IMAGINE ME AND YOU:

A MIXED METHODS INVESTIGATION OF

IMAGINED INTERACTIONS IN ONLINE DATING

by

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ABSTRACT

The research at-hand examines fundamental aspects of relational communication in online computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels. Specifically, the realm of online dating is investigated through the lens of imagined interactions (IIs) to create pathways for research, and better understanding of the cognitive strategies people utilize during intimate CMC encounters. An exploratory sequential mixed methods design utilized in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews (n = 12) to inform the creation of a quantitative online survey (n = 220) that statistically investigated the online dating process. Five major themes (honesty, trust, stigma, overall experience, and imagined interactions) resulted from the qualitative thematic analysis; these themes served as the basis by which counterpart factors were created in the quantitative scales. The findings from the quantitative analyses indicate that frequency and retroactivity, as characteristics of online IIs, and self-understanding, relational maintenance, catharsis, and compensation as interpersonal functions of IIs, are significantly related to trust, stigma, and the overall experience users associate with online dating.
DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather and stepmother, Bill and Babs Carpenter. You both were fabulous examples of how to make the most of relationships during our limited time on earth.

Chuckles or you’ll buckle! – Babs

Make us ever-mindful of the needs of others – Bill
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>Cronbach’s index of internal consistency</td>
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<td>β</td>
<td>Beta</td>
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<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>Degrees of freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mean square regression divided by mean square residual</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>μ</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Number in a subsample</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Total number in a sample</td>
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<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme or more extreme than the observed value</td>
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<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>Pearson product–moment correlation</td>
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<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research question</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient value divided by standard error</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would never have become a reality without the love and support from my family and friends, or the tutelage and wisdom passed down to me from key colleagues and mentors. First, I want to thank my wonderful wife for continually reminding me to keep my focus on the end-goal, and showing me that patience and gentleness can outweigh any bad mood or deadline the research process presents. Next, my Mother, Father, and ‘Grandmommy’ must be recognized for their never-ending encouragement; they made me believe that I could be whatever I chose, and now, here I am. I should similarly thank my sister for always reaching for the moon; she has taught me that no dream is too big. Also, my dear, sweet brother Numsie has always provided the bar for which I strive to live up to – I hope that I may one day become as half as honorable of the man that he is. All of my friends that ever asked about my research, or helped me forget about it for a short while – I just want to thank you for thinking of me.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As digital interaction comprises much more of our everyday communication, it is now more important than ever to better understand how people utilize technology to facilitate interpersonal interactions. The first milestone in today’s internet dating culture can be traced back to 1995 with the launch of the Match.com – the most popular dating website currently on the market with 1.7 million subscribers (Bercovici, 2014; Kaufflin, 2011). A full 20 years have passed since the inaugural site made its mark on CMC relationships in the online dating world, and more than 2,500 competing sites are estimated to have sprung up into operation over that time in the United States alone (Zwilling, 2013). Online dating is becoming increasingly more acceptable and popular; the majority of all Americans (59%) believe that online dating is no longer taboo, and one out of every five 25 to 34 year olds have experience with online dating technology (Smith & Anderson, 2015). The online dating domain manifests fundamental face-to-face (F2F) relational needs, desires, and goals, but they are met with increasingly new strategies and methods as technology allows (Walther et al., 2015). Essential aspects of relational communication must be continually examined and adapted to make way for constant technological advancement. Self-expression and social involvement through the use of text, images, videos, music, and avatars requires committed user involvement, which in turn, can foster meaningful relationships that resemble traditional F2F interpersonal relations (Bailenson, 2004). Walther (1996) first posited that it is even possible for significant online relationships to
achieve higher levels of affection than similar F2F relationships. The anonymity in CMC nonverbal channels and selective self-presentation can create incomplete profiles, and users’ active imaginations make up the difference and stimulate ideal images of the other (Hian et al., 2006; Hu et al., 2006; Walther, 1996; Walther et al., 2015).

Resembling much of the same dynamics found in online dating apps and sites, social networking sites such as Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Facebook have also become attractive avenues for people to express themselves and interact with others in comparison to traditional F2F communication. Geographical distances and time constraints, as well as social anxieties can be de-emphasized with technology (Walther et al., 2015; Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Walther, 1996; Kiesler, 1984), and the multitude of channels available creates countless possibilities for human interaction. In addition to social media and networking, media technology has also fundamentally altered the ways in which people can experience intimate relationships as well (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Applications and sites such as Tinder™ have eliminated the process of courtship altogether – simply swipe your finger to the right if you are interested in possible intimate communication/interaction. In an online survey, Gatter & Hodkinson (2016), found that Tinder™ users tend to be significantly younger than traditional online dating service members/subscribers. This significantly younger crowd is commonly referred to as millennials, or the millennial generation. Millennials, often thought of as being born between 1981 – 1997, are the largest represented generation alive today (Fry, 2016). Their noteworthy differences from previous generations (X, baby boomers, etc.) include their heavy immersion in mobile devices and other advanced digital technologies, as well as their rich ethnic diversity, and willingness to share with their personal networks (Rainie & Perrin, 2016; Taylor, 2014).

The current project is concerned with the way that young people (millennials) form and
sustain bonds and relationships over online dating websites and mobile applications aimed at intimacy and companionship—although meaningful relationships can be formed on social media apps and sites, those sites and apps with the specific purpose of romantic involvement are under scrutiny. Specifically, this study seeks to better understand the role imagination work plays during individuals’ experiences associated with online dating. By using one’s own thoughts and perceptions to make up for missing information, prospective partners are imagining how the other feels, thinks, responds, and behaves. The process of using imagination to substitute or reinforce interpersonal interaction with others has been researched from a social cognitive perspective, known as imagined interactions (IIs) (Honeycutt, 1988; Honeycutt et al., 2015). Simply put, imagined interactions are a type of social cognition wherein a person mentally experiences encounters with others before or after they actually happen—if they ever do (Honeycutt et al., 1988). IIs serve as a useful tool for investigating the interpersonal dynamics of online dating that are associated with the lack of informational cues provided by prospective partners.

The present study mixes qualitative and quantitative methods in an exploratory sequential design to better understand the dynamics of how intimate relationships are created through mediated communication, and the un/intended psychological and behavioral effects from using such media for romantic engagement. Imagined interactions are employed as an interpersonal construct to explain the nature of online dating behaviors and attitudes during the distance and downtime between conversational partners on the internet. Utilizing this theoretical construct provides the first rigorous examination of IIs in an online context, and provides a new lens for investigating the inherent use of imagination in computer mediated relationships. This project is also an attempt at establishing a new psychometric scale for better understanding the online
dating experience. The exploratory sequential design first features the qualitative strand of research methods in the in-depth interviews, which informs the proceeding quantitative instrument. Since relatively little is known about the application of IIs to mediated contexts, much less online dating, an exploration of the data from multiple perspectives proves more useful than a declaration from one. Therefore, the individual experiences of the participants in the interviews will be used to measure the general experiences of everyone who participates in the online survey. The following chapters illustrate how the existing computer mediated communication research begs for the pairing with imagined interactions, and vice-versa.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer mediated communication (CMC) is a term used to describe any kind of communication facilitated through the use of computers such as email, message boards, instant messaging, etc. (Hian et al 2004; Tidwell & Walther 2002; Walther, 1996; Kiesler et al., 1984). Although research into computer-mediated relationships goes back to the development of ARPANET, the 1980s and 90s saw more communication technologies surge, and a shift in focus by researchers to investigate the theoretical and practical applications of the new media (Kiesler et al., 1984; Siegel et al., 1986; Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Lea & Spears, 1991; Walther, 1995). Earlier studies tended to focus on computers as a means of streamlining work-related tasks, but work shifted to incorporate the social aspects of group participation and suggested an inherent anonymity in CMC, lack of cues, and temporal uncertainty (Kiesler et al., 1984). These social aspects and disinhibiting factors were seen to promote unreserved and inflammatory behavior, as well as increased self-disclosure (Siegel et al., 1986; Lea & Spears, 1991). Walther (1995), still focusing on work-centered groups, provided support for CMC as a positive tool for relational communication and social interaction in organizational settings. Cooper & Sportolari (1997) pointed out that many people pursue intimate relationships online because of the freedom it allows users in keeping their complete identity anonymous:

{Computer-Mediated Relating} CMR provides sufficient distance to make it safer for people who may be restrained in FTF encounters to reveal more than they normally would… The safety and space available for interpersonal interactions on the {Inter}Net
allows people a chance to experiment with putting normally inhibited parts of themselves forward” (p. 5 – 6).

The anonymity inherent to CMC is an attractive feature that allows for freedom of expression of personal attributes that might be sensitive or difficult to share in traditional F2F situations.

Since the late 1990s, virtual environments and other social software technologies have sprouted up in many different facets of daily life in an Internet movement known as Web 2.0 (Thorne, 2008; Alexander, 2006). Web 2.0 is built upon the idea of collaborative and user-generated content in platforms such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, online gaming, and social media (Thorne, 2008). The point of these technologies is social interaction; working collaboratively on wiki pages, creating public content in podcasts or blogs, and interacting with other users in virtual environments via online gaming or social media are all predicated on human interaction and can be carried out on multiple mediums. Walther et al. (2015) notes the evolution of the field, “CMC today is a whirlwind of applications and tools that operate on our desktops, laptops, and hand-held devices. Researchers are beginning to recognize that contemporary social interactions are not conducted through one medium or another but often through a variety of channels” (p. 18). As the field catches up to the multichannel reality of online social interactions, the dating industry paves the way for future research opportunities with its attention to the blending of F2F and CMC for a constantly connected experience. In an interview with Forbes Magazine in February 2014, Match.com CEO, Max Yagan, stated that online dating has moved through three phases in its brief existence; the first phase was categorized by the ability to search a catalog of other prospective daters, the second phase consisted of the addition of computer programs to assist in matchmaking by analyzing personal information and voluntary survey information, and the third and current phase is highlighted by users’ desire to move from online CMC interactions toward “offline” F2F encounters (Bercovici, 2014).
Whether participating with a future F2F encounter in mind or not, people utilize dating technology for a variety of purposes, with goals ranging from casual encounters to meeting a suitable husband or wife (Gibbs et al., 2006). Dating apps and sites each have their own platform unique to the technology, but the overarching goal of each is to facilitate intimate interpersonal relations on some level. The difference in services offered by each site dictates the types of social interaction typically exercised by its respective users. According to The Official Apple App Store (June, 2016), 8 of the top 150 grossing social networking apps available in the Apple Store are designed for online dating (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>RATING</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tinder</td>
<td>4 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>3 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Zoosk</td>
<td>3.5 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>3.5 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>OkCupid</td>
<td>4 / 5 Stars</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
<td>1.5 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>$.99</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Badoo</td>
<td>4.5 / 5 Stars</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>SCRUFF</td>
<td>4 / 5 Stars</td>
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Table 1

Most of the sites mentioned allow for long and short-term relationships to take place, but Tinder and Grindr insist on more of a relationship predicated on the expectation of future F2F sexual interaction. Grindr is an app for homosexual men to meet for casual relations, and the only dating app in the top 150 that requires a fee. Tinder was the highest grossing dating app with a 4-star rating, and as previously mentioned, reduces the initiation phase of dating down to
“swiping” your finger right in approval of the picture that has been presented.

Hyperpersonal CMC.

Walther (1996; et al., 2015) argues that CMC can foster relationships that are interpersonal, impersonal, and even hyperpersonal. He claims that CMC was originally thought to have a limiting effect on the potential of interpersonal communication because of the lack of nonverbal behaviors and actions associated with F2F communication, however the formation and existence of hyper and interpersonal communication bonds is possible. Hyperpersonal communication refers to the concept that during some interpersonal interactions, depth of information is shared at a faster rate than normal and relational milestones are met much quicker than F2F interactions. F2F interpersonal relations being replicable in online environments is a testimony to the advancing technology (Walther, 1996). The model includes four key aspects in senders, receivers, channel, and feedback that are synchronized to make the hyper-relations possible. Senders are afforded the ability of strategic self-presentation and craft more precise messages in the asynchronous nature of most online communications, so whether true or not, they are portraying their ideal self by only providing information they deem profitable to their relational goals (Walther et al., 2015). Receivers typically lack the required information from senders to make a solid judgment of character or attraction, so they use their own opinions of the little that they do know, along with their imagination to complete their assessment of the sender or message (Hian et al., 2006; Walther et al., 2015; Walther, 1996)

The channel is the means through which communication is carried out over the CMC system, and typically involves aspects of the message being sent as well. Within most CMC systems, senders have the opportunity to devote much time, energy, and cognitive resources to the formation and amendment of a message before it is finally transmitted to a receiver (Walther
et al., 2015). For example, creating a dating profile on an app or website may include several style and content revisions before ever being published for browsing by other users. The final aspect of the hyperpersonal model is feedback given by the receiver. When receivers come into contact with messages filled with self-hyperbole from senders, they typically respond with feedback that acknowledges and reinforces the exaggerated character originally presented to them (Walther, 1996; Walther et al., 2015). As more messages are exchanged, the cycle continues and inflated opinions of both the sender and receiver manifest in the respective other.

According to Burgoon & Hale (1988), the interpretation of an encounter as positive or negative is based on widely held social norms; however, when multiple meanings can be drawn from an action, more positive valence is assigned to high reward communicators, and more negative valence is assigned to low reward communicators. Communicator reward valence can be affected by the character given off by the pictures and text presented on the dating profiles, such that a very attractive, wealthy male may have higher reward value than an average-looking middle-class male. Anderson & Emmers-Sommer (2006) present early perspectives on CMC as impersonal and restrictive when discussing interpersonal communication, but their research and others’ has shown that it can be beneficial to the formation and sustainability of meaningful, close, personal relationships (Berkos, 2010; Cummings et al., 2002; Hu et al., 2004; Mesch & Talmund, 2006; Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

Intimacy Online.

The extant research on Internet communication is still in its infancy compared to traditional disciplines; furthermore, investigation into romantic involvement on dating platforms is even more underdeveloped. Many studies have focused on the online self that users present when they create personal profiles on dating sites (Gibbs et al., 2006; Toma et al., 2008;
Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), and others have investigated who actually participates, and for what purpose (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011; Baker, 2002; Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Henningsen et al., 2011; Young et al., 2000). A seemingly endless impersonal/interpersonal conflict within the confines of computer mediated communication rages on because support for each perspective persists (Robinson & Turner, 2003; Wright, 2012). Where it was once popular practice to label technology as limiting human relationships, it has now been suggested that the anonymity associated with CMC actually leads to the sharing and revealing of more personal information at a faster rate than F2F because the immediate consequence is much less severe without physically being present (Walther, 1996; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Anderson & Emmers-Sommer; Hian et al., 2006). For example, going out to meet someone could include maintaining your personal hygiene and appearance in a boisterous public setting, in addition to trying to participate in stimulating conversation; however, a person can completely manipulate the persona/image and message they display by texting for a bit and then sending a few pictures/videos over an application such as snapchat. The asynchronous communication inherent in CMC allows for participants to think through their communication longer, creating much more instrumental messages (Hian et al., 2004; Tidwell & Walther 2002; Walther, 1996; Kiesler et al., 1984).

For the research at-hand, intimacy can be understood as, “…a kind of closeness and reciprocity that is valued in personal relationships,” (Hian et al., 2004). The simplicity and scope of this definition does not specify whether F2F or via mediated channels, and allows for all of the nontraditional displays of intimacy that might manifest during online communication. Intimacy has been shown to be a sign of relational satisfaction in CMC and F2F relationships (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Cummings et al., 2000; Baker, 2002; Gibbs et al., 2006; Mesch & Talmud, 2006). Honeycutt and Keaton (2012) clarify the concept of relationship satisfaction as, “…an
individual’s general perception of the quality of his or her romantic association with a significant other” (p. 5). Anderson & Emmers-Sommer (2006), posited that intimacy is highly associated with trust in online relationships, and both can predict relational satisfaction; partners develop trust by beginning to share more personal information, and in turn, feelings of intimacy are cultivated. In addition to being a predictor of relationship satisfaction, lack of intimacy has been linked to psychological distress and insecure attachment (Pielage et al., 2005). Intimate relationships sustained by online channels are dependent upon meaningful interactions between users if any significant bond is to endure.

Relational Maintenance/Development.

Another popular strand of dating research interests itself in the role that computer-mediated communication can play in relational maintenance through new means of technology. Hu et al. (2006) found that increased frequency of text messaging in the form of instant messages increases intimacy. The content of CMC between users has been shown to indicate the strength of the bond such that the sharing of more personal information leads to stronger feelings (Mesch & Talmud, 2006). Baker (2002) suggested that relationships that begin in CMC and move to F2F encounters can be strengthened by a prolonged period of getting acquainted online. Additionally, Gibbs et al. (2006) proposed that the anticipation of a future F2F encounter as a goal for CMC relating can generate more truthful interactions between users. Their findings have shown that honesty is a key factor in determining the perceived success of self-presentation in online profiles (Gibbs et al., 2006). People believe that their profiles are more likely to garner them a date or conversation when they provide truthful information. Users prefer honest self-presentation even if deceptive tactics are available as a substitute to the truth (Toma et al., 2008).

No matter the app or website used, Anderson & Emmers-Sommer (2006) state that
relational satisfaction in CMC can be explained by the presence of intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction. In an early attempt to explain relationship formation and satisfaction in computer-mediated settings, Cooper and Sportolari (1997) discuss assumptions about the differences between F2F and CMC interactions. They note that most intimate relationships formed in society’s “real world” develop out of partners’ physical attraction for each other. They (1997) also suggested that video cameras and related technology would evolve to include the presentation of self in CMC, but ultimately F2F formed bonds are stronger because of the multiple nonverbal cues afforded to a physical encounter. Similar research also suggests that CMC formed relationships are deprived of such relational cues, and the nature of asynchronously communicating diminishes the quality and rate of feedback, as well as the possibilities for explaining behaviors and reducing uncertainty (Lea & Spears, 1995; Hu et al., 2004). This perspective focuses on the differences or shortcomings of computer mediated communication as the main reason intimacy cannot be achieved. Because CMC traditionally lacks the attraction and nonverbal cues inherent in physical interactions, scholars (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Lea & Spears, 1995; Hu et al., 2004) argue that it is impossible to fortify relationships that are as intimate/close as F2F.

Quite contrary to the perspective that CMC lacks vital cues, is the idea that computer mediated communication can produce equal and sometimes higher levels of intimacy and liking than F2F encounters, in hyperpersonal communication (Hian et al., 2006; Walther, 1996). Walther (1996) argues that CMC is capable of producing intimate personal relationships regardless of nonverbal and social cues, because people adapt to the textual clues presented if they have no other signals. The formation of close personal relationships is possible, but can take longer to achieve because of the lack of nonverbals. Since his seminal work on CMC, technology
and social practices have led scholars to look for nonverbals in CMC. Hu et al. (2006) point to emoticons as textual cues that can replace traditional nonverbal indicators, and serve as the basis for uncertainty reduction in CMC. Walther (1996) proposes that hyperpersonal communication in CMC can lead to the formation of intimate personal relationships because of the innate lack of cues.

Successful intimate relationships stem from CMC because message senders tend to communicate instrumentally in such a way that presents their ideal self rather than actual self (Gibbs et al., 2006; Toma et al., 2008). The receiver, in turn, is more likely to shape positive perceptions about the idealized other. This, coupled with the level of self-disclosure from each person leads to the communicators, “reinforcing one another’s perceptions of the idealized partner” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Computer-mediated communication’s innate anonymity between users has been shown to foster relational growth and satisfaction (Walther, 1996; Anders & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Management and presentation of the self is a major component of CMC and has been a main focus for much of the scholarly research on the topic (Baker, 2002; Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Cummings et al., 2000; Gibbs et al., 2006; Hu et al., 2004; Robinson, 2007; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Success has been conceptualized as eventually meeting in person in some of these attempts (Baker, 2002; Cooper & Sportolari, 1997, Gibbs et al., 2006), but with the audiovisual capabilities of many new dating apps, this may not necessarily equate accomplishment in the current online dating community. Furthermore, the anonymity and lack of nonverbal channels has been pointed to as promoting intimacy and success of online relationships (Gibbs et al., 2006; Hu et al., 2004; Walther et al., 2015), but this process has yet to be conceptualized as a construct of online relations. Honeycutt & Bryan (2003) suggest that relational growth and satisfaction have not been fully understood in F2F or
CMC bonds, “...an overlooked fact about relationships is that people imagine conversations with partners in order to feel connected” (p. 49). To better understand how users experience others in online dating contexts, the following research question asks:

RQ1) How do millennials present themselves, and experience others based on their respective dating profiles and pictures?

Imagination (Pre II)

Imagination has been a prominent feature of communication and self-understanding research for nearly 80 years of formal scholarship, starting with George Herbert Mead (1934), and later his protégé, Herbert Blumer (1986), who provided the groundwork for understanding imagination in interpersonal communication with symbolic interactionism. Among other major conceptual contributions, symbolic interactionism suggests that all reality is based on shared subjective agreement among society or between people, and that this shared subjective reality gives social action meaning (Blumer, 1986). For people to make sense of the world around them they experience it directly and also use their own perceptions to decide what meaning others’ actions and behavior carries. In trying to experience interactions or situations through the vantage point of the other, a person must imagine how that plays out in everything from affective state of emotion to word choice (if there is a conversation). By partaking in this role-playing exercise, people can then live out multiple scenarios from even more perspectives to form their belief system about the world in which they reside, much like an II.

The development of cognitive script theory (Schank & Abelson, 1975) proved to be another major advancement in the study of imagination’s role in interpersonal communication. Mead and Blumer were surely discussing the inner workings of cognitive scripts with symbolic interactionism, but Schank & Abelson (1975) built upon their work to show how symbolic
interactionism can lead to patterned behavior in scripts. Much like a film script, a cognitive script essentially prescribes the appropriate action, behavior, and language for a communicative encounter. Cognitive scripts can be broken down further to explain how people think about and picture themselves in relationships in what are known as relational scripts (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). Relational scripts have different functions, but exist along a continuum ranging from cultural – interpersonal – intrapsychic (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). Cultural scripts are blueprints for how to feel and act when placed in different social roles and settings; interpersonal scripts add experience and specific feelings and actions for specific individuals and settings (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). For example, the common cultural script for greeting acquaintances in the United States generally manifests as, “How are you?” with a smile and possible handshake or simple head nod. Greeting an acquaintance with, “Good afternoon!” and a kiss on the cheek would be completely out of the ordinary in the U.S., and most certainly would elicit an awkward response. However, an interpersonal script for greeting your grandmother would most likely include a small kiss on the cheek and a loving “hello,” and a cultural script in many European societies would include the same thing. As individuals understand the communicative nature and goals of a given situation, they mentally pattern that behavior as appropriate, and their script becomes a reference shortcut for future interactions (Schank & Abelson, 1975). These scripts serve as the basis for how individuals might imagine similar situations and behavior with significant others. Individuals also have intrapsychic scripts for how they think and feel about others, which may not be publicized, but serve as the basis for future interactions in the same way as cultural and interpersonal scripts (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994).

