masculine quality and women are expected to be thin, which is why they twisted their information online. Women were more accepting of physical differences in person, but men who were looking for a physical relationship tended to end the connection when the person's physical appearance did not match their expectations based on that person's profile. After being surprised by someone's appearance, many participants said they revisited the other's profile and learned from the deception. Some participants said they realized the person had no photographs next to anyone and so they assumed they were a certain height. As for personality, many participants were surprised by how shy and awkward daters were in person, but how exciting the conversation was online.

Daters participated in modality switching where the in-person conversation was bland, but the conversation online was interesting. This led them to feel disappointed and frustrated with the app. Tinder users who experienced less than desirable face-to-face communication, yet exciting communication online, would end their connection because

their ultimate goal was to sustain an offline relationship with people with whom they could have an effective conversation. However, just as participants were aware of catfishing and deception online, some participants said it was impossible to gauge a user's personality through short online chats. Those participants said they knew of the user's hobbies and interests, but had no expectation of the user's personality until they met in person. Taking this approach could lead to less disappointment as there is not an idealized image of the other going into the meeting. This was especially true for communicators before a hook up as the discussions lasted for a mere few hours or days before meeting. Hyperpersonal communication occurs when time is available, and time was short with hook ups, so communication was more impersonal, as supported by the hyperpersonal perspective. This adds to previous information discovered from this dissertation where users demonstrated technological literacy. Online daters are becoming aware of deception online and other users' ability to edit their messages to sound more attractive, so many do not form an opinion of other users' personality until they actually meet offline. As users become more aware of deception and of others' ability to edit and create their ideal message, hyperpersonal experiences are likely going to decrease.

Impact on Ego

While some users underwent hyperpersonal experiences from using Tinder, they also experienced a decrease or increase in self-esteem. Users noted the design of Tinder helped them to protect their ego. Participants said the matching and messaging restrictions helped them feel confident, as they were not notified if someone did not match them back. Participants liked knowing someone else was available and interested if they matched, which was different than face-to-face scenarios. However, rejection was

still a concern. Hesitation occurred when users pondered whether a match was truly a conscious match or if the other swiped right on everyone, thus degrading the meaning of a match. Users were then hesitant about messaging others because they were unsure if the other was genuinely interested. This finding connects to the “kid in the candy store” description of Tinder and the description of Tinder being a game. Again, it was fun for users to swipe through profiles for hours, but in turn these actions led to others’ taking more caution before attempting to initiate a serious interpersonal connection. Participants were quick to protect their own ego. They did not want to experience embarrassment or decreased self-confidence if they messaged a match who actually swiped right on everyone, and therefore was not interested in chatting. While it is assumed that initiating conversation online is easier than face-to-face situations, users countered this argument as they introduced the thought of users swiping right on all profiles, not just on ones they were interested in. Turning to a study with conflicting results, communicators developing relationships via Facebook had enjoyed the platform in regards to their ego because they felt less of a bruise and less rejection if they were messaging over the platform because of the casual nature (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013). The previous authors determined that this was especially true during the Initiation and Experimenting stages of developing a relationship through Facebook (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013). This outlook did not hold true for Tinder as users were hesitant about messaging another and many said they never initiated communication. One reason for this result is that Tinder is designed for people to make romantic and sexual connections, so there is more pressure to receive a positive response, whereas Facebook is not generally viewed as a place people go to start a relationship. It should be noted though that Tinder is not necessarily the cause of

users' apprehension. They likely experience confidence issues in many situations, but in this case, Tinder brings out those feelings of concern.

As users tried to protect their ego, there were still many cases of ego bruising. Tinder brought out self-esteem issues, unlike a study on online dating, where only two of the 34 participants felt negative impacts to their self-image (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). One reason participants explained Tinder affected them negatively is the heavy focus on physical appearance. Unlike traditional dating websites that also include an in-depth biography and personality portion, Tinder puts utmost importance on photographs. Users described Tinder as a visual platform and many said they swiped based on the picture, not as much on the written portion. Some participants said they would not swipe on attractive users or shirtless pictures because they were afraid they would not get a match back. Some were intimidated by others' photographs and felt the other person would never like them back, so they did not even try to match. Having few matches and few messages led to decreased self-esteem, as did matching or receiving a message from someone who was not attractive. Having no response to a message also negatively impacted one's ego, as did ghosting. Those interviewed said it was reasonable to ghost someone after a first date, however, those who were ghosted spent time pondering why their connection ended, especially when they believed the in-person meeting went well. Interviewees were ghosted after a first date, but also after hooking up. A female described being ghosted by the man she lost her virginity to who she had met from Tinder. While she eventually got past these feelings, she did expect a reason from the other person as to why he did not want to see her anymore. Those who were ghosted from dates felt the same way. Ghosting is important to understand because it can leave

the ghostee with feelings of frustration and concerns as to what they did wrong. They often ruminate over what they said and how they acted and look for a reason as to what they did wrong, though can never confirm it because the other person does not speak to them again. Ghosting can be connected with objectifying users online. Tinder users meeting in-person did not feel an obligation to protect the other's feelings by giving them a reason why they could not continue. Implications for using Tinder as a "kid in a candy store," and finding it comparable to a game were present in this finding. Because there are so many Tinder users and they are sometimes viewed as a profile instead of a person, many users find it easy to disconnect by ghosting. Participants did not feel emotionally involved after one meeting and because of that felt it was acceptable to ghost their date. This act likely left their date feeling confused and caused them to experience a decrease in self-esteem. Although this dissertation did not compare relationships that begin online versus offline, it would be interesting to explore whether ghosting is more acceptable to those meeting from an app versus those who met via mutual friends to determine if the app allows users to feel more comfortable separating from someone in an arguably hurtful manner.

Although users, especially men, received bruises to their ego while using Tinder, another result showed that men and women also received a boost in confidence by engaging on Tinder. Similarly, Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs (2010) found that many women in particular felt an ego boost from online dating. This dissertation found support for third person effects as participants stated they thought women received a boost to their self-esteem from using the app and that was the reason why many females downloaded the app. Mutz (1989) wrote that third person effects transpire when people believe the

media, communication, or a message has more of an impact on other people than themselves. While many male and female participants said they thought women used the app to increase their self-confidence, participants did not say the same about themselves when asked why they used the app. However, the idea of feeling good about themselves did come about in many interviews. Being notified of receiving a message, making an abundance of matches, and receiving compliments were all ways in which participants felt an ego boost from using Tinder. Clearly the app can trigger negative feelings with users, but also allowed them to gain confidence about themselves, especially regarding their physical appeal.

Sex Differences

Sex differences were not only present with Tinder's impact on the ego, they were apparent throughout the results. Straight female users were on the receiving end of messages, especially complimentary ones, and were more often the ones being pursued. This placed more burden and expectation for heterosexual males to message females and continue the conversation, at least in the U.S. culture. This perpetuated the traditional gender roles of developing a relationship. The difference came when U.S. males interacted on Tinder in other countries. Because they looked exotic to natives of other countries such as China and South America, straight males had an easier time making matches and conversing with women outside of the U.S.

Younger females were hesitant to use the app to meet people or admit that they were using it to eventually hook up. Older men were more forthright in saying they were on the app to engage in casual sex, which follows traditional gender stereotypes. Several females did engage in casual sex via Tinder, but did not state that as their goal for using

the app, whereas several men shared that as their goal without hesitation. A few male participants shared that while swiping on Tinder they would notice females' profiles that said, "not looking to hook up," but they shared that once they matched with them, the female did engage in casual sex. While it is becoming more accepted for women to have casual sex with men, it is generally more socially acceptable for men to engage in casual sex. For this reason, women are overall still hesitant to bluntly communicate (either visually or written) that they are looking for a casual sex partner and are still worried about the reputation they will gain. As a result, females mostly described their pictures as being classy without much cleavage because they did not want to give the impression that they were slutty and looking for a hook up. Males mentioned females' clothes and actions as being slutty if they had little clothes on or were drinking. Clearly, these stereotypes are still recognized and society has not made much advances in terms of gender equality and casual sex, at least as is indicated from these interviews.