Following the foundational strides made by symbolic interactionism and cognitive script theory, Rosenblatt and Meyer (1986) outlined the basic tenets and utility of using imagined
interaction in clinical settings. Rehearsal, compensation, self-understanding, conflict linkage, relational maintenance, and catharsis were all identified as possible functions of imagined interaction use. They first suggested that imagined interaction use had several implications for therapy, and could be used by patients to substitute for communication with conversational partners that might not be accessible due to the sensitive nature of topics or geographical differences. While Rosenblatt and Meyer (1986) acknowledged that imagined interactions were common human behavior, they were treating the construct as a type of intervention strategy for patients that could help lead to progress in expressing and understanding emotions, “For the therapist, learning about the internal interactions of a client may reveal otherwise unaccessible information regarding shame, family of origin issues, and the therapeutic relationship (Rosenblatt & Meyer, 1986, p. 321). The authors also insisted that repeated imagined interactions could be detrimental to the emotional wellbeing of a person if their conversational partners are not positive influences, such as past therapists, mentors, or family members that have helped them through a tough time.

Imagined Interactions

The asynchronous manner of CMC present in the distance and downtime between communicators leaves time for introspective thought, possibly about each other. The time between messages might be spent daydreaming or imagining experiences with others (Honeycutt, 2010). Rosenblatt and Meyer's (1986) initial foray into imagined interactions suggested that they resembled conversations and could be used by patients to substitute actual interaction with significant others. Edwards et al. (1988) adapted their work to reflect IIs as a universal occurrence, and applied the concept to interpersonal communication. They suggested that IIs might happen more or less often for some people, but that most people have them daily,
and that they are completely common. Honeycutt (2003) explains this daydreaming practice as Imagined Interaction (II), “…a process of social cognition whereby individuals imagine and therefore indirectly experience themselves in anticipated or past communicative encounters with significant others” (p. 1295). By experiencing a fantasy encounter with a fictionalized other, practitioners of Imagined Interaction can “live out” an encounter several times before or after it occurs.

IIs are intrapersonal in nature due to all of the speaking and action taking place in one’s own mind, but they serve an important interpersonal purpose in that they shape behavior and attitudes for future ‘real-life’ encounters. The setting and action of the II is limitless, realistically; however, the others in an II are significant others, usually played by friends, family, and lovers (Zagacki et al., 1992). The experience that a person has with one of their significant others in their II becomes just as real as if they had had that same experience face to face, in terms of behavior and attitudes. It is shortsighted to merely conceptualize IIs in terms of mental conversations because words could possibly never be spoken, and quite an impact could still be made (Honeycutt & Hatcher, 2016). For example, a nervous teenage boy might picture his high school crush saying nothing to him as he imagines asking her to the prom. The feelings of sadness or despair in the II could easily cause him to shy away from ever approaching the situation.

Imagined interactions (IIs) have been employed by many scholars to illustrate the proactive or retroactive thought processes involved in F2F relational maintenance (Honeycutt & Keaton, 2012; Honeycutt et al. 2013; Honeycutt & Bryan, 2003; Honeycutt & Wiemann, 1999; Honeycutt & Patterson, 1997; Honeycutt et al., 1990; Zagacki et al., 1992). Including proactive and retroactive thought, IIs exhibit eight total attributes; the remaining characteristics are
frequency, variety, discrepancy, self-dominance, valence, and specificity (Eidenmuller & Honeycutt, 2010). The intrapersonal attributes of IIs illustrate how the process of having and reflecting on an II is a solitary experience. The frequency of IIs refers to how often a given person may have an imagined interaction. The research shows that people tend to have more frequent IIs when they are in relationships where the other is frequently unavailable (Honeycutt, 2010), such as a long distance or online scenario.

Variety is the characteristic of IIs that details how many different topics and partners may be featured in a given person’s IIs. Imagined interactions have been shown to occur before an anticipated encounter (proactivity), as well as after a real encounter (retroactivity). A proactive II could feature a prospective job candidate practicing his or her responses to supposed interview questions. Using the same example, a retroactive II could occur after the interview with the job candidate reliving the experience and even changing how it ultimately played out. The specificity of an imagined interaction refers to how detailed a person gets into their mental imagery of a situation; more detail equates to a more specific II. IIs are conceptualized as self-dominant when a given person does most of the talking or action in their own imagined interaction. Since IIs are intrapersonal in nature, many times a person’s perceptions of what is going to occur or what did occur do not match up to the reality of the event or situation; this characteristic of IIs is termed discrepancy. Finally, the overall experience of an imagined interaction can be deemed to have a positive or negative valence.

In addition to the eight characteristics already discussed, Imagined Interactions also serve six functions; self-understanding, relational maintenance, conflict linkage, rehearsal, catharsis, compensation (Croghan & Croghan, 2003; Honeycutt et al., 1990; Honeycutt & Patterson, 1997; Honeycutt & Weimann, 1999; Honeycutt, 2003; Zagacki et al., 1992). The interpersonal
functions of IIs demonstrate how the overall process impacts interpersonal relations. Not only do IIs function to help make sense of the world around us, but people regularly use them to make sense of their own identities as well. A person imagining and living out multiple events and situations that puts them into difficult circumstances where they might not know how they would react can help him or her achieve, at least a modicum, of self-understanding. For example, college freshmen may mentally picture their available responses when being peer pressured in differing conditions to better understand the associated risks and consequences with each response. As they imagine themselves in several different scenarios, they can experience whether or not they would partake in the activity, thus teaching them something about themselves.

Rehearsal may be the most common form of imagined interaction, and is observed when a person is practicing for an anticipated encounter (Honeycutt, 2010). Using the job interview example from earlier, a prospective candidate would most likely want to run-through their responses to anticipated questions before actually going in for the interview so that they may be more prepared. Research on rehearsal aspects of IIs suggests that when used in this function, they can dramatically improve listening skills, as practitioners are more prepared for a variety of possibilities (Vickery et al., 2015).

Compensation is another prominent function of IIs, and is defined as serving the purpose of replacing communication for those who may not be able to. Compensation suggests that people tend to use IIs to make up for not being able to communicate with emotionally or physically unavailable significant others. Relational maintenance is an obvious function of IIs because people bridge actual interactions with imagined ones to make sense of their relationship and partners. In the same vein, IIs can maintain conflict as well. When an initial conflict arises and ends in a face-to-face encounter, it is actually very far from being over. People involved in
altercations maintain the conflict through imagining what they should or would have said and
done, as well as what they will do or say next time (Bodie et al., 2013). Finally, IIs have been
shown to serve a cathartic function for interpersonal communication as well. In an imagined
interaction a person can express themselves in any way they want without there being any real
consequence from the person or persons they are interacting with. A popular II for catharsis
usually involves the hostile expression of emotions that would not normally be acceptable in a
real-life encounter (i.e. telling a superior to kiss off) (Honeycutt, 2010).

Characteristics of IIs are intrapersonal insofar as they occur in an individual’s own mind
without anyone else ever needing to be present; however, they serve interpersonal functions
because they help to shape cognitive scripts for how people understand situations and settings in
future encounters. Through repetition, IIs can reinforce or recreate cognitive schema and
relational scripts for behavior (Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). Scripts and schema
are basic blueprints unique to every individual that map out appropriate behavior:

Individuals have scripts based on memory and experiences that create expectations
about what is likely to occur during the course of their lives in different types of
relationships…These scripts are similar to mental file folders into which information is
placed, retrieved, and often revised. (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011; p. 14)

Scripts, IIs, personal experience, and observations of society and culture serve as the basis for
how people think about, and therefore experience relationships (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011;
Honeycutt et al., 2013).

Since the emergence of II research in interpersonal communication, there has been a
growing number of scholars gaining interest and offering their own inquiries into the phenomena
(Honeycutt & Keaton, 2012; Allen & Berkos, 2010; Crisp & Turner, 2009; Allen et al., 2007;
Berkos et al., 2001; etc.). An early trend sought to better understand the types of imagery utilized
in IIs (Zagacki et al., 1992), and ultimately suggested (verbal, visual, both). All three types of
imagery have been shown to be useful in II, with imagery using both verbal and visual aspects being the most impactful. These modes of imagery can be understood as immediate or reflective. The immediate variety is understood as actually having the II, and then reflective imagery would be looking back and evaluating the imagined interaction. IIs can also take the form of one of two perspectives; omniscient or direct (Honeycutt, 1989). The omniscient mode of imagined interaction involves the person having the II, seeing all of encounter from the perspective of God. They witness all of the action but are not directly involved, even though they are a character. The direct mode of IIs would then be the experience of an II from one’s own perspective in the imagined interaction.

Once the imagery inherent to imagined interactions was better understood, a new trend began to emerge that saw II researchers focusing on the conflict maintenance function of IIs to the point of positing conflict-linkage theory (Allen & Berkos, 2010; Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt et al., 2013). Conflict linkage theory is predicated on the same ideology behind the conflict maintenance function of IIs. It suggests that conflict does not end in the immediate encounter and has the ability to grow and become much more painful or encompassing than the original fight or issue (Honeycutt, 2010). Imagined interactions are ripe with possibilities of misconstruing and manipulating characters and actions to fit a person’s own beliefs, so the emergence of conflict linkage theory is not a surprising development.

There are many different topics, concepts, and phenomena that IIs have been employed to investigate over the last 30 years. Among interpersonal communication standards such as listening skills and memory structures in organizational communication, IIs have unique application in communication research. For example, IIs have been used to study the bereavement process (Ford, 2010) as well as private prayer (Eidenmuller & Honeycutt, 2010).
Much more inquiry is needed in these subject areas, but the preliminary findings of a few studies shows that IIs do help in coping with emotions during times of bereavement. The private prayer research is not as concrete and an ambiguous line exists between whether or not praying is an imagined interaction or an actual interaction with the deity being prayed to, ultimately decided by the perceptions of the individual because many people claim to get responses (Eidenmuller & Honeycutt, 2010). Imagined Interactions have only recently been applied to relationships in online contexts (Berkos, 2010), but much further inquiry is necessary to determine the role IIs play in negotiating CMC relationships.

IIs in Online Contexts.

The relative anonymity in companion-websites provides a platform for daters to exercise their imagination to construct possible scenarios with prospective partners (Anders & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Arvidsson, 2006; Young et al., 2000). Arvidsson (2006) expounds on the capability of imagination in digital dating, “It is suggested that such ‘fantasy work’ – the work of imagining situations, people, and relations – is activated to an unprecedented extent in the online economy…Dating sites are where the powers of fantasy are stimulated” (p. 672, 678). Intimate relationships formed through CMC have the potential to be hyperpersonal (accelerated rate of intimacy) because imagination is a major tool in making up for information that is not present in the immediate interaction (Hian et al., 2006; Hu et al., 2006; Walther, 1996).

In the first study to conceptualize and consider Imagined Interactions in CMC, Berkos (2010) surveyed students on their use of IIs, measuring topic of online IIs, type of conversational partners in online IIs, online IIs role on message formation, and the effects of IIs on online communication. This study was a firm first step in investigating IIs in online settings, but in being the inaugural attempt, it lacks the luxury of a foundation to build from. Admittedly, the 4
item open-ended survey of 119 students that had been primed to IIs in their introductory communication course limited this research (Berkos, 2010), but important strides were made. Six aspects unique to CMC were identified as stimulants of IIs: downtime between messages, unintended recipients, false identity, away messages, lack of nonverbal cues, and message archives (Berkos, 2010). She found that social plans and dating were two of the main topics of online IIs, and that most conversational partners in online IIs were romantically linked to respondents. Her results also show that most participants change their online messages after an imagined interaction very often, often, or sometimes, and that the majority of messages are altered to avoid conflict.

Berkos (2010) findings indicate that emotion management, communication improvement, proactive/rehearsal communication, situation management, and professional conduct were the five main categories of II influence in CMC. Open-ended survey items in this study allowed for emergent categories of influence, but II research would be better served if the existing functions and characteristics were also put to the test. The experience of IIs in a computer mediated context will undoubtedly produce additional characteristics and functions than typical F2F settings, but the established tenets of IIs should not be overlooked. For example, proactivity/rehearsal communication are already in the literature, and the other categories that were identified could more than likely fit into the current theoretical assumptions as well. Berkos (2010) study may not have been the most rigorous attempt, but it highlighted the necessity of investigating imagination in regards to relational communication, “Students are increasingly relying on mediated communication forms to ask for dates, initiate friendships, and ask questions of their professors. These social transitions make the need for research surrounding how individuals imagine their communication encounters more relevant to these unique, mediated
situations” (p. 124 – 125). As more of daily social interaction migrates to digital landscapes, the importance of understanding fundamental aspects of human relations in CMC remains paramount; imagined interactions deliver the necessary theoretical lens to explore the phenomenon of online dating. The following research question was designed to examine imagined interactions in online dating:

RQ2) How does the use of imagined interactions relate to millennials’ communication and behavior when online dating?

Summary

The extant research on computer mediated communication (CMC), online dating, and imagination as an integral function of human relations and cognition has been presented in the current review to shape the present study. CMC inherently includes a dimension of imagination that allows communicators to make up for information missing during online interactions. The anonymity and plasticity of the internet allows users to portray whatever idealized image they prefer with strategic self-presentation, but the idea that much of users’ information is on their profile, and they are interacting around their shared interest in online relationships, suggests that they can relate at a faster pace than traditional F2F interpersonal relationships that fumble through the early stages of relationship formation/initiation. Typically, online daters are able to form a decent picture of their potential partners by scrolling through their profile information and pictures (or lack thereof), after they have already made a preliminary decision to show interest or match with each other. From this advanced starting point, it is possible to move rapidly through interpersonal milestones, toward a meaningful relationship. In addition to communication satisfaction with the interaction/relationship, honesty and trust have been found to be key factors in determining relational satisfaction in online dating (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006).
The present review has also expounded upon the role that imagination has played in typical F2F relationships with scripts, how it has been understood as an interpersonal construct as imagined interactions (IIs), and how IIs have been minimally applied to CMC in general. Through the formation of dating scripts, people better understand their appropriate role, behavior, and communication for particular encounters based on their perceived (imagined) understanding of their behavior’s impact. Imagined interactions have been used successfully throughout the interpersonal communication literature to expound upon the many intrapersonal characteristics, and interpersonal functions that imagination serves for human relationships. IIs, as a construct, have yet to be thoroughly explored in the realm of CMC, but have been suggested as a useful tool for the job (Berkos, 2010). The glaring gaps in the current literature review suggest that not enough is yet known to be able to give a complete explanation about how online daters form and maintain relationships through dating apps and websites. Furthermore, imagined interactions have been shown to be an indivisible feature of online dating, that have yet to fully realize their potential in the literature as an interpersonal function of CMC. Both of these motives, in accordance with the literature presented in this chapter, have stimulated the proceeding research questions:

   RQ1) How do millennials present themselves, and experience others based on their respective dating profiles and pictures?

   RQ2) How does the use of imagined interactions relate to millennials’ communication and behavior when online dating?
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Mixed Methods

To complete the exploratory study of imagined interactions and online dating, this research chose to exercise mixed methods wherein a qualitative phase led to a quantitative investigation, and overall understanding of the associated phenomena. Qualitative and quantitative inquiry are used regularly to investigate the same phenomena and concepts, but have disparate methodology and produce completely different interpretations of data under their respective paradigms. A paradigm is a specific worldview and system of beliefs that underlines how research is carried out, and guides the philosophical assumptions behind everything from how reality is perceived, to how data should be collected (Kuhn, 2012; Mertens, 2014). From a pragmatist perspective, the research subscribes to a subjective constructed reality, but suggests that the method that works best for the question being asked is the one that should be used (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Increasing the amount of methods used to answer a research question can also raise rigor, validity, and sometimes reliability as well.

Mixing methods and using the pragmatic paradigm provides the most complete investigation of a phenomenon. Pragmatism and mixed methods can be used to help explain the gaps created by the insufficiencies of one method, by instituting another. It allows for the question of the research to also prescribe just how close the investigators should be to the subject/s during data collection and observation, as well as how it should be undertaken. Instead of maintaining that researchers and subject should remain separate, like post-positivism, or
linked, like interpretivism, pragmatism permits the researcher to decide which tactic will answer the research question most completely. Rather than situate themselves as qualitative or quantitative scholars, pragmatists combine the use of inductive and deductive reasoning as well as quantitative and qualitative methods to gain the ultimate insight into a phenomenon or topic area. Scholars are able to observe and measure individual experiences as well as themes across larger groups by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods under a pragmatist paradigm.

Implementation.

Creswell and Clark (2011) suggest that when carrying out a mixed methods study wherein the first phase of the research is to specifically explore the phenomenon qualitatively and then generalize those findings and methods with quantitative means, an exploratory sequential design may be best, “This design is based on the premise that an exploration is needed for one of several reasons: (1) measures or instruments are not available, (2) the variables are unknown, or (3) there is no guiding framework or theory” (p. 86). Typically, a step occurs between the qualitative and quantitative phases, wherein a generalized instrument is created from the specific qualitative findings (Creswell et al., 2004). In the current study, the individual experiences of the participants will be used to create psychometrics for widespread distribution, as the variables are unknown and no instrument currently exists to test them in conjunction with imagined interactions (the guiding theory). Figure 1 represents the exploratory sequential design, illustrating how the QUAL phase will inform the QUAN phase, and thus the generalizable results. The QUAL phase will consist of open-ended interviews that will then be thematically analyzed to inform the QUAN instruments that will be utilized. During the QUAN phase, participants will respond to psychometrics, rating themes of online dating and imagined interaction use.
Exploratory Sequential Design

Figure 1

Qualitative

The QUAL phase of this research rests in the assumption that the quantitative data collected, alone, will not be enough to truly understand the dynamics and answer the research questions molding this study:

RQ1) How do millennials present themselves, and experience others based on their respective dating profiles and pictures?

RQ2) How does the use of imagined interactions relate to millennials’ communication and behavior when online dating?

As this design is exploratory in nature, more open-ended data collection in the first steps is most beneficial. According to Marshall and Rossman (2010) there are five main characteristics of qualitative research that allow it to generate unstructured, open responses: 1) it is naturalistic, 2) it draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study, 3) it focuses on context, 4) it is emergent and evolving, and 5) it is fundamentally interpretive (p. 2).

For all of these reasons, open-ended semi-structured interviews served as the basis for qualitative inquiry and analysis. These interviews took on the form of relaxed conversations about participants’ experiences with online dating and allowed the participants to feel comfortable in sharing their stories.

Participants.

There were a total of 12 undergraduate students, representing the millennial generation,
that participated in the semi-structured interviews. There were 6 males and 6 females interviewed for this phase of the study; 2 black males, 4 white males, 3 black females, and 3 white females made up the sample. Of these males and females, 2 were freshman, 2 sophomores, 5 juniors, and 3 were seniors; ages ranged from 18 to 27. All had spent significant time on at least one dating app or website, and each had multiple relevant experiences to share. A list of the interview participants is found in Table 2. The aliases were generated randomly, and were not chosen to reflect any cultural, gender, or ethnic identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee Alias</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Recruitment.

An initial short, online survey (Appendix A) was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and distributed to the College of Communication and Information Sciences Undergraduate Research Pool to identify potential candidates for the in-depth interviews. The 9 item measure asked for basic demographic information, whether or not the respondent had ever utilized dating apps and websites in the pursuit of some type of intimate relationship, and a line for contact information if they were interested in participating in the interview. From this convenience sample, the aforementioned 12 participants were purposively chosen to try to represent as much diversity as the initial sample would allow. Each participant was notified via email announcement of their selection, and invited to participate in interviews at the C&IS family communication lab.

Procedures.

After identifying and selecting participants to use in the study by scheduling an interview appointment, participants were to show up and read a brief synopsis explaining the study and asking for their written consent to participate. Once granting consent, audio recording technology was implemented, and the interview began. While qualitative measures are generally less structured and repeatable, a set of in-depth questions were crafted to serve as the prompts for these semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). Babbie (2007) notes the plasticity of the interview process as one of its strong suits for social research, “Although you may set out to conduct interviews with a reasonably clear idea of what you want to ask, one of the special strengths of field research is its flexibility. In particular, the answers evoked by your initial questions should shape your subsequent ones” (p. 306).

The interview protocol was developed to explore participant monologues dealing with their
respective experiences with dating apps and websites, as well as their use of imagination during the related computer mediated communication distinct to online dating. The initial 10 prompts and subsequent encouragers were created by the researcher, with the exception of one question taken from Berkos’ (2010) qualitative interview schedule of imagined interactions, “How often when talking online will you type a sentence, then erase or change what you have written because you imagine your partner’s specific response? Please list a recent example?” (p. 118).

This research is exploratory in nature, but the presence of imagined interactions in online dating has been put forward by Berkos (2010), so their role in online dating was probed during the interviews. The interviews began with the researcher asking participants to speak generally about their overall experience with dating apps and websites, and moved to more specific inquiry concerning their own profile information/pictures, what their goals are, and finally, their use or experience of imagination in relation to potential or past online interactions. The entire protocol was approved by the IRB, and lasted between 18 and 30 minutes to deliver and record responses.

Analysis.

The 12 interviews, totaling 247 minutes of audio, were transcribed into digital text and arranged by demographic information and timing of new prompts/responses to represent the qualitative data. Each interview was saved as a separate file without any identifying information, and accessible only to the researcher. The researcher scrutinized the qualitative data under the provisions of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) to produce specific codes, and general themes across the entire sample. The 6 distinct steps of Thematic Analysis (TA) – 1. Familiarization with data, 2. Coding, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, and 6. Writing up the results – are presented in Table 3.
Phases of Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Goal of Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Familiarization with the data</td>
<td>Listen, transcribe, read, re-read → initial observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Coding</td>
<td>Create concise categories for relevant data → organize data into categories or create new ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Searching for themes</td>
<td>Construct larger, reasoned themes from related codes / categories → coherent, informed observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Assess generated themes in relation to each other, research questions, and codes → test observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Defining/Naming themes</td>
<td>Classify and distinguish the core elements of each unique theme → organize and label major observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Writing up results</td>
<td>Tie analysis and themes together to give context and create persuasive explanation of data → create formal report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Clarke & Braun (2013)

Table 3

Thematic Analysis, much like the pragmatist approach guiding this research, refrains from subscribing to theoretical and paradigmatic constraints, and instead, relies on its simplistic logical prowess as a qualitative method (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Joffe, 2012). Rather than trying to fit data into preconceived conventions, TA allows defining characteristics of qualitative data (codes, themes, etc.) to emerge naturally. Clarke & Braun (2013) illustrate the liberty afforded to the utilization of TA, “We view TA as theoretically flexible because the search for, and examination of, patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices” (p. 120). Through a process of coding and recoding, TA evaluates and evolves classification of themes as they are assigned to different categories, by closely examining relationships between participant responses and the categorizations. As initial codes surface in the data analysis, they
are examined as to whether or not they fit an existing category. If not, a new code is created and themes are adapted to create a lens for the phenomenon.

The current research is concerned with better understanding the relational communication and behaviors associated with online dating apps and websites, and how imagined interactions play a role in the phenomenon.