Practical Application

Beyond the theoretical implications for studying relational development and termination are the practical applications for both Tinder and its users. While users connect to Tinder with a Facebook account, catfish and bots are still lurking on the app, making users hesitant about moving forward with a match and ultimately reaching their relational goals. Tinder may consider other ways of verifying user identities by allowing users to flag bots and catfish as fake accounts or "spam," thus alerting other users not to be tricked by their fabricated profiles.

In regards to Tinder users, pragmatic information can be taken from these results for effective ways to build a profile, understanding what profile photographs

communicate, and learning about successful initiation strategies which help users obtain their objectives for signing on to the app. Understanding how to engage in communication that will lead to responses, while still accurately presenting one's self can help users reach their intended goals and protect their ego. Other information pertinent to users is the vetting process. Participants described stories where they found themselves in uncomfortable situations from Tinder. Tinder users should be aware of these situations and avoid them to protect their own safety.

Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation sampled 18 to 40-year-old gay and straight Tinder users who have interacted on the app in multiple countries and across the U.S. to learn about their experiences forming and terminating romantic, platonic, and casually sexually relationships on the app. While notable contributions both practical and theoretical emerged from the data, it is not without its limitations. These limitations as well as ideas for future research are presented next.

Limitations

First, while Tinder users spanned from 18 years of age to 40 years, it would be beneficial to also sample those over 40 years to see if age differences emerge with communication at different stages in the relationship. Mostly younger women and older men volunteered for this study, so gaining an even distribution of age and sex should also be explored. Within demographics, sexual orientation should also be expanded, as this study featured mostly straight users. This dissertation sampled one questioning female and five gay men, but more people of different sexual orientations should be interviewed

to determine any notable differences in communication and relationship escalation and de-escalation.

Second, participants recalled their past Tinder experiences, some of which happened a few years ago. Some had a hard time remembering specific conversations or the timeline between when they initiated communication and when they met. However, others recalled more recent experiences and had their profile in front of them to describe their profile pictures and biography accurately. In the future it would be helpful to have users talk about recent experiences and describe their exact profile instead of recall what they think their profile included.

Third, the maintenance portion of the stages of a relationship was not fully explored and could warrant a separate individual study. Individuals spoke of vague ways in which they maintained their relationship, but they were not prompted with specific questions about maintenance that may have led to more developed answers.

Fourth, participants could have answered questions in a socially desirable manner. Although most of the interviews occurred over the phone, there is still reason to think some participants may not have been completely truthful. Participants overwhelmingly said their photographs on their Tinder profile were accurate; however, participants also said many users they met looked different from their respective profiles. Users from another study regarding online dating also stated their photographs were accurate; however, part of the study included judges who determined whether their photograph was accurate, and many found that photographs were not accurate, especially the female participants who tended to use photographs from when they were younger (Hancock & Toma, 2009). As users from this dissertation did not state they misrepresented

themselves, their photographs were not compared to their present day physical nature. Users may subconsciously think their photographs were accurate, but others may not agree. Or, participants did not want to admit their photographs were altered or misleading, as it is not socially desirable. While there was not much support for users to selectively self-present their photographs in this dissertation, assessing this in the future by looking at profile pictures on Tinder and a current photograph from the user might shed more light on visual selective self-presentation.

Future Research

Relational communication's intersection with CMC, especially with LBDAs, is a ripe area for future research. First, as one of the only, if not the only study to understand the full cycle of a relationship from Tinder, future research should continue to delve deeply into the communication during stages of escalation, maintenance, and de-escalation to determine how the traditional models of relationships should be altered. Notably, the stages that occur before communication have strong implications for the future of the relationship and should be further explored as well as the initiation stages that are so fragile to the continuation of a relationship. Additionally, ghosting should be further investigated as this act can negatively affect users and deter them from continuing to pursue their goals through LBDAs.