### Online Dating Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Relating to the presence of lies, or feelings of being truthful, and how people perceive it in CMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>The ability or inability to gain trust via dating apps and websites, and how it compares to traditional F2F relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Experience</td>
<td>The expectations and outcomes associated with using dating apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>The perceived social opinion of using dating apps and websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Interactions</td>
<td>The activation of imagination during profile creation and viewing, and the many related experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Two independent coders, trained in qualitative methodology and interpersonal communication, completed the analysis to contribute to the integrity of this study. Utilizing TA, the research team completely familiarized themselves with the data by listening, transcribing, and reading the interviews after they had initially taken place. During the coding phase, 26 unique codes emerged from the initial categorization of the data (Appendix C), and served as the basis for searching for themes. Searching for themes included grouping the codes together based on their relation to each other, and the research questions presented by the literature review in chapter 2.
The II theme was prescribed by the general purpose of the current study and the abovementioned interview prompt, but all of the 26 codes emerged from the participants’ testimonies. The research team searched for categories (codes) that emerged from the theme rather than using the subthemes to locate the larger theme as suggested in step 3 of TA. The researcher analyzed and then reviewed the set of themes to define their respective characteristics, and provide comprehensive labels/names in the 5th phase of TA (Table 4). Once analyzed and defined, the themes were written up (chapter 4 – findings), and used as factors to guide the quantitative scales and instruments apparent in the next phase of this research.

Trustworthiness and Quality.

Creswell & Clark (2011) suggest that establishing credibility for qualitative studies can be understood as a question of validity, “Qualitative validation is important to establish, but there are so many commentaries and types of qualitative validity that it is difficult to know which approach to adopt…Overall, checking for qualitative validity means assessing whether the information obtained through the qualitative data collection is accurate” (p. 211). To ensure the credibility of the qualitative strand of research, member checking, peer debriefing, and two independent coders were utilized as measures of trustworthiness, rigor, and quality. The independent coders each explored the interview transcriptions and placed the relevant data into codes, then later brought their findings together to negotiate the major themes, aside from IIIs. Member checking involves returning to initial participants after data analysis to share findings and collect input before moving forward (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher shared the results of the analysis with the interview participants via email, and asked for feedback as to whether or not the codes and themes represented their unique involvement with dating apps and websites; there were no discrepancies or concerns raised by the interview
participants. The researcher also reached out to colleagues and peers familiar with online dating apps to review the analysis of codes and themes. All three assessments of quality suggest trustworthy data.

Quantitative

Rationale.

The QUAN phase of this research has been made possible by the findings from the preceding QUAL phase, and was built into the current research design to strengthen the findings produced by the study as a whole. Creswell & Clark (2011) clarify the importance of the quantitative phase of exploratory sequential design, “Building from the exploratory results, the researcher conducts a second, quantitative phase to test or generalize the initial findings. The researcher then interprets how the quantitative results build on the initial qualitative results” (p. 71). For the current project, the themes that were developed in the qualitative analysis served as a guide to the creation and implementation of the survey measures that generated the quantitative data. The complete findings from both analyses have been reported in detail in the next chapter, but hypotheses were formed with the conclusion of the qualitative results in the previous phase, and are reported here. In addition to the two overarching research questions directing this study, the following hypotheses were drafted to test the five themes that resulted from the qualitative analysis:

H1a) The degree to which people are honest about themselves when online dating will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H1b) The degree of honesty people expect from others when online dating will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H2) The degree of trust that people expect to develop when online dating will be
significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H3) The stigma users’ associate with using online dating apps will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H4a) Users’ overall experience (activity) while online dating, will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H4b) Users’ overall experience (assessment) while online dating, will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

Participants.

The IRB approved the use of an online survey instrument to be distributed to students and volunteers on campus via email and other physical bulletin board postings, as well as online through various social media networks and applications. The web address that was provided linked to an informative summary of the current research, and an invitation to participate in the online survey (Appendix D). The sampling procedure began as a convenience method as it was distributed to the C&IS Undergraduate Research Pool, but turned to snowball techniques by word of mouth, and posting the link on social media. A total of 297 surveys were started, but only 220 were completed in their entirety and included for analysis after removing outliers (age, repeat/multiple attempts, etc.) and incomplete data.

Out of the 220 participants, approximately 70% (n=155) were female, 29% male (n=64), and less than 1% other (n=1). The average age of the sample was 22(μ = 22.4; SD = 3.7); 18 to 24 year-olds made up 79% (n=173) of the sample, but given the earlier definition of millennials being born between 1981 - 1997 (Fry, 2016), anyone 18 to 36 years of age was included for analysis. Nearly 79% (n=173) of the sample was white, 11% (n=25) black, 4% (n=9) Hispanic, 3% (n=7) Asian, 2% (n=5) other, and less than 1% (n=1) Native American. The majority (86%,
n=188) of participants were heterosexually oriented, 9% (n=19) bisexual, 2% (n=4) lesbian, 1% (n=3) homosexual, 1% (n=3) pansexual, less than 1% (n=2) other, and less than 1% (n=1) gay. The participants’ home regions were concentrated in the South (45%, n=101), but the North (19%, n=42), West (16%, n=35), East (10%, n=21), and the International regions (10%, n=21) all had solid representation as well. One third of participants never met anyone online (31%, n=68), while the majority (69%, n=152) went on at least one date with someone that they have met from a dating app or website; 46% (n=100) have had sex with someone from a dating app/website, 38% (n=83) have had no physical intimacy, and the remaining 16% (n=37) have experienced a varying degree of physical intimacy less than sex. In the sample, 20% (n=44) report that they have experienced virtual encounters as intimate as sex, while 47% (n=103) have had no intimate virtual encounters. The remaining 33% of participants have experienced some degree (low, n=39; med, n=27; high, n=7) of virtual intimate interaction, meaning that the majority of this sample (53%, n=117) have as well.

Procedures.

The participants responded to approximately 120 survey items in the final online measure (Appendix E), that should have ultimately taken no more than 15 – 20 minutes to complete. The study was deployed via Qualtrics research software, and allowed participants to access the measure from computers and personal devices. The questionnaire began with demographic identifiers (age, sex, education level, sexuality, geographical location), and also included goals, intentions, and a list of apps and sites to choose from as most popular (Figure 2). The number 1 choice in dating technology among millennials in this sample by far was Tinder, but OkCupid, PlentyOfFish, and Bumble were all not too far behind. Beyond the demographic questions, two different instruments were combined to form the remaining survey items; the first instrument
was created by the researcher to inspect the online dating codes and themes created in the qualitative phase, and the second is a version of the survey of imagined interactions (Honeycutt, 2010) that has been adapted according to the contextual prescriptions mentioned in the codes and themes.

![Top Dating Apps/Sites Reported](image)

**Figure 2**

**Instruments.**

*Honesty.* The scales created from the qualitative results include initial demographic and basic usage questions, as well as 45 more items rating the experience of online dating in terms of the initial codes and themes that are now factors for quantitative analysis (honesty, trust, overall experience, and stigma). Psychometric items and scales were created by the research team to reflect the literal sentiments present in the codes from the thematic analysis. Fetters et al. (2013) support the instrument creation phase of the current exploratory sequential mixed methods design being rooted in the belief that the specific experiences participants shared during their interviews can be generalized from the thematic analyses/findings to create a survey
questionnaire:

Integration through building occurs when results from one data collection procedure informs the data collection approach of the other procedure, the latter building on the former. Items for inclusion in a survey are built upon previously collected qualitative data that generate hypotheses or identify constructs or language used by research participants” (p. 2140).

The new instrument consists of Likert scaled items, measuring responses of, “YES!” – strongly agree to, “NO!” strongly disagree. The psychometric items were created to represent the experience of the 5 themes found in the qualitative analysis, but have not been used in previous research; all of the items were tested to pinpoint their relationship with the new themes through dimension reduction. Reduction was achieved by performing principle component analyses (PCA) for each theme to determine which survey items grouped together to form the associated variables. PCA identifies clusters of items that are correlated with each other to show where a latent variable might be present. PCA is often the preferred method of data reduction during the creation of new quantitative instruments, while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) best serves researchers when scales have already been established (Merenda, 1997).

Before conducting PCA on the themes/factors, parallel analysis was used to determine the number of statistically significant components in the set of items. Parallel analysis provides statistically bound parameters for deciding how many components to include, rather than using colloquial guidelines (O’Connor, 2000). Parallel analysis, through Monte Carlo Simulation (MCS), determined the number of survey items present for each factor by testing the scale items over 1000 randomly generated datasets in SPSS statistical software. The eigenvalues from the generated data sets are compared to the eigenvalues in the true data set, such that the true values that exceed the generated values indicate significant components. Papadrakakis and Kotsopulos (1999) express the statistical vigor innate to MCS:
The use of Monte Carlo Simulation (MCS) based on stochastic finite element method (SFEM) has the major advantage that accurate solutions can be obtained for any problem whose deterministic solution is known either numerically or analytically since it statistically converges to the correct solution provided that a large number of simulations is employed (p. 305).

MCS is successful because it uses several possible values in numerous datasets to highlight the components that are significant (Ledesma & Mora, 2007). The parallel analysis for the honesty factor revealed that two components’ eigenvalues fell within the 95% confidence interval set by the randomly generated eigenvalues present in the 1000 randomly generated datasets; components eigenvalues must exceed the generated statistic to warrant extraction in PCA (2.12 > 1.48; 1.84 > 1.34).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honesty</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Catfishing is Real</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>-.148</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>-.192</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I Have Been Catfished</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I Have Catfished</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. People Catfish</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I Use Filters</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I Lie Significantly</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I Tell Small Lies</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I Am Honest</td>
<td>-.148</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>-.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other’s Profiles Are Truthful</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My Pictures Are Recent</td>
<td>-.192</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Other’s Pictures Are Recent</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.355</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

SPSS was the software of choice to run the initial PCA with a forced factor extraction method set to two based on the results of the MCS. The correlations in the matrix in Table 5 show the relationships between the items on the honesty scale, as based on the strength threshold of $n > .3$ (Beavers et al., 2013; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic (KMO)
ranges from 0 to 1, and tests sampling adequacy based upon the degree of mutual variance between the items (higher scores indicate that the items are measuring the same variable); the KMO = .62.

Table 6 represents the factor loadings for each survey item on the two components / factors generated from the PCA. The loadings for component one suggested that three, possibly four items would load onto the first factor with moderate correlations (I Tell Small Lies = .763; I Have Catfished = .668; I Lie Significantly (.654); and I Have Been Catfished = .53), and the loadings for component two had two moderately correlated items (Catfishing Is Real = -.719; and People Catfish = -.710) with a negative relationship to the factor. Following the PCA, Cronbach’s Alpha test of reliability was run on the new set of items to support their value in the current study as markers of different aspects of honesty. The first component, made up of items that represented participants’ honesty (honesty – self), had α = .626, while the second component (α = .66) consisted of items associated with others’ honesty (honesty – others).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component / Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Tell Small Lies</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>-.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have Catfished</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>-.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Lie Significantly</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have Been Catfished</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>-.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catfishing Is Real</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Catfish</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>-.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other’s Pictures Are Recent</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>-.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other’s Profiles Are Truthful</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>-.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Pictures Are Recent</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Honest</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Use Filters</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Trust. The parallel analysis for trust indicated that only one component’s eigenvalue was higher than the generated statistic (2.42 > 1.32). With this prescription, a PCA with a forced factor extraction method set to one was run on the set of survey items. The PCA for trust resulted in decent relationships between the items (> .3), and indicated support for component extraction (Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Can Trust People Before We Meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apps / Sites Are A Good Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Is Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Relationships Are Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful For Starting Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful For Maintaining Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

The KMO measure of sampling adequacy (= .77) is borderline “meritorious” for mutual variance attributed to the component (Beavers et al., 2013). The factor loadings in Table 8 show how each item is related to the trust component produced during the PCA, and imply that 4, and possibly all 6 items could load onto the trust factor with moderate correlations. This factor is most correlated to the survey item that asked participants to denote the degree of possibility that exists for serious relationships to occur from using dating apps and websites (= .734). Cronbach’s Alpha was used following the results of the PCA to test the 6 items as a reliable measure of trust for the quantitative phase of research; according to the test statistic (α = .70), this is a reliable scale.
**Component Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component / Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious Relationships Are Possible</td>
<td>.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apps / Sites Are A Good Tool</td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful For Maintaining Relationships</td>
<td>.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful For Starting Relationships</td>
<td>.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Is Possible</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Can Trust People Before We Meet</td>
<td>.528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

**Overall Experience.** The MCS parallel analysis for overall experience offered two components for extraction (3.34 > 1.39; 1.40 > 1.25). The resulting PCA yielded several relationships among the survey items, as seen in the correlation matrix in Table 9.

**Correlation Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Experience</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad Experience</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not For Me</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed Apps/Sites</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Had Sex</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Hooked Up</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Met Someone</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier Online</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

The shared variance among the items, inferable from the components (KMO = .73) represents very much acceptable results. The factor loadings in Table 10 represent the relationship of the 8 survey items to the two experience components from the PCA. Four, possibly five factors loaded
on component 1 (Bad Experience, Enjoyed Apps/Sites, Positive Experience, Not For Me, Easier Online), and two, possibly three more loaded on the second component (Have Hooked Up, Have Had Sex, Have Met Someone). Tests of reliability for the both sets of items on each component revealed that both factors are reliable scales of overall experience (1, $\alpha = .75$; 2, $\alpha = .78$). The first component, dealing with the participants’ assessment of their experience was named overall experience – assessment, and the second component, comprised of participants’ personal dating activity was labeled overall experience – activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component / Factor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed Apps/Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not For Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Hooked Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Had Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Met Someone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

*Stigma.* The Monte Carlo Simulation for the final scale created solely from the qualitative thematic analysis, indicated one component for extraction ($2.78 > 1.45$). The correlation matrix presented in Table 11 shows the initial results of the principle components analysis, and relationships between the survey items. The measure of sampling adequacy revealed a decent degree of common variance ($KMO = .74$) among the survey items on the component.
### Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stigma With Apps</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.301</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Embarrassed</td>
<td>.301</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.379</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Are Embarrassed</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>.379</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Experience 4 Everyone</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Goals 4 Everyone</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Knows I Use</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends Know I Use</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Know My Friends Use</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Know My Family Uses</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most People My Age Use</td>
<td>.221</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.257</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

### Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends Know I Use</td>
<td>.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Are Embarrassed To Use</td>
<td>.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most People My Age Use</td>
<td>.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Embarrassed</td>
<td>.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma With Apps</td>
<td>.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Experience 4 Everyone</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Know My Friends Use</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Goals 4 Everyone</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Knows I Use</td>
<td>.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Know My Family Uses</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12
The factor loadings in Table 12 illustrate that every survey item, with the exception of I Know My Family Uses, had a moderate correlation to the component. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for this set of 9 items to determine their reliability as a scale for stigma; $\alpha = .72$ supports the use of the stigma scale as reliable in this study.

*Imagined Interactions.* The presence of IIs was measured with an adapted Survey of Imagined Interactions (SII). The changes made to the survey reflected the context of the current study (dating apps and websites), as suggested by Honeycutt (2010):

> The characteristics and functions may be measured in terms of overall usage as well as in specific contexts or the most recent II. It is important to contextualize items for specific research domains. Hence, the items may be modified to specify a particular interaction partner, scene, or situation (p. 205).

Adaptations were made based upon the results of the qualitative data analysis to include IIs in an online dating setting (i.e. before important meetings, I frequently imagine people – before messaging someone online, I frequently imagine them).

The survey (Appendix E) consists of 60 items measuring all of the characteristics and functions of IIs through Likert scaled responses of, “NO!” – strongly disagree to, “YES!” strongly agree, similar to the scales used in for the previously mentioned factors. The items that measured the characteristics included frequency (“I often have imagined interactions while browsing profiles online”), proactivity (“Before messaging someone online, I frequently imagine them”), retroactivity (“After messaging someone online, I frequently imagine them”), variety (“I have imagined interactions with the many different profiles I see”), valence (“My imagined interactions with people I’ve met online are usually enjoyable”), specificity (“When I have imagined interactions with people I’ve met online, they tend to be detailed and well developed”), discrepancy (“In my online conversations, I am very different from how I imagined the
conversation going), and self-dominance (“I talk a lot in my imagined interactions with people I’ve met online”). Survey items measuring the functions of IIs included relational maintenance (“My imagined interactions help keep online relationships alive”), conflict-linkage (“I relive old arguments with people I’ve met online in my mind”), rehearsal (“I have imagined interactions in order to practice what I am actually going to send in a message to the person I’ve met online”), compensation (“Imagining talking to someone substitutes for the absence of communicating online”), self-understanding (“My imagined interactions help me understand my self/profile”), and catharsis (“My imagined interactions help me relieve tension and stress from online dating”).

The established scale (Honeycutt, 2010) is comprised of several items that load onto one of 14 corresponding factors (8 characteristics, 6 functions). Since the scales have already been proven to be accurate assessments of II usage, reliability analysis was conducted for each factor to reveal the internal consistency of the group of survey items. While the entire 60+ item survey serves as a robust measure, Honeycutt (2010) suggests that all of them may not be warranted, “The SII can always be modified to raise internal consistency by adding or deleting items depending on the researcher’s needs and their selection of various characteristics and functions that are important to their research questions or hypotheses” (p. 205). In the current study, 10 of the 14 factors found in the original SII translated their internal consistency to the context of online dating (after adjusting for weak α by dropping low items), and are listed below in Table 13. All 6 functions, and half of the characteristics of IIs were included in the quantitative analysis after dismissing the unreliable scales of variety (α = .43), discrepancy (α = .26), specificity (α = .50), and self-dominance (α = .18).
Factors in Survey of Imagined Interactions in Online Dating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>Relational Maintenance</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>Conflict Linkage</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retroactivity</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>Rehearsal</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Understanding</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Catharsis</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13

Analysis.

Multiple regression modeling was chosen for the quantitative analysis, to investigate the characteristics and functions of IIs that are significantly associated with the themes found in online dating. Allen et al. (2009) explain the utility and application of multiple regression in multivariate statistical analysis, “…the regression extends beyond the bivariate correlation because it allows you to test a multiple-variable model and gives you comparatively more information about the relationship between each variable in the model and the criterion variable” (p. 157). Rather than just focusing on a simple bivariate relationship between a function or characteristic of IIs, multiple regression can explain how the characteristics and functions are related to each other, as well as the dependent variable. Six separate multiple linear regressions were run to identify the strength and significance of the relationships between the many characteristics and functions of Imagined Interactions and the remaining themes/factors of honesty – self, honesty – others, trust, stigma, overall experience – assessment, and overall
experience – activity in the context of online dating. Based on the qualitative interviews, imagined interactions are a normal and integral part of online dating; during the quantitative phase, they will be tested to better understand how their activation / use is related to online dating attitudes and behavior.

Summary.

This chapter has outlined the many steps involved in the current mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods, as part of an exploratory sequential investigation of imagined interactions in online dating. The pragmatist paradigm driving the current project allowed for the specific themes and findings from the testimony during the in-depth interviews to be transformed into an instrument capable of generalizing those same factors across quantified data trends. Following IRB approval, the researcher sent an invitation to the C&IS Undergraduate Research Pool for an initial short survey asking for demographic information, whether or not they had used dating apps and websites before, and whether or not they would like to participate in the interview phase. 12 participants were purposively selected to try to represent as much diversity as the willing and available respondents permitted. Following those interviews, 26 codes were grouped into 5 themes that drove the creation of quantified scales that were completed online by 220 respondents at their own volition. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative analyses of these themes/factors is presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses discussed in the previous section. The two research questions directing the current study (RQ1: How do millennials present themselves, and experience others based on their respective dating profiles and pictures? RQ2: How does the use of imagined interactions relate to millennials’ communication and behavior when online dating?) have been addressed and organized in terms of the themes found in the qualitative analysis. The findings include the interview analyses, reflections from the coding and theme formation process, how the results motivated the creation of new instruments, and hypotheses that investigate the themes with inferential statistics. A basic breakdown of each theme can be found in Table 14; the interview testimonies were analyzed for essential characteristics, and then grouped with similar data to form the themes. All themes address research question one and two, and all of the quantitative hypotheses were created out of the findings from both of these questions during the qualitative phase, and test IIIs in relation to the other themes.

Honesty

Although previous research shows that communication tends to be strategic in the CMC domain due to the asynchronous nature of most channels (Walther et al., 2015), that does not necessarily equate to strategic lying only. In many stories from the interviews in this study, participants discussed tactically adjusting their profile information, pictures, and messages as to reflect a more factual representation of themselves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Breakdown</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subtheme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty – self</td>
<td>• People don’t lie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty – others</td>
<td>• I don’t lie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I don’t want to put EVERYTHING out there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Impossible to be 100% honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some people are too honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>• Don’t trust anybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Similar to F2F relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Much harder than F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verify ID with other apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easier to trust people on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Experience – Assessment</td>
<td>• Good / Bad experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Experience – Activity</td>
<td>• Entertainment / serious / hookup / friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diff goals on diff apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developmental / age-specific phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easier / the norm to meet people online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>• Would rather meet / talk in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Everyone uses dating apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Alcohol erases stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Interactions</td>
<td>• I have them / they are normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I create un/realistic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Edit / Practice messages based on anticipated responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Edit self-presentation / pictures based on anticipated responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14

51
The motivation for wanting to be honest on dating apps and websites has also been linked to the anticipation of future F2F encounters, and hopes for overall success of online relationships (Gibbs et al., 2006). As Table 14 illustrates, the research team created 5 main codes under the theme of honesty: 1) People don’t lie, 2) I don’t lie, 3) I don’t want to put EVERYTHING out there, 4) It’s impossible to be 100% honest, and 5) Some people are too honest. These codes capture all of the general sentiments from the multitude of statements made dealing with the core concept of honesty during online dating interactions. The following sections present an exploration of the 5 codes with the participants’ own words, how the codes relate to each other, and how imagined interactions’ influence honesty.

I don’t lie.

During the interviews, it was common for participants to attempt to portray their self as being sincere and straightforward when discussing their own uses and practices. For some, being honest from the very beginning outweighs trying to impress potential matches with false information or pictures:

My bio says when I stop having fun it, I’m done with it. It’s honest. You could say whatever you want about me, I’m an asshole or a douche, but I’m honest on the front page. My picture is me, I just really like it. I like the lighting, the way I look, my hair.

Here, Joseph is associating his truthfulness in displaying his lack of wanting a commitment or serious relationship with the possible negative rating/judging of his personality and character, but he stresses the importance of his true intentions over his perceived image. He believes that his honesty will turn away any suitor before they begin to anticipate a relationship too official or long-term, and obviously by having a profile in the first place, believes he can attract likeminded prospects. Similarly, Pete remarked, “I feel like, I’m going to put it all out there, and if you like me then good. Message me. I feel comfortable with who I am.” Statements like both of these
reinforce self-confidence, and show that online daters will be honest to the point of being
detestable by potential matches, as long as they maintain a belief that they are portraying the
truth. Marcus’ comments echo this sentiment:

One thing, for example, like my interests, I’d put listen to music and watch TV and
movies – that doesn’t sound very outdoorsy or whatever, so that might’ve turned people
off – but, yeah I put where I’m from, that I’m in college…I put my interests in there. My
picture was just a picture of me, kind of close-up, at home wearing a nice shirt.

Marcus’ statement suggests that he believes his current population of matches would prefer
someone less interested in media and technology, and more interested in outdoor recreational
activity, but he maintains his openness and authors what he deems a truthful description of his
interests in his bio section.

Like Marcus, several students found it important to reference their college affiliation in
their profile bio and pictures. James implies that he knows or has come across profiles that fake
their enrollment status as a student, so he takes care to supply evidence of his claims:

I just had a picture of my face, like a selfie. I wrote that I went to [university], and a few
of my interests. I decided to put that I was from [university] because people will say they
go there and they really don’t. So I had pics of me doing things at [university] to prove I
am who I say I am.

James and others felt that presenting an honest description was important, but that status symbols
that can be easily forged, such as university affiliation, should match a visual image as well. In
addition to using pictures around school to prove status as a student, Shelia informs that Tinder’s
intrinsic link to users’ personal Facebook profile pictures can necessitate mindfulness during
picture selection as well:

All pics come from Facebook profiles. So of course, a lot of Facebook pics are old and
from High school. So, I immediately went and changed my pictures. I put up some
pictures of me at some football games, a little bit of my college experience, pictures of
me at the bar. The main one was me getting ready to go out.

Interestingly, Sheila’s comments suggest that she spends more effort and time maintaining
honesty on her Tinder profile than she does her Facebook, a less specialized form of social network platform. She also mentions that a lot of Facebook pictures are from high school and have not been updated as often during her time in college, so she includes different aspects of her own “college experience,” which should be recognizable to others.

People don’t lie.

While trust worked out to be a theme of its own, the absence of lies from other users and their profiles fit best under the code of ‘people don’t lie,’ to signify the honesty of others rather than a possible loyalty to a relationship; this code could have also been called authenticity of others. Craig’s feelings reinforce the idea that the expectation of future encounters produces more honest interactions:

Yeah, I mean you can tell an obvious catfish, but besides that, it’s pretty hard to lie about where you live or go to school if you plan on meeting these people someday...because if it turns into anything you’ll get caught up. With pictures it’s a little different, but pretty much the same thing. If you go to meet up and don’t look anything like your pictures it’s not going to work out most likely, and will probably be pretty embarrassing.

Craig suggests that people refrain from lying because they end up creating false personas that are impossible to replicate when face to F2F. He also contends that the entire ordeal of meeting in-person after lying about your appearance could potentially be socially uncomfortable create an awkward situation. Pete believes that honesty attracts honesty, “I feel like if I’m honest and up front with people, then they’ll be honest and up front with me. You can kind of tell when people are being real with you.” He maintains a high level of honesty throughout his interactions so that it sets the tone for his matches to reciprocate with veraciously. Marcus gave a list of criteria by which he establishes the honesty of a potential match:

Yeah, you know, I would say that a majority of profiles I looked at were pretty accurate. In a profile, I look at what they say about their interests, how close they are with their family, what they’re passionate about in life, and how important education is to them.
He lists personal interests, relationship with family, passions, and education as his benchmarks for measuring honesty in profiles. His statement suggests that profiles that put a heavy emphasis on education and family life, as well as detail strong passions / interests, emit the most honest impressions.

I don’t want to put EVERYTHING out there.

Several participants did not want to include very detailed information or more than a few pictures in their profiles, but did not feel that they were being dishonest. Instead, the participants felt that lines of communication must be drawn before the exchange of further information takes place. Emily’s comments suggest that she leaves the essentials undiscussed as to create subject matter for future conversations, “What I posted is true – that’s really me. I do work at the radio station, but I didn’t add all of my hobbies and interests. I guess it’s like, ‘well, you need to talk to me to find out the rest of that.” Again, Emily does not feel that she is being dishonest, rather, her comments contend that it is a good relational exercise to purposefully leave things up to discussion. The feeling that it is not dishonest to omit information, but leave it undiscovered is repeated through Shelia’s words, “My bio was something like, ‘bios are tedious, so if you want to know more message me,’ and I’d still get messages like, ‘oh, what do you do?’ When it clearly says in my bio, I’m a sophomore. No one even reads those two lines.” Shelia also points out that the process of creating a biography is a wearisome task in itself, and with no one taking the time to read the information, there is ultimately no purpose in creating a detailed profile.

Some participants did not choose to leave their profiles bare, but they did carefully pick what information to display and what details to leave out. Like the previous examples, this is not an admission of guilt for lying on the behalf of the participant, but a deliberate decision procedure for the inclusion of specified information, rather than a complete description. Lauren
suggests that some people are only looking for certain things in a profile in the first place:

I’m pretty honest, like I don’t put everything out there, but I’m honest. With me, on my profile, like a lot of people use Tinder to get weed. For me, I like to smoke, so the common symbol is like a leaf or something. So I definitely put that on my bio, because I’m not going to lie. For some people, that’s their attraction and how they bond anyway.

Lauren’s testimony presents an interesting phenomenon worthy of discussion in the next chapter, however, she explains that even while not presenting a complete picture of herself, she does not feel that she is lying. She believes that by using the leaf as a code to represent marijuana, she will attract other users who are knowledgeable of the symbol, and thus, share her interests.

It’s impossible to be 100% honest.

Similar to the previous code, many participants suggested that there are too many obstacles natural to CMC preventing from people from having completely honest interactions before meeting F2F. Most interview responses that fit this code focus on the fact that digital images are too easily manipulated in online settings for people to show exactly what they look like, but a few participants remarked on the information included in biographies as being incomplete. Emily’s comments insinuate that people can include detailed information about certain aspects of their identity, but that the whole story is still unknown, “I’m sure some people are completely honest, but the majority of people pick and choose what they’re honest about. They say that they’re involved in this that and the other, but that may not be all of who they are.” She is stating that it is impossible to get an honest depiction of people, because ultimately, they are in charge of the information, and might leave out important information. In addition to profile information being scant and often times empty, James suggests that females tend to show their absolute best side in their pictures:

Girls put the best photos they have of themselves up on Tinder. You’re going to put up a picture to show the best version of yourself because that’s what people are going to see if they catch you out on a Saturday. Even if she is attractive, you still don’t know her. The
picture aspect is like a hit or miss. The pictures draw you in, but the personality can push you back. I’ve never seen a detailed bio on Tinder.

While James is clearly concerned with the realistic, but not exactly accurate, selection of pictures for use on females’ profiles, he is also noting an important disconnect between appearance and behavior. He contends that the image presented through the collective pictures (i.e. smiling a lot, in fun/social settings, on the beach) might be a completely different person from the one behind the screen.

Surprisingly, other females reverberated James’ feelings, and suggest that it is more common for women to alter their pictures. For example, Megan states that it is more acceptable for a female to knowingly lie about or misrepresent her appearance than it is for a male:

I think that it’s a lot easier for a girl to use photo editing – I mean you can throw a filter on there. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t. For guys, if he has filters on there, it’s like, ‘eww he edits his pictures.’ It’s a lot harder for a guy to look cool with weird pictures. I almost trust boys’ profiles more than my profile. I don’t think I’m totally lying about what I look like or what I do, but it’s a lot harder for guys to hide things about themselves. I’m more likely to lie than a boy would.

Even after admitting that she is not portraying an accurate version of herself in her pictures, and that she would be turned off if one of her own possible matches did the same thing, Megan believes she is still hanging on to some degree of honesty. Other female participants admitted that they were being somewhat deceitful with their picture selecting/editing skills, but Rachel suggests that while most people choose their best pictures, which might not be a true representation of what they look like, she tries to balance that out with everyday photos as well:

Oh my God, nobody’s honest on there! The pictures are always so much better. We all tend to make ourselves look better on there. I have some modelling headshots that I use, but obviously I don’t look like that every day. I use those, but I always keep that in mind, and try to put up pictures of me on a normal day too.

Rachel admits that she uses professional photos that are not accurate of her everyday appearance, but she also maintains that she is not being dishonest by including the other photos as well.
Some people are too honest.

Admittedly, this code is relative to what the participant’s experiences are, but more than one person hinted that they believe the revelation of too much factual information can be problematic. Pete believes that his profile is too honest, and has already suffered from it:

I want to be approachable. I just want to be honest too. You want to be able to talk truthfully about the things you put in your bio. I think mine’s too honest. I put a lot of personal info in my bio, and it’s already bitten me in the butt. I’m not scared for people not to like me. I’m most scared of putting all that honesty on my page, it shows my courage.

Pete’s previous comments suggest he is consistent with his feelings towards honesty, and this current statement shows that he believes that he puts too many private details (possibly phone number, other screennames, or personal feelings) into his profile, and has already suffered some consequences. However, he feels that by putting this information on his profile he is able to reveal an important character trait (courage). From the other side of the interaction, Todd suggests that profiles that seem too honest or include too much information, present a negative image of the person:

I remember, I’d see people with paragraphs describing themselves and I always thought it was kind of funny. I don’t want to sound negative, but it seemed desperate. This person is telling everyone everything about themselves, and 99% of the people you’re never even going to see or ever meet in real life. Talking about if they like long walks on the beach. The funniest thing is that there would always be girls on there with Bible verses. So, you definitely swipe left on those because those are the girls who definitely aren’t down to… I personally just don’t believe anything I see on Tinder. If I see a profile that’s telling all about someone, I think this must be complete bullshit.

Todd’s comments seemingly reflect his sentiment that the people who spend more time crafting a profile are obviously more desperate than the average user because they have invested so much into a predominantly futile pursuit. His statements on “girls with Bible verses” imply that his goals are sexual in nature, and that when girls are honest about endorsing a seemingly Christian lifestyle, he chooses not to match because they are either not promiscuous or totally lying about
their character. In summation, Todd proposes an idea that people who are too honest in their profiles are obviously lying, possibly to create an idealized version of their self.

Statistical Findings.

The following hypotheses were created to test the relationship between IIs and honesty in the context of dating apps and websites:

H1a) The degree to which people are honest about themselves when online dating will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

H1b) The degree of honesty people expect from others when online dating will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of their IIs.

For each hypothesis, a linear multiple regression was carried out with backwards stepwise selection to investigate the relationship between the online IIs and honesty – self/other in online dating. For the first regression, the ten characteristics and functions of IIs (Table 13) were all tested on honesty – self, and then removed one by one until the model only included significant variables. Based on the following Coefficients table (15), compensation ($\beta = -.343; \text{df} = 1; p < .01$) was the only function of IIs that had a significant association with honesty – self in online dating. The negative beta weight indicates a negative relationship between compensation and honesty – self; lower compensation in IIs equates to higher levels of self-honesty in the participants. The model fit ($r^2 = .113$), shows that compensation explains about 11% of the variance in honesty – self. Overall, the model was statistically significant ($F = 28.99; \text{df} = 1; p < .01$). For honesty-others, a second regression was run in the same method to include only significant variables. Table 15 denotes that frequency ($\beta = -.191; \text{df} = 1; p < .01$) was the only characteristic of IIs that had a significant association with honesty – others. The negative beta weight signifies a negative relationship between honesty-others and II frequency; more frequent
IIs associate to less honesty in others. In this model \( r^2 = .036 \), frequency explains about 4% of the variance in honesty – others. Overall, the model was significant \( (F = 8.24; df = 1; p < .01) \).

### Coefficients – Honesty-Self

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### Coefficients – Honesty-Others

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Table 15

Trust

Trust is a similar theme/factor to honesty, but can most easily be seen as a separate construct by examining the interview data. The trust theme goes beyond the simplicity of whether or not people lie as in honesty, and encompasses a deeper mix of loyalty, intimacy, and respect as a relationship develops. In online dating, partners cultivate trust through the sharing of gradually more personal information, which can lead to expressions of intimacy and relationship satisfaction (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer., 2006). Table 14 illustrates the thematic breakdown for trust, including the 5 codes relating to the theme: 1) Don’t trust anybody, 2) Similar to F2F relationship, 3) Much harder than F2F relationship, 4) Verify ID with other apps, and 5) Easier to trust people on campus. These codes represent the positive and negative aspects of trust relevant to online dating and CMC, as well as in comparison to building trust in F2F relationships, and
will be expounded upon in the following sections.

Don’t trust anybody.

One of the main aspects of most of the codes in the trust theme is that people find it hard to develop and/or maintain trust on dating apps and websites. For many reasons, participants explained that it is difficult to place their trust in the people/profiles they come across, but their main sentiment in this code was to take a guilty until proven innocent approach. Mandy suggests that the connotation of the app or online dating itself presents a situation where trust cannot manifest, “Honestly, I don’t trust any of them. I mean pretty much, we’re on Tinder. I literally don’t go in thinking I can trust this person.” Interestingly, Mandy has a profile and subjects herself to the app, but does not believe that she could find a trustworthy match. Comparably, Todd states that he does not believe people are trustworthy because he has seen people he knows from F2F relationships publishing false information and pictures on their profile:

I do not think they’re accurate at all. Obviously, with Tinder, I see people on there that I know, and it’s like their best picture ever on their profile. Whether they’re pushing their boobs up for a selfie or like the girls with the Bible verses, so they’d put this good Christian image out there, but you can’t believe that.

Todd has continued with his prior awareness of an idealized self that others are trying present, and suggests that this is also a major reason for not placing trust in individuals on dating apps or sites. He is observing a division between F2F and CMC personas by having prior knowledge of people before seeing how they represent themselves on the app or site.

The participants, as a whole, had mixed responses as to whether it is harder to trust a person while messaging them and reading their bio information, or the believability of their pictures. Lauren implies that the textual information (stories, descriptions, etc.) that people use to define their personalities is usually erroneous in nature:

Well, I don’t think it’s pretty accurate how people describe themselves in their bios. I
don’t think they’re ever actually giving you a real sense of who they are. Like I see people’s profiles and they have pictures showing that they like to do things, but they really don’t like to do things, they just like to text. For me, it’s a fear of being screen shot, so I try to limit what I say. Like I’ll talk sexually, but I limit what I say because there’s zero trust in that situation.

Lauren indicates her fear of being screenshot as being a major reason she does not place trust in other individuals when messaging on dating apps, but she also mentions a frustration with people who portray an active lifestyle and actually just want to text rather than go out. Her comments show that people often choose to portray themselves (with words in this case) as social individuals, but tend to have a more solitary lifestyle. Joseph’s testimony on trusting appearances online further perpetuates the growing trend (in this study) that females have more acceptable deceptive tactics at their disposal:

I think it’s a lot easier for a girl using the app to be like ok here’s what this guy looks like, because girls are going to put up the best pic of themselves, throw a filter on it…Like girls will take a thousand pictures and send all of them to their friends and be like which is the best one. I have sisters, I have friends, I’ve been told they do this. If a girl’s just gorgeous and you’re looking through her pictures, and they’re all great makeup or no makeup, then yeah, you might believe that, but then you get girls where their first picture is great, but by the time you get to the last one it’s not even the same person. It’s impossible to trust what you’re seeing.

Joseph believes that the only way to truly gauge the attractiveness of a girl on a dating app or site is through the consistency of her appearance with and without makeup in her pictures, but even this could be an incorrect judgement call, so in the end, don’t trust anybody.

Similar to F2F.

Not all participants in this study believed that trust is an impossibility on online dating apps and sites; some were of the belief that trust is cultivated through these technologies much the same way that it is in traditional F2F relationships, by spending increasingly more time communicating and relating over different topics and activities. Mandy repeats an earlier idea that Facebook profile information tends to be outdated, so chatting with a match becomes the
best way to get an accurate idea of who they are:

Most guys really don’t use Facebook, and Tinder is linked to Facebook. So, they have like freshman year and high school pictures on there, so you really have to genuinely talk to get to know what they look like in person. Like one guy I met, had freshman year pledge pictures up, and I’m like I’m pretty sure you don’t look like this anymore, you’re about to graduate.

Mandy does not insist that the men she is matching with online are being deceptive necessarily, only that they are inept at keeping their Facebook profile up to date with recent pictures, so having a dialogue wherein pictures are eventually (presumably) exchanged fortifies trust. Sheila shares this sentiment of communicating to find out more about what the person looks like, as well as how they might behave:

It’s more talking to them. You can look completely different in your pictures than you do in real life. I like to play 20 questions, I ask questions like, how do you act around your family, what do you like to do for fun? Because I’m pretty active, and if you like to chill a lot that might not work. I try to get an idea of them based on people I’ve met in the past. I see if there’s someone I know who’s similar to this person, so I can get a grasp of how to interact with this person.

Sheila thinks that through sharing conversations with a match, and asking them questions, she can better gauge what type of person she is interacting with. She also points out that she uses similar F2F relationships and people she knows to serve as the basis of how characterizes people she meets online. On top of more breadth and depth of messaging, Pete believes that more pictures and other nonverbal channels should come into play similarly to F2F interaction, “[Trust] comes with facetime, pictures…If you’re comfortable with yourself, you shouldn’t mind. I want the full perspective, then I feel like when you message, you can get to know them. Are they guarded? Are they open? What?” Seemingly for Pete, recreating F2F interactions with as many nonverbal channels as are available to CMC replicates the courting experience as accurately as possible, and allows for the cultivation of trust. Megan is not trying to recreate the F2F experience, but she does also believe that more pictures and information should be included
her matches’ profiles as a symbol of trust:

I trust what you’re saying if you’ve got pics with people. if you’ve got something to backup who you say you are. Like if you say you like to fish, and you’ve got pictures of fishing then that makes sense. The more open a profile is, the more I trust it. Like if it’s one picture and it’s just you, and I don’t learn anything about you then yeah I don’t trust you.

She is basing her belief of trust on the amount of detail that potential matches choose to put into their profile, as well as the consistency across descriptions and pictures; she believes that trust can be earned the openness.

Much harder than F2F.

The current category, contrary to the previous code, was based in statements and stories from the interviews that contend that trust is more difficult to nurture in CMC rather than F2F relationships, and at times even impossible without F2F interaction. The biggest difference between interactions in CMC or F2F domains is the presence or lack of nonverbal cues. Todd considers the anonymity/lack of cues inherent to dating apps to be a pitfall for trust:

I think it’s a lot harder to trust somebody online. You’ve seen the show catfish, but I think on Tinder and everything you can be anything you want to be. I could make a profile today and literally say anything I want, and nobody would know. So, I have some skepticism, but I do think it’s possible to trust someone online.

It is not a shining endorsement of trust online, but he still believes it to be a possibility in the dating domain fraught with fakes and liars. Marcus also agrees that trust is possible online, but much harder to achieve:

I think one of the big things is the conversation that goes on between you two. Like how they respond to a message and what they say back or not responding. I feel like with online dating, it’s much harder to know the person than face to face meeting them in public. It’s harder to interact because you’re on the computer, the phone, social media and you’re not able to see their face or expressions all the time, so you’re really just exchanging words. Harder to know the person in general.

This statement from Marcus shows that he feels trust can be built through little things like
dialogue and responses, but for the most part, achieving trust is much more of a challenge to CMC relationships.

Other participants’ responses indicated that they do not believe trust to be achievable without an F2F interaction. Rachel insisted that the anonymity accompanying CMC prevents trust until F2F meeting occurs, “I mean you get to know them. For me, you really have to hang out with them face to face. Anybody can portray anything online.” In addition to Rachel, Emily also stated that she would need F2F interaction, but added a requisite duration in order to develop trust:

I like to let people earn my trust. Personally, it takes me a while. If I’m meeting them online or whatever, I’d have to hang out with them a few times in person. I feel like you truly don’t get to know someone until you interact with them face to face and you’re around them for a certain amount of time.

Her comments show that she needs to see the person multiple times, possibly in multiple scenarios, to assess whether or not they are trustworthy; by giving individuals opportunities to gain her trust, Emily sees it as a temporal process. Sheila declares that the only way to establish trust with someone from a dating app or site is to meet them in-person for some unmediated eye contact:

I feel like you can’t build trust until you get offline, off the app, and get to meet the person face to face. You can’t tell anything off a text message, it’s all false. I could be smiling doing something with another guy sitting here texting you sweet nothings. You have to meet the person in real life, look into their eyes when their talking to you, see if they’re telling the truth.

Once again, a participant has suggested that the lack of nonverbal cues available to most CMC formats allows for deceptive behaviors to flourish.

Most participants did end up stating that trust was, at the least, harder to sustain online versus off, but James offers a slightly different perspective on the lack of cues:

I feel like you can only build trust if you make yourself vulnerable. When you talk to
them, you have to really try to get to know them. You have to talk several times a week, make yourself available, tell them about yourself, your issues and make yourself vulnerable. I never allowed myself to get into it like that. The reputation that Tinder has given itself, nobody is willing to do that. I’ve allowed myself to get like that in real life – like I’m giving this person the power to hurt me, but in real life I know you from a different angle than from behind the phone. I have a better chance to get a better vibe about you. Even getting to hear somebody’s voice is much better to me than texting.

James’ comments reveal a few deep-seated aspects of his views of trust that he relates back to the lack of nonverbal cues. First, he states that in order for trust to develop you have to invest time, energy, and feelings through deep conversations about important and personal matters, but then he disclosed that he’s never given himself the opportunity on Tinder because of its low prestige as a matchmaking service. Finally, he surmises his response with the thought that he has more information in nonverbal cues to be a better judge of a person’s character.

Verify ID with other apps.

A person’s Tinder account is directly linked to their Facebook account/profile pictures and information from the time they sign up for the app. The dating pool is generated off of friends and friends of friends in the same networks on Facebook. Generally, participants said they use this and other apps to get a better idea of people from their multiple online profiles/personas and pictures. Pete commented that he looks at common friends from the same social networks when available:

Everyone that I have a mutual friend with on Facebook, I go find our other mutual friends immediately. I’m just trying to look into other pictures, see what they’re saying on their profiles, is their profile active. Things that help me get a clearer picture – like on their Instagram, I read their captions and how they respond to comments on their pictures to get a good idea.

In essence, Pete has triangulated a person when he is able to read their profile information, and look at their pictures and connections on three different networks (Tinder, Facebook, and Instagram). He can observe inconsistencies to the point of locating what he believes to be an
accurate portrayal of their persona.

Emily also has her Tinder account linked to Instagram, but still suggests that people are using outdated photos, “I have my Instagram linked to my Tinder, because if you don’t, you must be a catfish. I’ve also run into issues where people are using their high school pictures and they’re in college, and then we’ll facetime and I’m, ‘like wow that’s not you.’ I mean it may be you, but it’s not you now.” Emily goes so far as to say that if you are using Tinder and not linking your Instagram and other social media accounts, then you must be lying about your identity. Craig shares Emily’s sentiments from a male perspective:

I really go for the people who have their profiles linked to Instagram, I can’t really go off FB. There are older pictures, and you can’t go off that. I feel like if your Instagram matches up with what you’re saying in your profile and messages then you might be genuine, but I guess you really don’t know people’s ulterior motives.

Craig also uses Instagram to get a better idea of his possible matches because Facebook is seemingly outdated among this population (given the several indications in these responses), and the pictures there are more recent and accurate. Sheila insists that this is a normal practice, and that she is seeking out this abundance of information to ensure others’ sanity (not her own):

If you said you went to a certain university or something – first I’d check if it was real if I’ve never heard of it, then I’d look in your pictures and a lot of guys would have graduation pictures or degrees. And since it’s linked to Instagram, I’ll creep. I call it research, just to make sure you’re not a psycho; I look for somebody intelligent and ambitious.

Sheila mentions that she checks to make sure that the college affiliation is accurate – originally mentioned in the honesty thematic findings – and whether or not they had graduation pictures, as she is interested in motivated, aspiring men.