Second, although this dissertation sampled Tinder users beyond traditional college age, gathering a sample of users 40+ years, men and women, and of all kinds of sexual orientation should be explored to determine age, sex, and sexual orientation differences. From this study men went through more bruises to the ego, women received more messages, straight men wanted to hook up more than secure a relationship, and most gay

men used Tinder for a relationship, not to hook up. Gender differences were prevalent throughout the relationship formation process. Continuing to explore these differences and implications should be included in future studies as to understand men and women's experiences considering their age and sexual orientation.

Third, along with a wider sample, different methods should be used to approach Tinder data collection. Longitudinal studies would shed light on how users modify their profile and experience successes or failures over time. As for participants, dyads would be a useful unit of analysis. Hearing both sides of communication helps in understanding why some users were ghosted or why relationships continued based on the communication. To collect data, researchers should examine actual Tinder profiles and communication on the platform. Viewing users' profiles and collecting visual and biographical data would be helpful in assessing the effectiveness of the communication, how users decode the visual and written information, and if the users are choosing to selectively self-present themselves.

Fourth, because ego was a major theme that came forth during these interviews, learning more about how online daters experience a decrease in self-esteem can provide important results about how users are affected by online dating. Romantic jealousy and one's own physical attraction, or perception thereof, can be included in future studies. As participants said it was difficult to trust users online, do couples forming relationships from Tinder experience romantic jealousy because of the number of choices users have? Does physical appearance influence how users experience a decrease in self-esteem? These questions and more should be considered in future research.

Finally, the stages of a relationship should be applied to other platforms to determine if modifications to the relational stage model would also benefit other platforms. This dissertation researched Tinder because of its unique design and use and because it is currently the most popular LBDA. Many users in this study also used other apps that warrant focus because of their unique characteristics. Several straight men and women from this study mentioned Bumble as another LBDA they frequently use. What distinguishes Bumble from Tinder is the control women have over initial messages. Once a match is made, only female users can begin a conversation. This changes the traditional gender roles and may have effects on initial communication and self-esteem, making it worthwhile to investigate.

Conclusion

Tinder is a unique LBDA that has served the purposes of entertainment and making connections for users. Relationships that develop from Tinder have similarities but also differences with the traditional model of relationship escalation and de-escalation. Some users underwent hyperpersonal experiences, while others did not over interpret or over idealize information communicated by other users on Tinder, thus creating a potential shift in technologically mediated competence and how users understand the workings of the platform juxtaposed with reality. The complete experience of using Tinder brought out feelings of decreased self-esteem, but also boosted self-worth. Because Tinder can assist others in attaining romantic love or sexual connections, it is an important platform to study in terms of how users are communicating and developing successful relations over this unique app.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Email or Social Media Message

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania who is conducting a dissertation under the guidance of my advisor, Dr. Vicky Ortiz, on understanding romantic relationship development on Tinder. Specifically, we are interested in speaking to people who are at least 18 years of age and who have used Tinder within the past year to communicate with others and potentially form romantic relationships. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

You can choose to participate in an in-depth individual interview that would last between 45 and 90 minutes. You will be asked about your experience using the location-based dating app, Tinder. All of this information will be audio recorded and later transcribed. That being said, all materials will be free of any identifying evidence and destroyed after the project is over. The interview can take place in a private room in a quiet place (library or conference room), through the telephone or via Skype.

If you are interested in educating me about your experience on Tinder, please contact Rhiannon Kallis at dtmt@iup.edu or arrange a meeting and discuss any questions you may have.

Your participation means a lot! Thank you.

Rhiannon Kallis

Doctoral Candidate

Communications Media and Instructional Technology

Appendix B

Research Participant Information

Swipe Left or Right, But What Happens for the Rest of the Night? A Qualitative Approach to Understanding the Life Cycle of Romantic Relationships on Tinder

Principal Investigator: Rhiannon Kallis, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Vicky Ortiz, PhD

Communications Media Department

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Purpose of Research

This project seeks to explore Tinder users' experiences with romantic relationships. The researcher is interested in studying users' communication and overall experiences with the dating app.