Mandy has also had experiences with matches whose outdated photos did not match their current appearance, but she verified via Snapchat:

Like this one guy, had really cute pictures and I wanted to snapchat, and he sent me
another picture, and I was like ‘ooh you’ve definitely aged since then.’ Snapchat is confirmation, like do you look like this tinder picture, because when you watch shows like catfish, I’m like how’d you not know? If you don’t send pics on snapchat, you know something’s up.

Snapchat, as an addition or alternative to Instagram, creates opportunities for the sharing or streaming real-time/live video and audio. Online daters who use it believe it to be the ultimate test of identity due to its synchronous nature. Beyond Snapchat, Lauren recaps a time that here identity was confirmed via phone call:

It’s like let’s exchange numbers so I can make sure you are who you say you are and not some creep, because anybody could fake a profile. So we move off the site and exchange numbers. One guy wanted to call me to make sure I sounded like a female, because I guess he’s had some bad experiences. So I was like, ‘yeah, ok…Hello, this is me. It was a little bit awkward.

Lauren was asked, and complied, to partaking in a phone conversation to verify that she was, indeed, a female. She explains that the situation was a minor hindrance, but nothing too far out of the ordinary.

Easier to trust on campus.

A few participant responses have already mentioned that Facebook being intertwined with Tinder permits users to see each other’s mutual friends that they could possibly already have interacted with F2F on campus. Megan suggests that, for her, these kinds of apps are better suited for college campuses/towns because of the substantial student population (young people), “I think it depends on where you are. Like, outside of a college town I think it would be sketchy and less successful because of the wider age range and interests. I trusted it because of where I was – I’m in kind of a bubble here on campus. I only set my radius in the search for 1 mile.” Megan believes that by restricting her search radius to campus, and only using it in town, that she is narrowing down her possible matches to people closer to her age, and most likely students with similar interests.
Joseph and Sheila both gave testimony that directly refutes the prior paragraph by stating that they felt as, or more comfortable on the app or site when using it away from campus/school. Joseph implies that looking close to campus as well as further away can both produce favorable results, “With Tinder it’s just open season. Everyone’s out there for a certain radius. You could go 2 miles or 20 miles. You could pick up people from campus, or 20 year olds from Montgomery.” Joseph was very comfortable looking near or far away from campus for matches, but Sheila insisted on maintaining a healthy distance from campus while using the app, “I deleted it when I got to town. The pool was different being in Atlanta, then coming here it was smaller and seeing people from class was uncomfortable.” She does not enjoy seeing people she knows on the app, and being back in a college town gave more of the same matches, being that they are generated from Facebook friend lists.

Statistical Findings.

The second hypothesis (H2) sought to test the relationship between IIs and the trust factor/theme; it stated that the degree of trust that people expect to develop when online dating will be significantly associated with the characteristics and functions of IIs. A linear multiple regression was carried out in a backwards stepwise variable selection method to test the significance of the relationship between the II characteristics and functions and trust in online dating. The ten variables from the factor analysis (Table 13) were all included, and then removed one by one until the model only included significant variables. According to the following Coefficients table (16), frequency ($\beta = .232; df = 4; p < .05$), self-understanding ($\beta = .306; df = 4; p < .05$), catharsis ($\beta = -.246; df = 4; p < .05$), and compensation ($\beta = .230; df = 4; p < .05$) were the characteristics and functions of IIs that were significantly associated with trust in online dating. The overall model fit ($r^2 = .224$) shows that the set of variables explain about 22% of the
variance in trust. The model, as a whole, was statistically significant \( (F = 15.51; \text{df} = 4; p < .05) \).

### Coefficients – Trust

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Table 16

**Stigma**

Online dating technology has been in existence since 1995, meaning an entire generation of people have grown up with digital matchmaking as a normal option for romance. The continued proliferation of dating apps and websites, coupled with a growing focus on millennials and more social functions of technology have created a climate wherein relationships facilitated through apps and smart phones is becoming the norm. As more young people are taught how to relate through media and technology from younger ages, the stigma will assuredly continue to dissipate. However, technology has still not perfected or replicated true F2F interaction into a CMC platform, and the anonymity and ambiguity inherent to most platforms create stigma (Cali et al., 2013). This theme, stigma, refers to the possible negative feelings of shame or disgrace associated with using dating apps and websites for relational purposes. Three main codes for the stigma theme are listed in Table 14 and explained in detail in the sections that follow: 1) Would rather meet/talk in person, 2) Everyone uses dating apps, and 3) Alcohol erases the stigma.

Would rather meet / talk in person.
Many participants noted that they would rather just meet or talk to their matches in person. It is not difficult to understand why, considering that their matches are generated from Facebook friend lists, and radius can be set for search results; they have just as much opportunity to meet them in-person as they might have to become a successful match on a dating app. Craig’s words illustrate this point, and also recognize the staggering differences in CMC and F2F interaction. “You start seeing people you know on there, and I’m like, ‘why don’t I just go talk to her and not type?’ It’s a whole different scenario when you’re face to face than when you’re on the phone.” Craig seemingly thinks that it is a better dating practice, in general, to approach an interest F2F if the opportunity is available. James shared similar feelings during his interview session:

I swipe, and as soon as I got a match I would usually send a message like hey what’s up, what’s your major, blah blah blah. I want to say I’ve talked to people I’ve liked, but I just don’t think online is the way to do it. I feel like I should have that initial face to face meeting, and then just take it from there. It’s like, ‘I know you through Tinder and through the phone, but I’m probably going to hang out with the girls that I know in real life.’

James describes the process of pursuing an interest online as if it is a monotonous homework assignment, and expressly states that he does not believe online dating is the way to form successful relationships.

Others also shared James’ views that the current online dating technology does not create an environment for meeting potential partners that is as comfortable or successful as F2F encounters. Sheila explained that she thought the practice was at the very least, strange, “My friend got me into it. I was just bored and wanted to check and see what the hype was about. I don’t really like meeting people online. I feel like it’s kind of creepy.” Sheila’s comments indicate that she felt that some of the associated stigma was compensated for by the fact that her friends asked her to join, as well as her own ennui, but that was not enough to overcome the
shame of using dating apps. A few participants explicitly mentioned Tinder as carrying its own stigma as a dating service. For example, Megan does not consider Tinder to be a legitimate means of relationship building technology, “I would still be embarrassed to say I met someone on Tinder. I think everyone for the most part doesn’t take it seriously when it comes to finding a relationship.” She states that having to admit that a relationship started on Tinder would be embarrassing because of the lack of seriousness afforded by its users, insinuating that it could also be an admission of less than chaste beginnings. Rachel shares an equally damning opinion of Tinder as an illegitimate means of matchmaking, but also suggests that CMC, as a whole, is an obstacle to successful relationships:

For me, it’s always been awkward. It’s just awkward, that’s the reason I didn’t continue using it. I mean, ‘how’d you guys meet?’ ‘Tinder’…The stigma is definitely there. It’s just not my cup of tea, I think when you do the whole online thing it builds a barrier. Overall, a negative experience.

This selection shows that she thinks that online dating, regardless of app / site, is not a worthwhile endeavor, and in the end will not lead to satisfactory results.

Everyone uses dating apps.

Every participant included for analysis in both strands of this study (N = 232) first answered yes to whether or not they have used dating apps or websites with the purpose of find a match or date. The initial 12 interviewees all had significant experience and stories to share, and most of them endorsed the code that everyone uses dating apps. Lauren believes that the experience is uniform across the board, “I think it’s pretty typical for everybody my age. Even talking to my friends…me and my friend have sent the same guys the same basic message. I haven’t heard any stories where anything new and crazy is happening to people.” Not only are the experiences similar between her and her friends, but they have actually sent the same people the same messages. Pete also discusses how he believes the experience to be pretty typical:
I think it’s overall typical. Online you can find someone to connect with. You may live in a small town and think there’s nobody for you. Online there’s such diversity, and so many people are on there. So, typically you’ll message a girl or like a few of her photos and she’ll be like, thanks for stalking me…I know it’s weird, but I’ll get that too – we’ll like each others photos and comment, and then either one of us will send a message. Then you have a place to start the conversation. Most of the time, it moves off the app.

His testimony mentions the idea that online dating apps and sites offer a match for anyone, and summarizes the archetypal experience.

Other participant responses centered around the notion that everyone at school already has some familiarity with dating apps, and it is not uncommon to see many acquaintances or friends’ profiles. Joseph insists that dating apps are predominantly used for getting to know people at school, “Just like, why not? Obviously people want to have sex and stuff. Definitely more about getting to know people around campus. It can’t hurt to be out there, who knows, anything could happen – you could actually meet someone genuine on there. Anything’s possible.” Joseph views this profile much the same way others would view a Facebook or Instagram profile; he believes that Tinder doubles as another social network on college campuses. Craig also shares the thought that dating apps give you a better idea of who’s available at school, “I would say that upon using these apps and stuff, you get to see the people around campus. People you know and stuff. Like, if you see a girl from your class or something, you might swipe right on her to see if she swipes back.” Craig’s statement implies that he knows users on the site already, so he might show interest by trying to match them. Todd also remarked on the amount of familiar faces he witnessed during his initial foray with Tinder:

It was just a fad, I guess. Going through pledgeship, all of my pledge brothers are like, ‘Have you seen Tinder?’ They all had it, so it was just the thing to do. I remember first downloading it with all my friends at the same point, and then everybody had it. I’d see like 30 or 40 people that I knew online at one time.

Todd admits that he downloaded the dating app during a time when most new college students
are developing their peer groups, and social networks as they have just arrived on campus.

Alcohol erases stigma.

Alcohol has been shown to be a disinhibiting factor in the field of first dates (Goldman & Roehrich 1991; Mongeau et al., 2007). In the current study, it emerged from the interview testimonies to function as a disinhibiting factor on the perceived stigma associated with using dating apps and websites. Several participants indicated that they tend to use Tinder in conjunction with alcohol to make it more of an entertaining experience. Todd’s comments show that he believes many Tinder users also use the app or site while consuming alcohol:

Honestly, I don’t have Tinder anymore; it was more of a drunken download – I think a lot of people use it like that – just for fun when they want to see who else is looking. I guess it was positive, I got a lot of matches. I didn’t have a bad experience. It was nice seeing a lot of matches on there.

Todd expressed that even though he downloaded Tinder out of a drunken fever, he still had an overall positive experience with the app, and seemingly would recommend it to others for similar purposes. Megan also shares how alcohol and Tinder make a solid mix for entertainment:

We used to play this drinking game where you would have to message your first Tinder match with some ridiculous pick up line, like do you believe in love at first site or do you need me to walk by again? I always got messages back, but if you weren’t willing to hang out with the person, then it didn’t go anywhere.

Megan insists that using the app as a flirtatious game to break the ice typically resulted in positive responses for her, and even had the prospect of moving into more serious territory if she had so pleased. Joseph indicates how alcohol consumption can influence the Tinder usage from a slightly different angle:

I know a lot of people, and I’ll do this as well, you know if alcohol is introduced into the equation, you just like swipe right on everyone. Doesn’t matter who it is or what they look like, just to see who’s going to swipe as well and then you could always unmatch if you’re not about it, and other times you’ll go through it more seriously, but in the end it’s all the same result.
Joseph’s comments speak more to the disinhibiting nature of alcohol than the previous two statements. He explains that there are times when he has been consuming alcohol, and he matches with every possible profile that comes into his feed/search regardless of his interest in them. He is only considering whether or not he would pursue the person after they have denoted themselves as a match. He even goes further to say that he can unmatch with the ones he is not fond of once he soberes up.

Statistical Findings.

Hypothesis three (H3) was generated to explore the relationship between the stigma associated with using dating apps/websites and IIs, such that stigma is significantly related to the characteristics and functions of IIs. A linear multiple regression was carried out in the same backwards stepwise variable selection method as was used to analyze the first and second hypotheses. The ten variables from the factor analysis (Table 13) were all included, and then removed one by one until the model only included significant variables. According to the following coefficients table (17), self-understanding ($\beta = .355$; df = 3; $p < .01$), catharsis ($\beta = -.232$; df = 3; $p < .05$), and relational maintenance ($\beta = .336$; df = 3; $p < .01$) were the functions of IIs that are significantly related to stigma in online dating. Self-understanding and relational maintenance had a positive relationship with stigma, while catharsis maintained a negative association; IIs with more catharsis function are the only statistically significant characteristic or function of IIs that reduces the stigma of online dating. The overall model fit ($r^2 = .21$), indicates that the set of variables is responsible for 21% of the variance in stigma. The model, as a whole, was statistically significant ($F = 18.8$; df = 3; $p < .01$).
Overall Experience

This theme includes a personal assessment of the participant’s own experiences, as well as the level of interaction that they achieved with other users. Table 14 shows the thematic categorization of statements made and how they have been coded: 1) Good/Bad experience, 2) Entertainment/Hookup/Friend, 3) Different goals for different apps, 4) Developmental / Age-specific phenomenon, 5) Easier/The norm to meet people online. Relational satisfaction in online dating has been shown to be primarily made up of intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction (Anderson & Emmers-Sommers, 2006). Following the thematic analysis in the previous chapter, the factor analysis for overall experience illustrated how the current theme broke into two components (assessment and activity). The following sections explore the theme in terms of the 5 codes, and the assessment and activity factors found during both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Good / Bad experience.

“How has your experience with using online dating sites and apps gone,” was the first question every interview participant was asked (Appendix B). Every participant gave an indication that they had a positive or negative experience, and many of them recalled memorable
stories and people, or their archetypal interaction. Several participants communicated positive experiences with happy thoughts or memories about online dating. For example, Megan illustrates a typical interaction with a potential match:

So I see a guy I like …. Swipe right, if you match then a message. And if he said something not obscene, then you’d start with small talk, school and major, and then you decide if you want to meet them. So if it was like a Friday night, I’d say something like, ‘Me and my friends are going out here tonight, you should come if you want.’ I feel like some people just liked having somebody to talk to, but at least it was entertaining. I haven’t had a ton of experience, and I I never really took it that seriously. It was successful for some people. Overall, a positive experience.

Megan attributes her optimistic outlook of online dating to the calm approach that she takes toward Tinder. She acknowledges that she has yet to spend much time on the app, but that she regularly arranged loosely-structured meets – she did not set a dates, per se. Pete had an overall positive experience as well, but for different reasons:

It’s gone pretty well. I’ve met a lot of people, actually. With dating apps, you meet people really quickly. At first you catch a glance and you’re attracted, and then from there you really connect with that person if they like you back. Pretty successful and positive experience for me.

He has enjoyed his experience because he has taken the online dating world seriously, and established genuine relationships with people he has been physically attracted to online. Whether serious or lighthearted, participants reported positive experiences associated with dating apps and websites.

There were also several stories and instances of interviewees having negative experiences and opinions dating apps and websites. Megan insisted that there were three general types of initial interactions that played out for her:

Once you’re matched, they can message you or not, and obviously you’re not going to get one from everyone – and in the south, I think the girls are not going to message the guys. They’re more hesitant. There’s usually 3 scenarios, the weird pickup line, the funny one, or the normal hey, what’s up. Then you have typical conversation, like what are you doing this weekend? Like hey, I’m going here, we should meet up. Then we’d exchange
She lists the obscure pickup line, the comedic gesture, and the normal greeting as the three prototypical initial messages that she received, and then explains a mundane standard exchange that usually followed if there was any interest. Marcus also had predominantly negative experiences with dating apps:

I initiate the contact, after I look at a profile that may have sparked my interests, whether it’s something we have in common or I like their personality or something about their family I liked. I think I’d usually send a message, but a lot of times I’d like a picture or something on their profile. I say Hi, my name is Marcus. Nice to meet you, I saw your profile and pictures and became very interested in them. I’d like to get to know you more. Then I start asking questions more about them. A lot of times they’ll reciprocate the conversation, a lot of times they’ll bring up a new topic, like something about me. Or if like, they notice I like country music, they’ll ask what’s your favorite artist or have you seen this singer live in person in concert? I would say it’s been a negative experience. I did a bunch and tried it for a few years. The most recent one I tried was Tinder, I tried it out for a while, and that one’s actually a lot different from the others. It’s just a swipe right if you like someone. I found one or two matches that were interested, but overall, it was negative. I also did a dating website for people with Autism, which is what I have. I did this for a while, but I’d say I didn’t get too much luck from them. I found some girls that were interested in me, but I never found a real match unfortunately. On the autistic dating site, there weren’t really matches out there for you. I think I may have had one. Never went on a date or anything.

His comments present a thorough negative review of his overall experience with many different dating platforms. He explains that his typical search for matches has been largely unsuccessful regardless of the app or site he tries. Marcus also notes that Tinder is a vast departure away from traditional dating technologies, but that it still was a negative experience for him.

Other participants also noted Tinder’s unique format, and explicitly blamed their negative experiences on the app itself. Sheila’s thoughts illustrate Tinder’s unfavorable format:

Tinder is like a game honestly, that’s what it is let me just swipe right, swipe left. I didn’t enjoy it. So, you swipe right, maybe like an hour or so later you usually get a message and you’ll message back and forth. After about a day or so, you’ll probably exchange phone numbers and the texting continues from there. In a good week you’ve probably talked to this person more than anyone else, and it’s just somebody new and you want to
keep talking to them. That’s when you decide if you want to let it grow and see what happens, or just let it die. Like I started using it back in November [4 months prior]. I downloaded Tinder because my friend met a guy over the summer and told me to check it out. So I downloaded it, met a guy, we went on a couple dates, that was it.

Sheila is not fond of the constant swiping of profiles (left – reject; right – accept/match) and equates it to the playing of other casual games on her phone. Even though she discusses meeting someone through the app, and the possibilities of deep/intimate connection, she still has a negative impression of Tinder. Mandy explains that she regrets ever using Tinder from the beginning:

Definitely not successful at all. I dunno, I kind of hate that it ever came about to be honest. It was definitely negative. Oh, God! I’ve run across a lot of jerks, and done things I’m not proud of – let’s be honest here. It’s just been a lot of jerks for real. The Internet is a scary place; Tinder showed me that.

Mandy’s testimony reflects her opinions of Tinder as a cesspool for crude and offensive behavior, going so far as to say it open her eyes to the horrors of the Internet. Her experience was very clearly negative in nature, and supports other participants’ views that Tinder is not a good tool for online dating.

Entertainment / Hookup / Friend / Serious.

The interviewees gave several different reasons for why they began using dating apps in the first place, but the most effective way to classify their answers was based on the level of seriousness that they were looking for in an interaction. Also, some participants’ answers gave the impression that their intentions may not be mutually exclusive, so the research is best served by constructing this code as a continuum rather than completely separate points (Entertainment – Serious). Most participants indicated that entertainment was their main intention on dating apps, but a few did indicate that they do legitimately use it in hopes of finding serious relationships. Marcus explains that he could ultimately see himself getting married to someone from a dating
app or site:

I think I was having trouble meeting people for some reason. I wasn’t going to lots of clubs or social activities, and I think that was the problem. I wanted to try something different, see if I got something out of it, and met somebody. I’m searching for somebody that’s really independent like I am, someone who has a good education, and works hard like I have. I think that’s a really good trait to have in a person. I would like to find a long-term relationship with somebody or – I’m not expecting a short term relationship – but I would like to find a long-term relationship or a relationship that could grow deeper and deeper, and hopefully get married one day.

Marcus clearly respects online dating apps and websites as legitimate means of finding/meeting romantic interests, and believes that the relationships with the highest levels of commitment can be forged from them. Mandy also had hopes for something closer to a serious relationship, but more of a friendship rather than romantic interest:

I was really bored, and just wanted somebody to talk to. That’s the intention I went in with, maybe somebody to text and snapchat you know. More like just friends or companions and if it got to hanging out that was cool, but mostly just talking.

Mandy’s description of her goals with online dating sites shows that her longing for companionship stems from her own boredom. This could be from a lack of stimulation or human communication; a void that she is trying to fill with people she meets on dating apps and sites. James stated that his desire to use dating apps grew from boredom as well:

I’ve never built a real relationship off it. The only one I’ve used it Tinder. Tinder is something I use when I’m bored. Like no female contact bored. It’s a positive selfishly. I feel like the end goal is a one night stand honestly. You’re really just picking up someone strictly off their looks. Nobody goes in depth in their bios. I think my experience was the basic experience. You talk to some people, maybe you meet up or maybe you don’t, but the relationship isn’t going to last. I mean, I don’t know anybody who still talks to somebody that they met on Tinder.

James disclosed that he is not interested in a long-term relationship, but his pursuits are not strictly for entertainment value; he stated that he only logs in when he is trying to satisfy a personal desire for female contact/companionship. He does believe that a meaningful interaction can occur, but long-term relationships are not possible.
More commonly, participants suggested that dating apps and websites are generally a form of entertainment rather than a sincere pursuit. Rachel asserts that her own intentions were unclear to her, “I don’t even know if I was looking for a partner. I think I was just doing it because I had never tried it before, but when you’re going off of that… obviously somebody who’s attractive.” While she does admit that she does not know for certain if she was legitimately looking for a partner, at the very least, she was looking for someone attractive – most likely in case something did work out. Sheila also states that she does not know her true purpose for joining, but finding a fun experience was a main goal:

I don’t know. I guess my goal was to see if I could find any fun on Tinder, but I don’t really know what I was looking for. I was just on it to be on it. Whenever guys would ask, I would say to meet new friends, but not a relationship. No, I didn’t go into thinking I’ll meet somebody, I just did it because I was bored. It’s awfully funny reading some of the people’s bios.

Sheila admits that she told possible suitors that she was not interested in a relationship, and that she enjoyed perusing the comedic aspects of the catalog of profiles available to her on Tinder. Todd was sure of his intentions, and declares that entertainment was the sole reason for him using dating apps:

Sometimes, me and my friends would get drunk and say stupid things on there, but I never pursued meeting up with someone or anything like that. It was pretty much for entertainment purposes only. I don’t think the majority of people are looking for anything serious, but I do know people who have gotten serious on it.

Alcohol has already been discussed as most likely having a disinhibiting effect on the stigma users might associate with dating apps. Now, it is being used to illustrate the trivial nature of dating apps according to Todd, and shows how he believes that saying “stupid things” to potential matches is a form of entertainment for his peer group.

Different goals on different apps.
The multitude of different dating apps and websites available to potential users creates several different perspectives on appropriate behavior for each respective platform. Many participants intimated that they have (or would have) different goals for different apps. Todd considers Tinder a hookup app:

It would vary from app to app. On something like Tinder, I’m looking for a casual hookup. If I was on something like Eharmony, I would have more expectation for a meaningful relationship. The connotation of the app just makes it not serious. Like me and my friends, if you’re actually going to meet up with someone on Tinder then you’re definitely just looking to hookup.

Todd draws a clear distinction between Tinder and Eharmony, such that Eharmony has the ability to produce serious connections versus the promiscuous nature of Tinder. Several other participants also remarked on the casual, hookup behavior predominant on Tinder, and alluded to the idea that people seeking serious relationships would be best served on other apps. Rachel suggests that Tinder is an app predicated on attractiveness, “I had a picture of me going out with my friends, that I cropped out and zoomed in. I remember if you had multiple people in your pictures, guys would be like, which one’s you? If you’re not good looking, you’re not going to do well on Tinder.” In her eyes, the decision to match with another user is solely predicated on physical attraction, which would most likely translate to a physical relationship.

Sheila describes an experience she deemed as typical to Tinder, “One guy messaged me a picture of his lower parts. We had matched, and I had my snapchat on my profile, and that was the first thing he sent me. I deleted him immediately. That’s the kind of culture I picked up off Tinder.” One of her matches felt comfortable enough after swiping right to lead off with a picture of his genitalia, and she labels this as a normal occurrence on the app – a sign that hookups are a prime goal for many users. Like Todd, Megan also suggests that there are other choices besides Tinder for people seriously looking into dating apps and websites:
Like, my 80-year-old grandpa wanted me to set up an eharmony and match.com profile for him last summer. Obviously, that’s a totally different arena, like he was so scared to send an email because he wanted to look respectable. In this particular situation, it’s not as serious because we’re on Tinder. It’s not like I didn’t take it seriously, because at some point you – you know if you meet somebody intriguing obviously it’s fun – but it was more of just an entertainment value. But, if I’m 30 and it’s not looking good. I’ll absolutely go on eharmony or match.com. I think they’re a little bit more trustworthy, and the people on those sites are looking for something a little more serious than Tinder.

Megan shares the story of creating her grandfather a respectable account on sites eharmony and match.com, but insists that maintaining self-respect is not a goal on Tinder because it is not as sincere as the other platforms. Mandy discusses the differences in platforms and intentions in terms of membership costs and individual differences:

I mean, it varies on the person. I work with a girl who met her fiancé on Tinder. Don’t know how that was possible, but I guess it depends on the person. I think it’s more negative overall, because so many people using it with the wrong mindset. I don’t think people who use Tinder and Plenty of Fish have good intentions, but if you pay for something like match.com and eharmony and all that I feel like it’s a little more true, because you’re paying a fee each month rather than just downloading an app and going. I feel like POF for if you’re kind of looking for a relationship and companionship, but Tinder is more about, ‘Ok you swiped right, I swiped right. Let’s get to it.’ Then they start sending and asking for nude pics.

She believes that once people become more invested monetarily, then they have added reason to pursue a more substantial or serious relationship. She also notes that Tinder was a negative experience for her, but she places more blame on the individual users rather than the site itself.

Joseph also places thinks dating apps similar to Tinder are more casual by design, but he puts the emphasis on the expectation of sexual language and behavior as limiting the successful navigation of relationships, rather than the actual experience of it:

I would say it’s positive because it’s definitely not negative, but if you’re looking to like meet your wife on Tinder you’re not going to...Tinder, bumble it’s all the same the category. You know attraction is what catches your attention, but if a girl’s bio is like “only looking for friends” or “not looking to hookup” you’re probably going to be like no…I don’t need anymore friends. Especially if I’m going to meet you on Tinder. I feel like people close themselves off, because they assume if they match with someone they’re just going to hit them up for sex. I won’t say anything’s impossible, but with
Joseph clearly has his own expectations for some type of physicality in a relationship, and he states that apps like Tinder and Bumble support this with their short-term design, but he also indicated that he’s actually interested in an emotional connection as well. Contrary to Joseph’s thoughts, Lauren suggests that sexual language and the expectation of it do not hinder the interaction:

I’m using two so far, I’m using Tinder and seeking arrangement – it’s more of a sugar daddy, casual dating type of thing. Don’t really know how to explain it. Tinder is sometimes a good experience because you’re meeting more people your age or closer to your age, and they are closer to you… and on seeking arrangement, the men are much more graphic, especially the older men. Seeking Arrangement is more tailored to older men, so the language is much different. It’s full sentences, it’s not so basic. It’s really complex. The pictures are actually worse than the ones on Tinder, it’s more provocative. There’s not a picture where I’m not showing any skin. Tinder is more just to have someone to talk to, but with seeking arrangement I expect more out of it. With Tinder, I have zero expectations for meeting someone, I mean I would like to, but I don’t expect to. With seeking arrangement, I have people willing to buy me plane tickets to go somewhere. So it’s really like if I want to, there’s a great potential with that rather than Tinder for me. With Tinder I don’t have an expectation.

Lauren’s experiences illustrate how two seemingly similar sites in Seeking Arrangement and Tinder can be immensely different in terms of users and acceptable/customary behavior. Seeking Arrangement is a niche dating platform grounded in the idea that the women and men can search each other based on a mutually beneficial relationship; typically, the man provides financial support and stability for other goods and services expected in a casual relationship. Lauren’s testimony shows that sexual behavior and sexual language do not limit the interaction on other platforms, and insists that even on similar apps she has different goals.

Different goals on different apps was a common code among the participant responses,
but there a few interviewees that insisted that they have the same goal with each matchmaking app or site they use. Pete claimed that he was interested in finding a meaningful relationship regardless of the platform, “I have the same goal for all of them. I’m not about hookups, but I’m more into a relationship. Sometimes situations occur, like if you go out drinking and if that happens, then so be it. I just don’t want a one-night stand.” He acknowledges that physical encounters are part of the dating scene, but that is not his primary interest. Marcus also declared that he wanted a serious relationship regardless of the app or site:

I would say I have the same goal for every dating app and website I use. I want something real. I enjoyed eharmony for a while, but match.com was my favorite. For some reason, they gave me more variety in my matches. I think eharmony matched you more closely based on your personality and characteristics. So, that was the one thing; I had thousands of matches to choose from on match.com, but eharmony would give me like 10, and that’s not very many at all. There was more variety on match.com, and I never went to these, but match.com has these events around town that you could go to. So I thought that was pretty interesting.

Marcus noted key differences in the matchmaking process and community makeup of eharmony and match.com, but insisted that his intentions remain the same across platforms. Interestingly, he believes that eharmony gave him more precise matches, but the amount of matches that match.com produced sway him to preference it as his personal favorite.

Developmental / Age-specific phenomenon.

Several interview participants indicated that they had been active with dating apps or sites in the past, but had since stopped using them for different reasons. Mandy admits that she is not proud of the way she has used Tinder, but believes it is only a phase in her life, “If we’re being honest, I don’t know, back then I went through this phase where I was lonely in life and if you showed me a little attention. I used it the wrong way. I definitely don’t think I’ll be on it long-term.” She needed the interaction to help her through a lonesome period in her life, and is confident that she will not require it in the future. Many participants also suggested that they had
signed up when they were younger and were just getting started in college. For instance, Megan insists that she joined because her friends at school did:

I mean, everyone had it. I’m from California, so when I got to school everyone was trying out, so I wanted to join in. My friends had it, and I thought it would be fun. It was the thing to do when Tinder came out freshman and sophomore year. It was kind of fun. I went on Tinder double dates, but never went on my own. I went for support.

She came across the country to a new school and peer group, and decided that she wanted to join Tinder to experience what her friends were doing. She also states that it was a big part of her social life during her freshman and sophomore years. James also discusses how he began using Tinder because of his peers’ successes:

My friends were talking about it, and I had just moved here to start school. Then my one friend brought a girl around that he had met from Tinder, and I was like if he’s meeting girls on Tinder then I want to meet girls on there. I think Tinder, at least with the people I came in with, has run its course. I don’t hear about it anymore; it never comes up anymore. I think it was an age thing. Like, maybe freshman still use it, but my age group doesn’t.

James goes one step further than Megan and says that he and his friends joined when they started school, but had outgrown Tinder in the years since. He believes that young people use it to meet their needs in a major transitional period in their lives.

Participants also proposed that many of these apps and sites are specifically designed to target millennials. Rachel, a graduating senior, suggests that Tinder has run its course by the end of undergraduate studies:

I don’t think Tinder’s as serious as other apps. I think it’s more of a millennial targeted app. Maybe I’m out of the loop, but I’ve never really heard of older people using it. I think it was kind of like a popularity thing. It was the beginning of my sophomore year. A bunch of my sisters were doing it, and I was just like this is not for me. I think it’s faded out, we’re all seniors now and none of us use Tinder now. It’s almost comical if we know people who have it. Back then it was kind of like a trial and error thing, now it’s been around and gone around. If you have Tinder, you’re desperate.

According to Rachel, Tinder is specifically for millennials, and “older people” who use it must
be desperate. She contends that she and her peers went through a honeymoon phase with Tinder getting acquainted with the technology, but ultimately it is not socially acceptable for people to use it long-term. Joseph also thinks that Tinder is for younger people:

"I feel like if you were looking for a more intimate thing you’d probably be on match.com or something, and at that point, I definitely think you’d be a little bit older...because I think if you’re on match.com, and you’re like 19, you’re probably better off going on Tinder to find your relationship."

He notes a difference between age groups and the associated matchmaking services, and he also relates them back to the intentions/goals distinctive to each platform.

Easier / The norm to meet people online.

The final code under the overall experience theme was created from participant statements that suggested it is easier to meet people online, or that it is no longer taboo to start a relationship via dating app or website. Craig explains that the lack of nonverbal cues creates a comfortable environment for sexual/playful exchanges, “People talk very flirtatiously on these apps, probably more so than in person. Everyone’s a lot less nervous about what they’re saying or how it’s said behind a screen. No one ever wants to be intimate or expose themselves in person.” Craig believes that people are too guarded in F2F situations to allow themselves to be intimate with new interests. Megan also claims that it easier break the ice online, “As far as keeping interactions casual, it’s a great app. You learn to interact with people on a really casual basis. Like if a guy comes up to you in the bar, it’s a lot harder than if he would’ve sent you a message.” She explains that she would prefer to have an initial CMC interaction with a potential love interest rather than F2F because it creates a more relaxed climate. Lauren also praises dating apps for their removal of awkward F2F first meets, “Well, I’m introvert so I very rarely go up and say hey I like you. I travel a lot, so with Tinder it’s easy to meet people you just wouldn’t normally get a chance to.” She mentions her personality trait of being an introvert, and describes
how Tinder allows her to get past her fear of initiating conversation with people she might be romantically interested in. It also gives her an opportunity to meet people on the app, because she regularly travels and can take the dating pool with her. James also gives Tinder credit for eliminating potentially socially awkward first meetings:

Well on Tinder, I look for a girl who I think is attractive. I mean, I’m not picky. I like white girls, black girls, Spanish girls, you name it. Where I’m from you have more freedom culturally. It’s not as looked down upon in New Jersey as it is in the South, and on Tinder you have a better chance of getting past that at first.

James expressed that he does not feel like he has had the same opportunities to meet women outside of his own culture in this region of the country as he would in his home state. Tinder offered him a method to circumvent the cultural prejudices existing and less avoidable in F2F social interaction.

Participants were generally grateful for the relative anonymity and ambiguity offered to them by dating apps and websites, however, some were also not as enthused. Joseph described his negative feelings on the normalization of dating technology:

Most of the time, I won’t even message them. Like we’ll match, and if she wants to message me then she can. I’m not very quick to message people. Like there’s this one girl who lives in my building, and we matched on Bumble. I see her sometimes. I saw her this morning. I just think people are very afraid to speak to people verbally. Now you have to text these girls forever...and like when my parents were dating they didn’t have cell phones and obviously they weren’t talking every day. I think that’s a huge problem in society today, people are so connected that they always want to be connected, and it’s annoying. When girls expect that, it turns me off completely. I’d rather hangout in person for like 2 hours a day, than text them from the time I wake up until the time I go to sleep. It kind of pisses me off. It’s become such a social norm in today’s society.

Joseph longs for what he describes as an idealized time before personal devices and cell phone technology when romantic partners were not expected to be as connected to each other. He sees the growing reliance on technology as a hindrance to human relationships, and even described a neighbor with whom he had matched on Tinder, and sees regularly, but has still never spoken to
because it is becoming decreasingly socially acceptable.

Statistical Findings.

The final hypotheses (H4a and H4b) were drafted to explore the relationship between IIs and both overall experience factors (assessment and activity). They both stated that the characteristics and functions of IIs would be significantly associated with overall experience – assessment and overall experience – activity. Two final linear multiple regressions were carried out in backwards stepwise variable selection methods to test the significance of the relationship between II characteristics and functions and over experience. The ten variables from the factor analysis (Table 13) were all included in each regression, and then removed one by one until the models only included significant variables. According to the following Coefficients table (18), retroactivity ($\beta = .200; df = 2; p < .05$) and self-understanding ($\beta = .196; df = 2; p < .05$) were the only characteristics and functions of IIs that were significantly related to overall experience – assessment. Retroactivity ($\beta = .275; df = 1; p < .01$) was the only characteristic significantly associated with overall experience – activity. The overall model fit for assessment ($r^2 = .13$) suggested that retroactivity and self-understanding explain approximately 13% of the variance in the factor, and the model fit for activity ($r^2 = .10$) implies that the retroactivity explains 10% of the variance in the dependent variable. The models for assessment ($F = 15.84; df = 2; p < .05$) and activity ($F = 17.87; df = 1; p < .05$) were both statistically significant.

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Imagined Interactions

Imagined Interactions (IIs) have not realized their full potential in the context of CMC, especially in the subfield of online dating research. Berkos (2010) found that the majority of online IIs take place with romantic partners, and also identified dating and social plans as two of the six major subjects of online IIs. In the thematic analysis (Table 14), four codes were used to categorize participant responses: 1) I have them / they are normal, 2) I create un/realistic expectations, 3) I edit / practice messages based on anticipated responses, 4) I edit self-presentation / pictures based on anticipated responses. The interview participants were briefed with information about the study, including that they would be asked questions about how imagination factors into their online dating experience, but the concept of IIs was not formally used or defined. The sections that follow thoroughly explore the four codes mentioned above, and answer both RQ1 and RQ2 by examining the role IIs play in online dating.

Have them / normal occurrence.

Most participants consistently discussed imagination as a normal, everyday occurrence in their use of dating apps and sites throughout the interviews. Pete claimed he has IIs often, and described the things he imagines, “I do this a lot. Usually, I imagine what we could talk about or if it’s just a headshot, I try to imagine her body. How they walk, how they talk, laugh, everything.” Pete makes it clear that he regularly uses IIs to make up for missing information in
profiles; he is especially interested in the specific details of how his matches would appear, communicate, and behave in F2F scenarios. Rachel described how she uses IIs in a similar detailed fashion as Pete does:

I think that’s any natural response – to wonder what someone’s like after you see their picture. Like oh, they have really big muscles, they must work out. If I see somebody in rugged jeans and cowboy boots, I may think they’re really southern. They may prove you wrong, but that’s just natural putting 2 and 2 together. I may think like, ‘Oh, it may be fun to go hang out with him.’

Rachel describes a process through which her IIs construct all of the missing pieces of potential match. She utilizes precise details from her prospects’ photos to create her own image of who that person is.

Others also admitted that IIs were a normal occurrence when online dating, but some of them did not experience the same amplified level of detail. Todd stated that his IIs were typically general experiences rather than precise episodes:

Yeah, I picture most girls’ profiles I come across, but when I would do it, it was pretty superficial. There’d be times I’d be swiping through and see a really attractive girl and think, “Yeah, I’d really like to meet her.” I always looked at it more like pretty face, swipe right. I never really actively engaged in too many conversations. There were girls that I saw on there, where I’d picture running into them at the bar and hanging out, but nothing too specific.

Todd stated that he has IIs rather often, but that they are not very specific in terms of details. He also admitted that the bulk of his IIs were superficial, and that he has more of an expectation for physical romance. Megan divulged that she spends more time with profiles that hold her attention:

So, if on their profile they have enough pictures to learn something about them, you’d see something like a guy and a girl. Then you start wondering, is that like a previous girlfriend, or is that his sister. I mean I have tons of pictures with my brother, so I’d wonder who that is. I’d wonder where he’s from if he had a very pretty picture of the mountains, or if he just visits there. You come up with stories, you know, from I don’t know… He’s wearing a bathing suit, so does he go to Florida a lot? Does he have fraternity letters, or where he comes from or what he does? I mean, I feel like I analyze a
profile a decent amount if I'm interested.

She primarily visualizes how her match looks and behaves by dissecting the minutiae she sees in his photographs; before ever speaking to him, Megan has constructed his life story and personality in her imagination. Emily also predominantly used visual imagery when imagining her matches:

I could probably tell if they were into music, if they had band t-shirts or instruments in their pictures. So, I guess the photos were the main way. I would often imagine what they're like in real life. People always post things like they're super happy people, but then you meet them in person and that may not be the case.

Emily uses profile pictures in an almost identical manner as Megan; she used small, specific details she found in the photos to construct her own image of her matches.

Other participants relied on other specific details in addition to photographs, to construct their images of their matches. Todd insists that age is an important piece of information to have when thinking about potential matches:

If I see a girl that's like drop-dead gorgeous. I think, man, I'd just like to sweep her off her feet and get her hooked on whatever I'm working with. I'll picture making her laugh, different ways to make her want me. Maybe if they say where they're from. It definitely helps to know - like it says your age - if I'm a sophomore and I can tell a girl's a freshman or senior it's going to impact how you approach them. If you know you're working with an 18-year-old as opposed to a 22 y/o what you might say will be different going for an older girl compared to a younger girl.

Todd uses his imagination to mentally picture positive scenarios wherein he is succeeding at wooing his match. He highlights the age of his prospects as prescribing his communication for any subsequent interaction. Marcus indicated that his sometimes overactive imagination frequently takes him years into the future with potential matches:

Yes, I definitely would say I do that [mentally picture prospective partners] a lot. I have a bad habit of getting too obsessive with them. I'll think about in the future, like when are we going to married, are we going to have kids and all that stuff. I do think about stuff that far, but I also think about us going on a date or having a good time. So I think about a lot of stuff in the future, but I've been trying not to get too far ahead of myself, because
after all you know I just met the person. I don’t share these with the person, but I do do it. I think there’s a little bit of talking, but it’s more me imagining things going on between us. Especially, if it’s somebody who’s like drop-dead gorgeous. Like, the sites I’ve used eharmony and match.com, when I’m browsing through my matches, if I see somebody attractive or very attractive, I start to have these imaginary thoughts about going on dates and having fun. I do it a lot before I contact them, but I would say it stays about the same even though we start messaging each other. I think if the relationship was deeper, like going on dates, I think I would probably do it more. But when I first meet that person, I try not to obsess over it too much.

He admitted that his imagination can lead him to be borderline obsessive at times, and he explained that more attractive matches equate to added visual IIs, but he acknowledges that he must set realistic expectations, and continue to practice grounding himself in socially acceptable experiences before moving too quickly. Interestingly, he also postulates that his IIs would most likely strengthen and occur more frequently as the potential relationship progressed.

Create un/realistic expectations.

There were several stories involving participants using their imagination to create expectations for their potential matches. Megan explained that she creates mental pictures based off a combination of textual profile information, pictures, and initial messages:

If a guy could get my attention with something like, ‘What’s your favorite flavor of pop tart?’ then I Would respond. If they said something creative, then you can see their personality via message. The effort made it feel like less of an attempt for a hookup. And like I said, if their profile is interesting. If you can show your personality through 140 characters or so, then that’s kind of badass. Like, I want to talk to you. You’re fun. I’m so quick to judge people by their profile, but if they had any kind of personality in their pictures too – I mean it’s weird if you’ve got like weird selfies, but if you’ve got a fun picture like in a group, that tells me that you’re social, that’s cool. Show something that you’re interested in, more than just your face.

Megan’s IIs for suitors that used more creative tactics in their messages involved her envisioning highly creative people with higher intentions for a romantic involvement. She especially praised the ability of her matches to reveal unique aspects of character in their limited textual exchanges or posts. Rachel implied that interests and passions are the biggest pieces of information that help
She believes that by knowing her matches interests, she can assess whether or not their personalities would align for a successful relationship. Many participants discussed having had lofty hopes for their prospective dates, but insisted that their ideal image was not always congruent with the real person, “When you see a profile picture, you construct an image in your brain and say, ‘She likes this and this, and she looks like this, so she must act like this;’ sometimes they meet the expectations you set for them, and sometimes they don’t” (Pete). His comments show that his IIs for potential relational partners are inconsistent in accurately predicting personality and behavior.

Several participant testimonies insisted that the expectations that they created were often more appealing than the people in the profiles. Sheila recalled a specific instance of her expectations misleading her:

Yeah, so this one guy I went on a date with…he was black, so like, from his bio he had an Android picture on there… I usually don’t date guys with Android phones, but I was like, ‘whatever.’ He was interested in sports, like soccer, and we were in the same city, and we found out we went to the same high school. He was born in Spain, and I just imagined this intellectual guy who had like an accent, and he told me he was developing apps and all. So, I had this genius in my mind, who’s muscular and into soccer, and I meet this guy in real life and there’s no fireworks. I was so disappointed, such a letdown.

Sheila used several context clues, including conversations she had with the guy, pictures and information in his profile, as well as his occupation and interests, to create an ideal image that did not match up with the person she met F2F. Joseph also described how he does not think people live up to the expectations potential matches set for each other based off online presence (profile, pictures, etc.):
Yeah, sure. I think a lot of people do that [mentally picture prospective partners], if not everyone. I think a lot of people see something, and they might try to visualize in their mind how they would like things to go, but I don’t think that reality ever matches your expectation. Like, obviously you imagine yourself being the victor or something, saying all the right things, being suave. That’s how you rehearse in your head how you’d like it to go, and reality usually doesn’t, but then again for myself, I probably don’t put myself out there enough. The stuff I think in my head, is not stuff so far out there that I wouldn’t actually say it, you just don’t know how people are going to react to you. Internally you’re always battling that, like what is socially acceptable to say or do.

Joseph practices (in his thoughts) himself winning the interaction with potential dates by generating interest for himself with his own charming charisma. He notably pointed out that his expectations not being met might actually be his own fault for not living up to the persona he creates for himself in his IIs.

Other participants suggested that in constructing expectations for potential matches, they often found difficulty having enough factual information to create a mental image. Craig explained that he believed females were deceptive with their photos, and that this created contradiction in IIs and reality:

I hate when you’re swiping, and you come across a profile that a girl and her, like, 20 friends. I’m like, ‘alright, some of them are attractive. Maybe I’ll get lucky and she’ll be one of the hotter ones,’ but I think that she’s probably ugly. Or a girl will put a picture with her extremely attractive friend, and you don’t realize she’s not the hot one until later on. I think people are swiping based on the first picture.

Craig believes that females that he considers less attractive often use more attractive friends in their main display photos to entice more potential matches to select yes. He did also assign a portion of the responsibility to users swiping yes to a match based off one picture, when there are several more available to view, but he maintains that females use deceptive tactics so their matches have no choice but to create a better mental picture. Lauren also believed that her IIs can be misleading because people are disingenuous in their profiles:

Yea, actually I do this a lot. I like try to match up their personality through pictures with their words, bc that’s normally how you can tell if they’re a catfish or not. I had one guy
before talking about all this sports stuff, but all of his pictures and friendships didn’t match up at all. I always think it’s just like some girl playing games. Really a lot from their words, like slang. There’s this one guy that uses ‘bruh’ a lot, and I’m like culturally...hmmm. I don’t really see this person in these pictures, and I try to imagine him saying it and nah I can’t.

She explained how people’s words and profile information often did not match up to their pictures, and that she usually believes that females are actually creating many of the fake male profiles that she has encountered.