Specific Procedures to be Used

If you are willing to participate in this research project, you will be interviewed in person, on the phone, or through Skype about your experiences using Tinder to find romantic relationships. Questions will ask about how you have interacted with others and communicated on Tinder, romantic experiences you have had with others on Tinder online and offline, and your overall experience with the dating app. You may choose to skip any questions that could lead you to feeling uncomfortable.

Duration of Participation

Your participation will consist of one interview, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. You can withdraw participation by leaving the interview and/or saying you would like to stop at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed and will not be used. If you choose to withdraw your data at a later date, you may contact the researcher.

Risks to the Individual

Risks are very minimal (no more than everyday activities). Additionally, the researchers will take every reasonable precaution to ensure your privacy.

Benefits to the Individual or Others

Participants in this study will have the opportunity to share their experience of using Tinder. Not only will this enlighten the researcher, but it also may serve to further the literature on romantic relationship formation and development, and therefore inform other researchers and potentially society on the experiences of dating on Tinder.

Confidentiality

The researcher will use pseudonyms in all of the interview transcripts and notes taken during interviews. Electronic data collected (audio recordings, transcripts) and hard copies of items such as interview notes and written consent forms will be kept on the primary investigator's password-protected computer and in a locked cabinet in the interviewer's home that only she has access to, respectively. All data will be kept for three years and then will be destroyed after those three years have expired.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

You do not have to participate in this research project. You can withdraw participation by leaving the interview and/or saying you would like to stop at any time.

Contact Information

Rhiannon Kallis is a doctoral candidate conducting research under the guidance of Dr. Vicky Ortiz, PhD in the Department of Communications Media at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. You are welcome to contact them at the following locations:

Rhiannon Kallis

Email: dtmt@iup.edu

Department phone: 724-357-2492

Dr. Vicky Ortiz

Email: vortiz@iup.edu

Office Phone: 724-357-3781

By providing my signature, I am giving my consent to participate in this study:

Name _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. Tell about the purpose of the interview.
2. Tell me about yourself. What is your age? Where are you from? What are you studying? Doing for a living?
3. Tell me about your current or past romantic relationships. Are you in a relationship? Dating?
4. How would you explain Tinder to someone who has never used it? How did you hear about it?
5. What made you choose to use it? When did you start using it?
6. Have you used any other dating apps or websites? Which ones? Why did you choose them?
7. What was your main objective for using Tinder? (Date? Secure partner? Casual hook up?) Did you meet that objective? Are you currently using Tinder?
8. Tell me about your use of Tinder. Can you describe your profile? Photos? Bio? What do you take into account when choosing photos and a bio of yourself?
9. How often would or do you use it? Would you use it in your main geographic area or more so when you visited a new town?
10. What made you decide to swipe left or right? Roughly how many matches have you had? Roughly how many of those did you decide to communicate with? What made you want to communicate with them?
11. Tell me about the initial communication. Did you initiate conversations or wait until others did? What did you say first? What did he/she say first? How did the conversations flow? What do you take into account when creating a message to someone? What was the content of the conversations?
12. In-person: How many people have you met in person? When did you decide to meet in person (after how much communication)? Why? Where did you meet? How did you feel? Did he or she meet your expectations? Overall how was the in-person meeting or date?
13. After the meeting/date: After meeting in person did communication continue? Through which medium? Did you want the communication to continue? Did she or he contact you or did you contact him or her? Did you go on a second date? Why or why not?

14. How did you maintain the relationship? Did you decide to date exclusively? Why or why not?
15. If the romantic relationship did not continue, tell me about how it dissolved? What happened?
16. Overall, how would you describe your experience dating on Tinder? What are the pros and cons? Will you continue to use it? For how long? Why?
17. Wrap up: express appreciation (thank you for taking the time to have this conversation with me...)