**Edit / Practice messages based on anticipated response.**

The only repeated measure used during the qualitative interview process asked participants to explain if they had ever edited a message online based on how they imagined the other responding, and to give a recent example if they had (Berkos, 2010). Pete described that he does this because he is afraid of being turned down, “Most of the time, if I’m intimidated, I’m like, ‘What could I even say to this person for her to respond to me?’ I’ve had a lot of friends that are girls say, ‘Oh, this guy just messaged me, what do I do?’ I just don’t want the rejection.” He thinks through possible message content until he is confident that his words will elicit a response.

Todd also discussed how imagining anticipated responses shaped his messages:

Definitely, if I think I’m starting to say something pretty mean I’ll always back down from it. There’s times when girls will text me pictures, and it may take me like 30 minutes to respond because I’m going through everything to say. Also, I take my time when I respond anyway, but when I’m texting a new girl I tend to wait a decent amount of time between messages. I don’t want to seem like I’m too interested. I don’t want her to think, oh he’s too into me.

His comments show that he is generally very careful in responding to messages as he is reviewing multiple responses and scenarios in his mind, but he also likes to create a measure of mystery with new interests, so he waits longer to give them time to let their own imagined interactions take place as well. James shared Todd’s sentiments regarding new interests:

You don’t want to come off too strong. If someone I was excited about swiped right on
me, I would have to check myself and be like, ‘Hold up, this isn’t how you want to come off.’ I can remember meeting this girl on Tinder and wanting to ask her to come over like third message. It was like, ‘Hey, what’s up?’ ‘I’m good, how are you?’ ‘Come over?’ So I had to rethink that.

James explained that he was more careful about his communication with matches he was particularly interested in, and would try not to show his true level of interest. Marcus also shared a similar experience as well:

Yeah, I can remember one or two instances where that’s happened. There was one instance when I was typing a message to this girl I liked, and I think I asked this question too soon, but I was asking if she wanted to go on a date, and I just met her, so I decided not to. Like, asking a personal question like, ‘How many exes have you had?’ You probably want to save that for a little bit later. So I just keep the conversation simple, and don’t ask anything too personal. Just keep the conversation flowing.

Todd, James, and Marcus have all suggested that they can be overzealous with new matches, and have had to curtail their communication because they believe that they are showing too much interests. Ironically, they are imagining how their potential matches will imagine them.

A few female participants also indicated that they play things safe when they are communicating with new matches, and have had to adjust their comments to reflect an image they were trying to present. Lauren explained that she regularly edited her initial messages to matches to maintain a level of sophistication she associated with herself, “Yeah, in general I like to be poetic. So anytime I meet someone and I think I’m being too simple, I will change it a million times. Like, I feel like I’m complex so it’s really strategic for me.” She pointed out that her communication in this domain is highly strategic, an aspect of CMC communication that can lead to hyperpersonal encounters (Walther, 1996). Rachel also suggested that she is strategic when communicating with new matches:

I think when it comes to that, I’m pretty bad about sending something, and being like, ‘Aww crap, I should’ve worded that differently.’ Especially if it’s somebody new though, I am more careful. You don’t want to use too many exclamation points and seem weird. I don’t want to come off as too excited and super interested.
Much like her male counterparts, Rachel does not want to give the initial impression that she is very interested in her new matches because she perceives it as socially undesirable. Not all female participants were concerned with seeming too interested in their initial messages. Sheila, for example, described how she has had to curtail her emotions and communication:

If I feel like it’s too wordy I’ll delete my message. Like with this guy, he was very anal and type A, and I like to go out with my friends and have fun. He told me he didn’t want a girl to go out, because he didn’t want to worry about her. He wanted her to chill and watch movies, and play video games. And I was about to go off, but I was like, ‘Wait, I just met this guy.’ I ended up deleting the message and changing the subject. I had a whole paragraph ready… only sent three words back.

She did not want to tell her match how she truly felt because she had not yet gotten to know him well enough, and the security of the connection/relationship was far from assured. She edited her response to him based on her idea that he may not continue talk to her, but she was obviously not too concerned, as she only responded with three words.

Edit self-presentation / pictures based on anticipated response.

The previous section explored how participants edited their messages based on the anticipated responses of potential matches; this section investigates how they edited their self-presentation and pictures. Lauren described how she expected people to view her profile,

All of my pics are pics of my face, and then I have further pics that are of my body. I kind of got the impression that’s what people care about, and I learned to put my height in my bio. That’s one of the first things people will ask you. I noticed a lot of people mention it in theirs too. I also mention that I’m a student at [university] because it gives me a little bit of prestige.

She uses several pictures of her body, and included her height because she believes that her potential matches are interested in that physical information. She also imagined that people would see her school affiliation and hold her education in high regard. Megan insisted that the main goal of the profile pictures and information that she used was to present her in the best
possible light:

My pictures were synced with Facebook. I think you pick like 5 or so, and obviously you want to look good. You don’t want a tagged photo. In my main profile, it was my friend and I, so it was like, ‘He is going to have to guess.’ My bio was stupid and totally cliché, like, ‘I like long walks on the beach. If you’re going to do it, just do it.’ If some people had a funny bio, and it made me laugh, then I definitely matched them. If there was an ounce of personality, I would totally match. In my other pictures, I’m like wakeboarding and snowboarding because I wanted to look cool. It’s not really a lie, it wasn’t like I said I could play a violin. The point was to make me look good.

She suggested that she has created an amalgamation (through pictures and text) of different aspects of her personality to create her best self. She has a specific idea of the person she wants people to see, and she enjoys creating a little mystery by not having a solo main profile picture. She imagined that her potential matches would envision a “cool” girl. Joseph also insisted on not having a solo picture, and felt that he wanted his profile to represent his best possible self, but did not appreciate the university Greek culture spilling over into the dating social network:

I always think the first picture is the most important, because if you have a picture of something weird, people are probably going to be like, ‘Why even bother at looking at the other ones?’ So, you always try to put your best foot forward. So, I have a picture that I particularly like of myself with a few of my buddies from New Year’s. It kind of creates that mysterious, I wonder which one he is. Then the next one is a picture of me rock climbing just because it’s something I do. It might tell you something about me before you even know who I am. I tend to look at girls’ pictures, see if they’re in a sorority or not. Like, not all of them have it up there. I don’t have my Greek letters on my profile. I think people here think it matters much more than it does. I’m from NY, I didn’t grow up in the South. I grew up in Brooklyn. I feel like people who come from the city are a lot more open minded about just diversity in general. Some people in Greek life down here get the idea that just because I’m in this sorority I have to associate myself with people in that fraternity, and it’s just a status thing. I feel like if I put my Greek letters up there, someone might be like, ‘No,’ just because of that. So it’s like, ‘Why say anything that will let someone know who you are too quick? You lose that mysteriousness.’ Like, if someone wants to talk to you because of your pictures or what you said in your bio, your Greek affiliation shouldn’t matter…and it shouldn’t matter in general. It’s all about the person, that’s something people don’t tend to think about in a quick hookup situation. Girls might say it doesn’t matter, but it matters. People care too much what other people say about them.

Joseph explained that he chose his pictures to represent different aspects of his personality, so
that his potential matches could begin to create their own mental image of him. Interestingly, he
pointed out that Greek affiliation is usually considered a status symbol to his peer group, but that
he would feel limited in his possible matches if he included his own. His overall goal in his
profile is presenting enough information to give his potential matches an idea of who he is,
without telling the whole story.

Summary

Online daters chose to present themselves the way that they do in their own profiles to
highlight personality qualities of honesty and trustworthiness, to minimize the subsiding stigma
associated with dating apps and websites, and to maximize their overall experience in terms of
their own assessment and activity level. These same themes that they want to communicate as
being representative of themselves are also how they rate and select potential matches. Most
people feel that they cannot fully develop trust over a dating app or website without having some
face-to-face interaction, because it is impossible for people to communicate or portray
themselves with total honesty. Many people believe that dating apps have become a normal
means of relationship building, and others suggest that certain apps and sites have been geared
for specific age groups and type of relationship sought. For example, Tinder is the most popular
app/site among both samples in this study, and has been discussed as a millennial playground.
Imagination has been shown to play a prominent role in online dating that can influence
communication, self-presentation, and expectations of others to the point of hindering the
experience, because of unrealistic goals. Many people use their imagination to create their own
sense of potential matches personality/identity when information may be left out of their profiles
or conversations, and often this ideal is more alluring than the actual person. The interpersonal
construct of imagined interactions has been shown to be significantly related to trust, stigma,
overall experience – assessment, and overall experience – activity. The next chapter reviews these findings in relation to the entire study, and surmises the major strides made by this research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Review of Findings

Research Question One.

The first major question guiding this research probed the general practice of online
dating, by asking daters how they present themselves and experience others based on the
information and pictures available in their respective profiles. The research team purposively
selected six males and six females from the millennial demographic to participate in in-depth,
semi-structured interviews concerning their use of online dating apps and websites. There were
five main themes (honesty, trust, stigma, overall experience, and imagination) that encompassed
the many aspects of navigating online dating profiles, which ultimately became the central focus
of the entire study. Tinder was affirmed as the primary means of matchmaking software that
millennials used throughout each of the themes, which suggests that many millennials are not
seeking serious relationships via dating apps and websites during their college years. Gatter &
Hodkinson (2016) found similar results - younger people are more likely to use Tinder than other
dating services, and they are more sexually permissive than their older counterparts.

Honesty. Many people drew a clear distinction between Tinder as a casual endeavor, and
something more serious such as match.com or eharmony. It was widely referred to as a hookup
app, but every interview participant was actively involved or had at least tried Tinder at some
point, and still recognized it as a disingenuous matchmaking service. It is exceedingly prevalent,
and any discussion of online dating apps or websites for many people solely revolved around
Tinder experiences; it shaped their views and expectations for online dating and dominated the interview testimonies. For example, many people felt that they were as honest as they could be with their profile (still not 100%), but that it was harder to trust others because they expected them to lie to a certain degree on Tinder. Furthermore, being too honest and open can be seen as a desperate bid for attention, so users must perform a balancing act of trying not to reveal too much about themselves, while still providing enough information to create an alluring impression for others.

Research has shown that exaggerated self-expression can reinforce heightened expectations and evaluations of users when communication confirms the hyperbolic presentation (Walther, 1996; Walther et al., 2015). Participants in the qualitative interviews suggested that they were aware of the pervasiveness of self-hyperbole, but still try to confirm this exaggerated identity through other channels and communication. Consistent with this finding, Guadagno et al. (2012) found that male users tend to increase and exaggerate their positive online self-presentation when they expect future CMC encounters. Participants in the current study accepted selective self-presentation without refusing to pursue the deceitful other. Furthermore, users do not necessarily consider the heightened representation to be false – rather the absolute best version of the person that they may interact with, “You can look completely different in your pictures than you do in real life” (Mandy). In a study of sexual self-presentation on social media among adolescent users (12-18), Baumgartner et al. (2015) found opposite sex ratings of sexual self-presentation to be much higher than same-sex ratings, as well as popularity being the main reason for posting sexual images. Users expect their heightened sexual representations to improve their social desirability, so the inclusion of pictures that highlight their physical attributes typically manifest. The use of purposefully evasive and embellished tactics during self-
presentation (pictures, messages, and profile information) restricts the development of trust in CMC relationships, and creates a dating culture that lauds perjury.

**Trust.** For the most part, participants did not trust others based off interactions that take place solely through CMC channels. The need to have immediate feedback from all channels was the main reason F2F interaction was preferred for the successful establishment of trust. Even though trust was thought to be best cultivated offline or using audio/visual channels similar to F2F interaction, people used as many CMC social networks and platforms as were available to them to seek out further information on their matches. Interestingly, Facebook has seemingly fallen out of favor with the millennial demographic in this sample, as they privilege other apps such as SnapChat and Instagram for their personal verification efforts. However, Norcie et al. (2013) found that trustworthiness increased by presenting users with an interface (Certifeye) to fact check online dating profiles against counterpart Facebook profiles. People who refuse to share pictures via SnapChat were automatically considered catfish (fake, liar) because of the real-time audiovisual nature of the app. Most agreed that using other apps and mutual social connections to seek out as much information as possible on potential matches was a common practice during the initial stages of online relationship formation.

Millennial-aged online daters do not place personal boundaries on information that has been published on the Internet. For instance, many people praised others for recalling their personal information even if they did not realize they had shared it or made it available to them; users saw this as a positive relational milestone because of the time and energy investments associated with researching/snooping. Ellison et al. (2014) investigated relational communication/behaviors on Facebook (commenting, liking, posting ‘Happy Birthday,’ etc.), and found that higher involvement with one’s own social network via the app/site constitutes
relationship maintenance and can increase social capital:

We argue that behaviors captured by the Facebook Relationship Maintenance Behaviors scale serve a relationship maintenance function by signaling attention and contributing to expectations of reciprocal assistance, enabling individuals to access networks outside of their own, and reshaping attention filters within the system (p. 867).

Tinder automatically links users’ profiles to their Facebook accounts; daters can peruse their catalog of matches and investigate the associated Facebook profiles to see the extent to which someone is invested in their own social media networks. Participants in the current study suggested that many of their matches did not maintain a recent or noticeable presence on Facebook, so even further channels were pursued (i.e. snapchat). Users seek out as much information as they can possibly find on their matches to try to create a trustworthy depiction of the (often idealized) other.

**Stigma.** The online daters in the current study insisted that the majority of their peers have tried dating apps, and that they are a good tool for initiating relationships. However, the participants did associate stigma with using dating apps to maintain relationships. Stephure et al.’s (2009) results suggested that most user’s do not associate stigma with online dating, but those that do feel as though others will view them as desperate. These findings do not conflict with the current analyses; many participants noted stigma with dating apps after a certain ‘grace period’ wherein it is their rite of passage to find out how online dating works first-hand. People are becoming more comfortable initiating relationships with dating apps and websites because of the difficulty in starting casual conversations with potentially intimate strangers in F2F interactions. Most users also suggested that they joined at the behest of their peer group and other social pressures, and were mainly seeking amusement.

Millennials in the current study treat online dating as a playful game with no ostensible consequences for long-term interaction, especially if alcohol consumption is involved while
using the app. Alcohol consumption functioned in a similar manner as it does in F2F interaction, whereby it stimulated sexual arousal, communication, and behavior (George & Norris, 1991; George & Stoner, 2000). The actual source of stigma associated with online dating seems to stem from Tinder and similar hookup apps, but typically only exists if both parties are not interested in casual relationships. Using hookup apps in general was seen as a natural developmental step during young adulthood in people’s lives. It was often described as something that people do during their transition from high school to college to get to know others on campus, especially if they are moving to a new city and/or state. The geo-location options inbuilt to many dating apps allow users to set a distance radius for their potential matches; most chose short distances to maximize their chances of matching with people from school, but there were some who preferred larger areas and more unfamiliar options.

*Overall Experience.* The overall quality of experience that online dating can offer its users is contingent upon their relationship needs and goals. Those who were looking for substantial and meaningful relationships tended to report more negative experiences and interactions, while those who sought casual encounters and entertainment intimated more fulfilment with online dating apps. Gibbs et al. (2006) analysis of self-presentation in online dating similarly found that honest self-disclosure had a negative association with perceived success of the relationship. Users who are forthcoming with their intentions for long term relationships might have more negative experiences on apps predicated on more casual relationships, such as Tinder. Gibbs et al. (2006) suggested that more dishonest users may report more positive experiences in online dating because they are possibly withholding delicate and unappealing information. Most users suggested that they have different goals for different apps and sites, such that eharmony and match.com are used for finding committed relationships, but
those sites are geared for older demographics.

Hookups and casual encounters are the main purposes for using Tinder, but as previously discussed, Tinder’s reputation as a hookup service and its widespread adoption as the dating app of choice among millennials, restricts the actualization of more meaningful interactions and relationships; however, this does not negate the overall experience of its users. The enormous catalog of other single/available users and potential matches proved to be one of the major reasons people joined certain and/or multiple dating services. In F2F settings, users must communicate to learn important information about potential matches (availability, interests, occupation, etc.), and the fear of rejection can overpower their will to initiate contact. However, when online, users are generally presented with enough information in profiles to discern whether or not they would be interested in others before they even say, “Hello.” The lack of nonverbal cues inherent to dating apps and websites ultimately creates an experience that is easier and more enjoyable to navigate than traditional F2F social settings (Kreager et al., 2014). The absence of cues that are innate to F2F interaction also creates a necessity for users to exercise their own thoughts and imagination to make sense of ambiguous or missing information and interaction.

*Imagined Interactions.* Online daters regularly use their imagination to create expectations for their potential matches, to practice their communication before anticipated encounters, and to edit their self-presentation based on how they assume others will respond to them. Every participant in the interviews acknowledged using their imagination to get a better idea of their potential matches as a normal and frequent practice. Users are able to create an identity and personality using specific details found in profile pictures, communication patterns, and biographical information. Visual information such as amount of photos, contexts of photos,
and other people in photos all help users to create detailed mental images of their potential matches. Although users often judge profiles and set expectations through their imagined interactions, very rarely do those potential matches actually live up to the hopes that have been set for them. Users tend to create idealized versions of others based on positive aspects they select from the available context clues in profiles. Correspondingly, users also portray themselves with highly self-promotional/borderline deceitful strategies such as, manipulating photos, exaggerating interests and personal achievements, and falsifying true experiences or intentions. The alluring/erroneous self-image that users portray in their profiles serve as the basis for their potential matches to generate oft-embellished expectations (Hian et al., 2006; Walther et al., 2015).

Research Question Two.

The second question that shaped the course of this research asked, “How does the use of imagined interactions influence online dating?” During qualitative data collection, the interview participants discussed their use of imagined interactions in terms of mentally picturing potential matches based on available profile information, pictures, and dialogue. Imagined interactions, along with four other elements (honesty, trust, overall experience, and stigma), were posited as major themes of online dating after a thematic analysis was carried out. All themes were converted into factors in chapter three, and scales were created and adapted to test the new variables with an online survey measure. To answer RQ2, the relationship between the characteristics and functions of IIs and the degree to which the other factors/themes were present was tested. The results of the linear multiple regressions for each factor/theme are presented in the previous chapter, and are examined through the significant characteristics and functions of IIs in the following paragraphs.
**Characteristics.** The only two characteristics of IIs that were significantly related to the other major online dating themes were frequency and retroactivity. Consistent with this finding, Berkos (2010) found that most IIs occur with romantically linked partners and feature social or dating plans as main topics. In the current study, frequency of IIs had a negative relationship with honesty—others, and a positive relationship with the trust factor. These findings illustrate that more imagined interactions equate to higher levels of trust, yet lower levels of honesty in others. This could have two interpretations; first, that IIs are a positive interpersonal tool for CMC relationships because when used frequently, they assist in trustworthy initial impression formation regardless of honest self-representation in others, or that frequent II use creates and reinforces unrealistic initial impressions based on lies. The qualitative data findings support the second claim that users place their trust in impractical figments of their own IIs. The evaluation of dating profiles is predicated on the activation of IIs, such that more frequent usage produces greater faith in others. This can make the online dating process even more challenging for some, by magnifying the negative effects felt by users when relationships and interactions are terminated or abandoned.

Retroactivity was significantly related to overall experience—assessment and overall experience—activity. The overall experience theme split into two factors; one based on the user’s self-reported satisfaction levels with his or her overall experiences, and the other grounded in the level of intimate activity actualized during his or her time on dating apps. Retroactivity, as an intrapersonal feature of IIs, refers to the act of reflecting on past experiences and either reliving them or picturing how they could have played out differently. The significant survey items that loaded on the overall experience scales all asked participants to reflect on their current or past involvement with dating apps (i.e. I have enjoyed using online dating apps and websites; I
have had sex with someone that I met from a dating site), so the presence of retroactivity is not at all surprising, and supports the reliability of the scale.

Functions. Self-understanding, relational maintenance, catharsis, and compensation were all found to be significantly associated to at least one of the other six factors under analysis (honesty – self, honesty – others, trust, stigma, overall experience – assessment, overall experience – activity). Self-understanding was significantly related the level of ratings and had a positive relationship with overall experience – assessment, stigma, and trust; more IIs geared toward self-understanding are related to higher levels of each of these factors. The analogous relationship self-understanding IIs share with the assessment and trust factors suggests that users enjoyed and trusted their experience and matches more if they imagined their encounters as teaching them something about themselves. Surprisingly, stigma also shares a parallel relationship with self-understandings IIs, such that more imagined self-learning experiences raised ratings of stigma. The more online daters utilized IIs for self-exploration, the more stigma they associated with dating apps and sites. The frequency distribution in Figure 2 illustrates the pervasiveness of Tinder among Millennials; over 75% of the respondents from the quantitative measure, and 100% percent of participants during the qualitative interviews use Tinder as their primary means of online dating. The previously discussed negative connotation of the matchmaking service as a hookup app could possibly be the reason self-understanding IIs have a positive association with stigma.

Much like the self-understanding function, both relational maintenance and catharsis were also significantly associated with the presence of stigma, but relational maintenance had a parallel relationship to the factor and catharsis had a negative association to it. Relational maintenance IIs equating to more stigma on dating apps reverberates the qualitative findings;
most participants indicated that dating apps were acceptable for initiating relationships, but unfavorable for the preservation of them. Participants felt that committed relational partners did not need access to the catalog of single/available potential matches, as it would only promote delinquent behavior. Catharsis had a negative relationship with stigma, indicating that as stigma levels went up catharsis levels went down, and vice-versa. Cathartic IIs typically involve mentally picturing some behavior or communication encounter that would ordinarily be socially unacceptable, for the end result of expressing an emotional release (i.e. imagining a sexual encounter with a stranger – or a hookup). Users can use cathartic IIs to experience emotions and situations that they may not feel comfortable with in F2F or CMC settings. Fewer cathartic imagined interactions equates to higher levels of stigma; when daters are not using IIs to release pent up frustrations or emotional impasses, they perceive more shame from online dating.

Catharsis also had a significant negative relationship with the trust factor/theme. More cathartic IIs linked to lower levels of trust; users that experience higher levels of trust most likely do not exercise cathartic IIs as often because they are trusting of others with whom they interact, and do not have a need to privately express any emotional outbursts. Compensation was also significantly related to trust, as well as honesty – self, but it upheld a positive association with trust and a negative relationship with honesty – self. IIs that were used to compensate for a lack of F2F interaction were correspondingly related to an uptick in trust and a downturn in self-honesty; daters who use more IIs for compensation feel that they can trust others at higher rates because they have constructed a more complete (most likely unrealistic) mental image and identity of others, but they do not feel as though they are honest about themselves. The lack of F2F interaction could possibly cause users to enact IIs with the compensation function wherein they are imagining an idealized version of themselves, based on the heightened expectations they
Several theoretical extensions and implications have been presented by the current study; five major themes (honesty, trust, stigma, overall experience, and imagined interactions) of online dating were revealed, and imagined interactions have been shown to be an integral tool for understanding them, and CMC aspects in general. Imagined interactions were shown to be highly influential on self-presentation – through profile and message construction, and expectations of others – through profile and message interpretation. The adapted survey of imagined interactions (SII) proved to be a reliable measure of all characteristics and functions except variety, discrepancy, specificity, and self-dominance when applied to the context of online dating. The characteristics of frequency and retroactivity, along with the functions of self-understanding, relational maintenance, catharsis, and compensation were all aspects of IIs that were significantly related to the online dating themes. Furthermore, support has been provided to suggest that imagined interactions can occur with others whom individuals have yet to have F2F encounters with, and still serve important interpersonal functions.

The SII was semantically adapted per Honeycutt (2010) to reflect the online dating context relevant to this study (Appendix E). As he indicated, not all survey items were relevant to this new context and many were subsequently dropped during the factor analysis and scale creation stage of this study. The items that were used (Table 13) indicate that most (10/14) of the adapted measures from the SII translate to the online dating context, and six factors (frequency, retroactivity, self-understanding, relational maintenance, catharsis, and compensation) were significantly associated with the themes of honesty, trust, stigma, and overall experience. The intrapersonal characteristics of variety, discrepancy, specificity, and self-dominance not being...
dependable measures of online dating IIs could have been an inadequacy of scale design (discussed in limitations) or the characteristics may not be significant in an online context where relational partners are yet to meet. Discrepancy obviously does not translate, because it refers to the difference between an imagined interaction and the actual encounter. Variety and specificity may not be statistically significant in online dating contexts due to the similarity of topics and partners in associated IIs; the imagined interactions user’s experience may not change very much from one profile to the next.

Traditionally, II research has ignored the significance of fantasy imagined interactions, and instead has treated them as detrimental to interpersonal relationships; they are seen as unrealistic escapes from reality that would not otherwise occur (Honeycutt 2003; Honeycutt et al., 2013). Although online dating IIs might be based in reality as far as behavior and communication in the fictional scenario, the expectancy for future interaction is a fantasy until initial contact has been made. Treat (2010) first suggested the use of fantasy IIs as an integral component of interpersonal script maintenance. He urged that through fantasy IIs, people create narratives of social and cultural interaction that unmistakably function to create notions of self-identity. The results of the current study presented conflicting findings on the significance of imagined interactions with potential relational partners (fantasy IIs). IIs were discussed as a universal strategy that typically creates unrealistic expectations for potential matches, however, self-understanding IIs were shown to have a statistically significant relationship with trust, overall experience, and stigma.

Practical Contribution

Many implications for the practice of online dating, and relating over CMC in general have been made by the current research. Imagination has been shown to play a prominent role in
self-presentation and communication on dating apps and websites, that shapes the honesty, trust, stigma, and overall experience users sense from participating in online dating. Most users do not believe that completely honest interactions are possible, and insist that catfishing has become a widespread phenomenon. Providing more, but not too much, information in profiles (pictures, biographical data) gives potential matches more substance to use when they are creating their own mental pictures of others, and helps negate the chances of possibly being a catfish. However, lengthy/wordy profiles present an image of desperation, and should be avoided unless using a matchmaking service focused on serious, committed relationships.

By far, Tinder is the dating app of choice among millennials and shapes their behaviors and opinions of online dating. Tinder is widely agreed upon as being a hookup app with very little prospects for serious relationships. It is seen as a rite of passage among college students moving to new cities and schools. There is very little stigma associated with using the app for hookups at a young age, but the older users get, the more they report experiencing fatigue or displeasure with Tinder and have quit the dating network. However, the overwhelming majority of all participants in both strands of the current research were or have been active on Tinder at some point. This brings to light an interesting conundrum: does Tinder reflect millennials’ casual relational interests or does Tinder prescribe millennials’ casual relational interests? Regardless of the answer, for the most part, millennials are not interested in initiating long-term, serious relationships with online dating apps and websites.

Limitations

Although, there are several benefits associated with the realization of the current study, there are also some limitations. First, the current population of concern is college-aged students who have been immersed in technology for the majority of their lives; the results may not be
generalizable to an older, less technologically reliant demographic. Also, the needs and social expectations of college students are most likely incongruent with the responsibilities and schedules of professional adults. A few limitations occurred during the scale design and factor analysis stage. Reliability statistics for honesty – self ($\alpha = .626$) and honesty – others ($\alpha = .66$) were not as high as preferred, but were still dependable enough to use in this study and provide significant results. Several of the II characteristics and functions were not significantly related to the themes as well. This could have been due to a possibly low face validity among the survey items rating the themes (honesty, trust, stigma, overall experience). The items were designed by the research team – familiar with online dating research – to reflect the responses and testimonies from the qualitative interviews, but no other steps were taken to ensure their practicality in the current study. Strides were made in the correct direction by adapting the application of certain aspects of IIs to online contexts, but the field’s hesitancy of defining the role of fantasy IIs limits the possibilities as well. Both research and theory need to evolve to better suit IIs for investigating online dating and similar CMC contexts with relevant scales and measures.

In the current study, the quality of CMC imagined interactions is not compared to more typical F2F IIs. Examining the use of IIs with partners that are available in CMC settings and F2F encounters could potentially provide information on how IIs are utilized across channels/ mediums. Berkos (2010) also suggests examining IIs in a variety of contexts in hopes of measuring in/ consistencies across different relational settings. Online dating and technology are constantly changing, which makes replication difficult, but the constant that remains is that research needs to be adapting with the same rate of dynamism in attempts at helping people navigate new spaces of relational development. Even when apps and sites endure for several years, the ways that their users communicate and behave on the platforms evolve (Gatter &
Future Research

Future attempts at similar research utilizing imagined interactions and online dating should build upon the work that has been laid out in the current study. The present research only focused on the millennial demographic; prospective designs should include older users for a comparison of their experiences. Furthermore, different age groups should be included to compare the behavior exhibited on different apps and websites. Millennials in the current study adamantly suggested that Tinder was specifically geared toward them, and other sites such as eharmony and match.com were designed for their parents and grandparents. Many steps were taken in the current study to explore imagined interactions in the realm of online dating, by designing and altering scales to fit the context. While most of the scales proved to be reliable measures of online IIs, it still remains to be seen whether or not there are more latent characteristics and functions waiting to be discovered. Potential studies should continue to adapt the SII and scales for online dating until more rigorous and reliable measures are established.

Conclusion

Both phases of this study have come together to illustrate the significance and utility of imagined interactions in online dating. This research design has provided a complete picture of the individual experiences that are typical of online dating, as well as larger, broad trends native to the entire millennial demographic. In doing so, this research has also established reliable psychometrics for investigating phenomena associated with online dating. Five major themes of online dating (honesty, trust, stigma, overall experience, imagined interactions) were examined in qualitative interviews, and then tested with quantitative survey measures in an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The findings from both strands indicate that online
dating behaviors are evolving, and that millennials are more interested in hookups and short term flings on dating apps, rather than serious, committed relationships.

The current findings suggest that relationship maintenance strategies for millennials are rapidly changing to include more CMC systems. The anonymity and ambiguity of CMC relations encourages users to exercise IIs to make up for the missing information not found in dating profiles, and from the limited interactions they have with others. Users seek out as much information as they can on others to create accurate representations of their matches, in efforts to locate trustworthy individuals for possible F2F interaction. Match.com CEO, Max Yagan, supports this claim and characterizes the current atmosphere of online dating culture by users’ desire to meet F2F (Bercovici, 2004). Relationship maintenance is not as highlighted online as relationship initiation; rather than having dates online, users are narrowing the field of possible matches down to include people they would possibly meet F2F. Referring to the personal safety of women in online dating, Padgett (2007) describes this practice as online screening, “Online screening methods refer to the processes that women used to determine whether a man they were talking with online was safe to meet for a face-to-face encounter” (p. 30). Pagett’s (2007) results show that women seek consistency in communication behaviors to determine the identity and appropriateness of meeting others. This practice could easily be applied to both sexes, and accurately represents the ultimate goal of millennials on online dating apps and sites. IIs are significant and integral facet of online dating/screening, and help create un/realistic expectations of possible matches.

Imagined interactions were found to be a normal and routine aspect of online dating, and are significantly associated with trust, stigma, and the overall experience associated with online dating. However, results also showed that IIs can create unrealistic expectations for potential
matches, and can actually limit the success of online relationships. These unrealistic expectations could be detrimental fantasy-daydreams because potential matches might not live up to the set of standards created for them (Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt et al., 2013), or they could be self-understanding IIs because the created narrative reveals important information about the self (Treat, 2010). Whether fantasy or self-understanding, imagined interactions are a vital part of online dating that warrant further investigation in order to better understand fundamental aspects of human relationships.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – INITIAL SURVEY

1. What is your sex?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Transgender
   d. Other
2. How old are you?
   __________
3. What is your current grade classification?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Graduate
4. What is your race?
   a. Asian
   b. Black
   c. Hispanic
   d. Native American
   e. Pacific Islander
   f. White
   g. Other
5. What is your sexuality?
   a. Heterosexual
   b. Homosexual
   c. Bisexual
   d. Pansexual
   e. Lesbian
   f. Gay
   g. Other
6. What geographic region were you raised in?
   a. Alaska / Hawaii
   b. North
   c. South
   d. East
   e. West
   f. International
   g. Other
7. Have you ever used a mobile app or website for the specific purpose of finding a prospective date or intimate relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No
8. Would you say you have more long-term or short-term goals in regards to your use of dating apps and websites?
   a. Short-term
   b. Long-term
9. Please provide your email address if you would like to participate in this study.
   __________________
APPENDIX B – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How has your experience with using online dating sites and apps gone?
   a. Would you say overall it’s been a positive or negative experience?
   b. Tell me about a particular encounter/interaction that sticks out?
2. How/Why did you decide to start using dating apps/sites?
   a. In what ways do you feel your experience is unique or is it typical among your peers?
3. What kinds of info do you usually put in your profile?
   a. How did you decide to put this information up?
4. What does your main profile picture look like?
   a. How/why did you choose that one?
   b. Do you have other photos listed -> how/why did you choose those?
   c. Would you mind providing a copy of your picture for analysis?
5. What do you look for in a prospective partner?
   a. If you use a search, what terms do you search?
   b. How do you initiate contact (if you do)
   c. How do you respond to suitors?
   d. How does a typical interaction play out?
6. Do you mentally picture prospective partners when you are deciding if you are interested in them?
   a. What types of images or scenarios do you imagine
      - If there is dialogue, what are typical things that are said?
   b. What information helps you get a clearer picture of the person?
   c. What is the most involved you have ever gotten with someone before contacting them?
   d. How often do you do this for dating profiles?
7. Do your mental interactions continue after you begin communicating with someone online?
   a. How do these interactions differ once contact has been made?
   b. How often when talking online will you type a sentence, then erase or change what you have written because you imagine your partner’s specific response?
   Can you give a recent example?
8. How do these interactions ultimately help you decide whether or not to pursue the person?
9. How do you feel about the accuracy of potential partners’ profiles?
   a. How do you place trust in potential partners or how do you build trust?
   b. How does your profile compare in terms of honesty?
10. What is your favorite app/site to use and why?
    How do you use different dating apps for different dating goals?
APPENDIX C – LIST OF CODES/SUBTHEMES

1. People don’t lie
2. I don’t lie
3. I don’t want to put EVERYTHING out there
4. It’s impossible to be 100% honest
5. Some people are too honest
6. Don’t trust anybody
7. Trust develops similarly to a F2F relationship
8. Much harder to gain trust in CMC
9. Verify identity with other apps/channels
10. Easier to trust people from school/campus
11. Would rather meet/talk in person
12. Everyone uses apps for dating, no big deal
13. Alcohol erases the stigma
14. Good experience
15. Bad experience
16. Joined for entertainment
17. Joined for hookup
18. Joined for serious relationship
19. Joined to find a friend/companion
20. Different goals/expectations with each different app/website
21. It’s just an age (developmental) thing
22. Easier/the norm to meet people online
23. I have imagined interactions
24. IIs create realistic and unrealistic first impressions
25. People edit/practice messages based on imagined responses
26. People edit self-presentation / pictures based on imagined responses
You are being asked to be in a research study. This study is called “Imagine Me and You: Imagined Interactions in Online Dating.” This study is being conducted by Graham Carpenter, a Ph.D. student in the College of Communication and Information Sciences, and Dr. Carol Mills, a professor in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about?
The current project is concerned with the way that bonds and relationships are formed and sustained through online dating websites and mobile applications aimed at intimacy and companionship—although meaningful relationships can be formed on social media apps and sites, those sites and apps with the specific purpose of romantic involvement are under scrutiny. Specifically, this study seeks to better understand the role imagination work plays during individuals’ experiences associated with online dating.

What will I be asked to do in this study?
You will be asked to provide your responses to questions rating your opinions of online dating and your imagined interactions with profiles you have seen.

How many other participants will be in this study?
The investigators have recruited approximately 250 students, and hope to add 50 to 100 more.

How much time will I spend being in this study?
The survey will last anywhere between 10 and 20 minutes.

Will being in this study cost me anything?
The only cost to you from this study is your time.

What are the benefits and risks (problems or dangers) from being in this study?
There are no direct benefits to participating in this study other than fulfilling a research pool requirement, or extra credit.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
The information in the study records will be kept confidential between the researchers. No identifying information will be linked to responses.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?
The only alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, your responses will be destroyed. The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures please contact Graham Carpenter (205)260-8836 (email: jgcarpenter@crimson.ua.edu) or Dr. Carol Mills (205)348-6165 (cbmills@ua.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. You are free not to participate or stop participating any time before you submit your answers.

If you understand the statements above, are at least 18 years old, and freely consent to be in this study, please proceed to the survey via
“https://universityofalabama.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bKhJ3fWw7F3DNgV”

Thank you very much,

Graham Carpenter
APPENDIX E – ONLINE QUANTITATIVE MEASURE

Online Dating Habits
Graham Carpenter, principal investigator and Ph.D. student from the college of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama is conducting a research study focusing on the way that bonds and relationships are formed and sustained through online dating websites and mobile applications aimed at intimacy and companionship.

Specifically, this study seeks to better understand the role imagination work plays during individuals’ experiences associated with online dating. Taking part in this study involves completing this survey that will take between 15 and 20 minutes to finish. The survey contains questions indicating demographic information, as well as your usage of online dating apps or websites.

You will be awarded .5 points of extra credit for completing the survey. We will protect your confidentiality by keeping the informed consent and debriefing statements separate from the data so they cannot be matched. Only the investigators, Dr. Carol Mills and myself, will have access to the data. The data will be kept in a password protected folder only to be shared between the investigators. Only summarized data will be presented at meetings or in publication.

There will be no direct benefits to you from participating in this study, but the findings will be useful to anyone interested in using mobile applications and websites to create and maintain intimate relationships.

The only foreseeable risk is that some of the questions may make you uncomfortable. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Graham Carpenter at jgcarpenter@crimson.ua.edu. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. If you have complaints or concerns about this study, file them through the UA IRB outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. Also, if you participate, you are encouraged to complete the short Survey for Research Participants online at this website. This helps UA improve its protection of human research participants.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY.

You are free not to participate or stop participating any time before you submit your answers.

If you understand the statements above, are at least 18 years old, and freely consent to be in this
study, you may begin.

Thank you very much,

Graham Carpenter

Q1 What is your sex?
○ Female
○ Male
○ Transgender
○ Other

Q2 How old are you?

Q3 What is the highest level of school you have completed?
○ High School
○ Some College
○ Freshman
○ Sophomore
○ Junior
○ Senior
○ Associate’s Degree
○ Bachelor’s Degree
○ Master’s / Professional / Doctoral Degree

Q4 What is your race?
○ Asian
○ Black
○ Hispanic
○ Native American
○ Pacific Islander
○ White
○ Other

Q5 What is your sexuality?
○ Heterosexual
○ Homosexual
○ Bisexual
○ Pansexual
○ Lesbian
Q6 What geographic region were you raised in?
- Alaska / Hawaii
- North
- South
- East
- West
- International

Q7 Have you ever used a mobile app or website aimed at online dating / intimacy?
- Yes
- No

Q8 Would you say you have more longterm or short term goals in regards to your use of dating apps and sites?
- Short term
- Longterm

Q9 Select all of the following that you have ever used (browsed, signed up for, previous member)
- Tinder
- Match.com
- Bumble
- Grindr
- Eharmony
- PlentyOffFish
- CoffeeMeetsBagel
- Hinge
- OkCupid
- Zoosk

Q10 I downloaded / began using dating apps and sites with the intention of finding...
- a potential serious relationship
- a friend or companion
- a hookup (physical encounter with no emotional expectations)
- a possible spouse
- entertainment
- other
Q11 Please select one

<table>
<thead>
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<th>From an online dating app / site, I have</th>
<th>Never met anyone in person</th>
<th>Had 1 date</th>
<th>Had a few dates</th>
<th>Had a short term relationship</th>
<th>Had a long term relationship</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12 From an online dating app / site, I have had physical encounters as intimate as...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nothing: Sexual Intercourse</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing: Sexual Intercourse</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q13 From an online dating app / site, I have had virtual encounters as intimate as...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nothing: Sexual Intercourse</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing: Sexual Intercourse</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q14 In the following sections, please choose one response for each statement on the left...

YES! = very strong agreement  YES = strong agreement  Yes = agreement  ? = no agreement or disagreement  no = disagreement  NO = strong disagreement  NO! = very strong disagreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My overall experience with online dating apps and sites has been positive</th>
<th>YES!</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online dating is the same for everyone my age</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I'm honest in my profile</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>The profiles I view contain truthful information</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>My profile pictures are recent and accurate</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>The profile pictures I view are recent and accurate</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>I initiate contact with others</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>I mentally picture others based on their profiles</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online dating apps/sites are not for me</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is possible to trust others before meeting them</td>
<td>ọ</td>
<td>ọ</td>
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<tr>
<td>When talking online/texting, I will type a sentence and then erase or change</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
what I have written, because I have imagined the response it might get
I wait for people to contact me, instead of messaging them
Dating apps/sites are a good tool for meeting people
I lie about small details in my profile
I lie about significant details in my profile
I use image filters to improve my profile pictures
I believe people catfish others
It is possible to fall in love over a dating app/site
Q15 In the following sections, please choose one response for each statement on the left...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES!</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most people my age use dating apps / sites for the same purpose</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>People are embarrassed to admit they meet people online</td>
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<tr>
<td>My friends know I use dating apps / sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>My family knows I use dating apps / sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know my friends use dating apps / sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dating apps / sites are not useful for starting relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know my family uses dating apps / sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most people my age use dating apps / sites</td>
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<td>I would be embarrassed to admit I met</td>
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<tr>
<td>someone online</td>
<td>It is easier to meet people on dating apps and sites than on campus or going out</td>
<td>Dating apps/sites are not useful for maintaining relationships</td>
<td>There is a stigma associated with dating apps for people my age</td>
<td>I have intentionally met someone from a dating app/site</td>
<td>I have hooked up with someone from a dating app/site</td>
<td>I have engaged in sexual activity with someone I met on a dating app/site</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This section deals with the concept of Imagined Interactions. Imagined interactions are mental interactions we have with human others who are not physically present. People may have imagined conversations that occur in self-controlled daydreams or while the mind wanders. With your help, we can better understand the characteristics and functions of imagined interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES!</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often have imagined interactions while browsing profiles online</td>
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</table>

Q16
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I frequently have imagined interactions while texting</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often have imagined interactions while using the internet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I often have imagined interactions before sending someone a message online / via text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Before matching with someone online, I imagine them</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is rare that I imagine an encounter before matching or sending messages online</td>
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<tr>
<td>I often have imagined interactions after interacting with someone online / via text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most of my imagined interactions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
are with different people
When I have imagined interactions, they tend to be detailed and well developed
I have recurrent imagined interactions with the same profiles over the same topics
After exchanging messages with someone online, I frequently imagine them
Most of my imagined interactions are with the same people I've met online
My imagined interactions usually involve conflict or arguments
When I have imagined interactions, the other person talks a lot

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143
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I frequently have imagined interactions</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After I exchange photos with a person online, I imagine my encounter with them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I rarely imagine myself interacting with someone from a dating app / site</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is hard recalling the details of imagined interactions I have with people I see or meet online</td>
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<tr>
<td>My imagined interactions are very specific</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my online conversations, I am very different from my imagined interactions</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES!</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I talk a lot in my imagined interactions with people</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've met online</td>
<td>People I meet online dominate the conversation in my imagined interactions</td>
<td>Before messaging someone online, I frequently imagine them</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have imagined interactions with many different profiles I see</td>
<td>I dominate the conversation in my imagined interactions with people I've met online</td>
<td>In my imagined interactions with people I've met online, I can &quot;hear&quot; what the other person says</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Before speaking to</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When I have an imagined interaction with people I've met online, I often have only a vague idea of what the other says. The people I meet online have a lot to say in my imagined interactions. My imagined interactions tend to be on a lot of different topics. My imagined interactions help me to actually talk to people I've met online about feelings or problems. My imagined interactions help me understand people's...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>profiles</th>
<th>My imagined interactions help me understand my self/profile</th>
<th>My imagined interactions help me in clarifying my thoughts and feelings when I am using dating apps and sites</th>
<th>My imagined interactions help me plan what I am going to say in an anticipated message</th>
<th>I enjoy most of my imagined interactions with people I've met online</th>
<th>When I have a conversation with someone online that I have already imagined interacting with, the</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
actual conversation is very different from what I imagined

My imagined interactions help me relieve tension and stress from online dating

My imagined interactions make me feel more confident when I think I am going to actually talk to a person I’ve met online

I have imagined interactions in order to practice what I am actually going to send in a message to the person I've met online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES!</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My imagined interactions</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
help me to reduce uncertainty about other's actions and behaviors
I relive old arguments with people I've met online in my mind
It is sometimes hard to forget old arguments
My imagined interactions are usually quite pleasant
Imagining talking to someone substitutes for the absence of communicating online
I use imagined interactions to think about dating profiles that I’d like to know more about
Imagined interactions help keep online relationships alive
I often cannot get negative imagined interactions "out of my mind" when I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>help me to reduce uncertainty about other's actions and behaviors</th>
<th>imagine old arguments in my mind</th>
<th>it is sometimes hard to forget old arguments</th>
<th>my imagined interactions are usually quite pleasant</th>
<th>imagining talking to someone substitutes for the absence of communicating online</th>
<th>i use imagined interactions to think about dating profiles that i’d like to know more about</th>
<th>imagined interactions help keep online relationships alive</th>
<th>i often cannot get negative imagined interactions &quot;out of my mind&quot; when i</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
am angry
Imagined interactions can be used to substitute for real encounters
Imagined interactions sometimes help me manage conflict
My imagined interactions are quite similar to the real conversations in which they follow
By thinking about important conversations, it helps relieve tension or stress
Imagined interactions may be used to compensate for the lack of real, face-to-face communication
Imagined interactions are important in online dating when thinking about possible partners
My imagined interactions usually involve happy thoughts
or fun activities
In my online conversations, I usually say what I thought I would say

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Myself</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During my imagined interactions, I tend to see and concentrate attention on</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q17

Q18 My imagined interactions are:
● Mostly Verbal - talking with little visual imagery
● Mostly Visual - little talking occurs
● A Mixture of verbal and visual

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

Please enter your name, course, and professor if you're completing this for extra credit
January 13, 2016

Re: IRB # 16-OR-015, “Imagine Me and You: Imagined Interactions in Online Dating”

Dear Mr. Carpenter:

The [redacted] Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on January 12, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Redacted]

Office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance