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**ONLINE DATING TECHNOLOGY EFFECTS
ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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The trend of online dating has been around since the emergence of the Internet. In the generation before the online era, people would meet face-to-face in cafes, on streets or at bars or even on airplanes. People make initial contact based on a number of cues and preferences, getting to know one another in person. Today these coincidental or so to say "meant to be" moments seem to be non-existent. Why have they become such a rarity? Is it because we know that there is an easy way out? What will it take for people to be as straightforward and confident in reality as they are behind the safety of their screens? It feels as though time spent with people in person has become a so to say 'hot commodity', even more so to the effort people are willing to put in. I will suggest that the new form of communication, provided by dating apps and websites, has created new societal issues in regards to in-person interactions, relationship forming and relationship maintenance.

We are undeniably a generation who feeds off of our need for instant gratification, becoming more impatient than ever. The never-ending possibilities of profiles, causes us constantly search for "the next best thing" on the newest dating platforms. These promises the online world carries with which reality can compete, and people who can present themselves in unrealistic ways, seem skew our perceptions and lead to inevitable disappointment. What is the future of our love lives? Will we only know our significant others based on their profile pictures? The fear of rejection will always be an inherent issue within most normal people and our consumption of technology has become somewhat of an antidote and crutch to this problem. I am afraid that technology is becoming a substitute, addiction and even replacement for real life interactions.

Popular media can give us valuable insights into modern day culture, the human condition and specifically, relationship values. Online dating has changed the ways in

which interpersonal relationships are developed and maintained. According to various articles, personal anecdotes and primary sources I will consider how computer mediated communication plays a role in social development, creates modality switching and increases self-presentation techniques, which seem to harm us in the long-term. In this paper I will suggest how advances in technology have pushed the current generation of twenty-something's to adapt to new modes of communication and become prone to contemporary interpersonal issues within romantic. The effect of technologically mediated modes of communication, taken in-hand with interpersonal issues, can lead to unrealistic expectations, isolation from others and a decrease of in-person initiations.

Online dating has altered how people make decisions about romantic partners. Before the time of online dating people could either speak on the phone or face-to-face, now there are numerous options including text messaging, chat rooms, social media interactions and video calling. According to an interview on December 2, 2014 with marriage and family therapist, Janet Buder, when the Internet became popular, time became more valuable, strengthening instant gratification and laying a foundation for dating applications like Tinder. Buder argues that, "Tinder fits the need with the short time slots, especially with busy college schedules but it really scares me that people are not using and developing their social skills." Due to endless potential in the online world, people are becoming less attentive to people who could better fit their expectations and are more vulnerable to people who are less compatible.

It is important to consider if and how online dating is unique from relationships that are initiated in person, and if online dating platforms can promote more interpersonal romantic success. Professors of social psychology explore how online dating has both

added new benefits to the dating world and sometimes undermines success in the article "Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science."

The authors argue that online dating has added three main new dimensions to the dating ecosystem, which are ease of access to evaluate others, various computer mediated modes to communicate with partners and matching services via mathematical algorithms¹². For the same reason that the dating environment has been fundamentally altered, the romantic outcomes can also be negatively effected and "fail to capture those experiential aspects of social interaction that are essential to evaluating one's compatibility with potential partners,"¹². Part of the issue, with the three new dimensions online dating provides are the incessant searching behaviors, which the numerous profiles elicit.

In the experimental study "More Options Lead To More Searching And Worse Choices In Finding Partners For Romantic Relationships Online" the authors explore how the endless options of profiles and the people behind them can actually be detrimental to people's dating decisions. The authors examine how the never-ending selection of profiles leads to a downgrade in cognitive abilities, less selectivity and excessive searching behaviors². The authors created an experimental study in which groups were able to view a set number of 30, 60 or 90 profiles in a dating platform. The results revealed that more options resulted in more searching and a decrease in choice quality².

Cognitive handicapping in reality is exemplified by the dating application, Tinder. Tinder with over 100 million users, characterized by its flame, includes shared interests, Facebook connections and the option for up to 7 profile photos. People are able to swipe left and right until they have exhausted their options causing people to engage in the act

of choosing mindlessly and without focused attention. The act of searching for potential mates has become gamified.

With the growing popularity of dating apps in environments like college campuses, the chances of finding an attractive friend or classmate you've been too shy to talk to, seem to be ever increasing. However, the ability of apps such as Tinder to actually create successful and meaningful relationships is questionable. "Due to these sort of apps, the younger generation has definitely placed more of a value on casual hooking up," says Buder¹⁰. "People are becoming superficially focused looks, are reluctant to be themselves, and use their screens as a defensive mechanism. It doesn't allow for any kind of growth period due to the quick "yes" or "no.""

Part of the gamification of dating, is the ways in which online users are able to set filters for the potential matches they are looking for. In the article "The Filtered Encounter: Online Dating And The Problem Of Filtering Through Excessive Information," the authors explore the various filtering techniques online daters utilize. There are both pre-set filters which people use such as gender, race and age, but many people come up with their own screening processes⁸. People have the option to disclose sometimes more personal information than one would share in an initial face-to-face meeting, giving people the option to either become more or less interested. Online there are endless options for qualifying romantic partners and also people who are not of interest. It is much easier for people to apply the 'checklists' they have for people who they want to date, and to completely avoid people who do not meet specific criteria. However, due to the ease of rejection and acceptance people often seem to disregard certain values that are more recognizable in person. Dating sites and applications seem to

have future plans to further enhance novel selectivity options⁸, which may help people find better suited matches and less time wasted on weeding out others or could also lead to other issues such as less monogamy between couples.

In her TED talk "How I hacked online dating," digital strategist Amy Webb discusses her relationship with online dating. She calculated her probability of finding "Mr. Right" depending on a list of criteria; the number she came up with was 35 eligible men in the city of Philadelphia. Due to the slim chances of her bumping into one of the 35 men out of the 1.5 million inhabitants she decided to sign up for online dating. She explains that at first she thought that the online algorithms were the cause of a number of disastrous dates. The interests she included in her profile, for the most part inaccurately set her up with various men. Webb soon realized that the algorithms were actually not the problem but the in-person interactions. Based on the criteria and surveys, people for the most part were not able to find the people who could most compliment each other behaviorally, which is an area lacking online.

Webb then came up with 72 data points and a scoring system, for a potential mate. Webb would only partake in discussion with others if they met a certain score, and only date if they met an even higher number. Webb's experience with online dating shows how online dating can become more than a game but also a social experiment revealing valuable facts. It seems that online dating can be successful based on an optimized amount of words and word numbers, photos and your own algorithms for others.

The fore-stated articles uniquely reveal a realistic and potential downfall of online dating. The authors explore how the cognitive processes of mindful searching and

selection are altered. In addition to the straightforward issues of online dating, such as risks of meeting a person of danger or being deceived, there are also more subliminal issues that go on via online communication in dating platforms. While a greater pool of options does have some benefits such as finding people outside of your own town that may be compatible, perhaps there is a prime number that may lead to better success in person and finding the right people to date or be in a relationship with.

In addition to an optimal number of profile options and subsequent searching behaviors, there are a number of other factors playing an important role in success. People who consider online dating a viable way to meet significant others, tend to have specific intentions and outcome goals. Whether people are seeking casual romance, someone to date, to be in a serious relationship with or marry, there are variations of success. However, people who use online dating in a serious manner typically have a universal goal of eventual in-person interaction with others.

The authors of "Self-Presentation in Online Personals" argue that online dating success can be predicted through four dimensions of disclosure - honesty, amount, intent, and valence, as well as the experience one has. The authors discuss how social penetration and social information processing theories extend to mixed-mode relationships. Social penetration, or the theory that self-disclosure is a shared and reciprocated behavior, is critical to getting to know others online and making the decision to meet in-person, intimacy and developing a relationship. Online daters who are more serious, will often ask more questions and self-disclose more information. Information processing online is unique from in-person interactions, due to the absence of nonverbal

cues and the value users place on anticipated future interaction. Once people have decided to meet in person there are a number of other issues to consider.

With 66% of the Internet community considering online dating a dangerous activity,⁵ it is important to investigate some of the reasons why. Through in-depth interviews with users of online dating platforms, the investigators of “What are the real and perceived risks and dangers of online dating? Perspectives from online daters,” add unique insights into relevant concerns of online dating. The participants of the study explain risks in terms of ‘risky others,’ meaning the anonymous receiver of communication and profiles. Many participants were not only concerned for themselves but also for family and friends who utilize online dating. The article focuses on how dating platforms carry unique dangers from the traditional in-person environment.

Cyber security is of major concern in general and even more so in the realm of online dating because people are actually partaking in the risk of meeting strangers with sometimes particularly concerning intentions. One concern participants had were coming across liars and deceitful people, who could potentially be scammers or fabricators of life details, for example lying about their marital status or their dating intentions⁵. Another prevalent issue, particularly among women participants, were emotional and sexual dangers, such as getting involved with someone who is not who they said they were online, contracting an STD or even becoming pregnant⁵. Some participants were worried about experiences of violence, such as rape and abuse. One woman shares an emotional account of an experience with someone she met online, “I want to reiterate Mike did not have a normal sex addiction and was right out of control. Mike was violent and raped me in the bedroom,”⁵. Using the internet for personal purposes carries inherent security risks

such as scams, infringement of personal information and stalking. While there are numerous psychological, interpersonal and cognitive issues that go along with online dating there are also more straightforward risks.

Expanding on security risks, women seem to face unique dangers from men, in the article "Stranger Danger? Women's Self-Protection Intent And The Continuing Stigma Of Online Dating," the authors look at how the stigmas of online dating, has led to self-protective behaviors for women. They created an experiment in which women participants read either a scenario based on an online meeting or a face-to-face meeting. As hypothesized, the women felt that they needed to engage in more self-protective behaviors when meeting someone from an online dating source as to when they were meeting with someone they had engaged with face-to-face. The results were significantly larger for intent to self-protect in an online initiated date than an in-person initiated date, for both female college students and adult women. However, interestingly enough if a woman had previously gone on an online date, there was no significant difference in self-protection intent.

The article brings up the important point of how women feel they need to protect themselves against the potential "stranger danger" one can experience online. As society is adapting to technological advances and changes, people depending on their demographics and previous life experiences, are learning how to adapt and deal with the relevant issues. Women are often particularly at risk of to certain dangers of dating such as rape and sexual abuse, thus causing many women to generally be more fearful and engage in protective behaviors. The article highlights the fact that if someone had gone on a date, they acted no differently in regards to self-protection - revealing the nature of

the online dating stigmas. Many people view online dating in a particularly negative light, because of the extra potential dangers that upon the first meeting people do not know one another and there could be false identities.

The increasing prevalence of Internet dating makes it both a global activity and in-turn a social epidemic. The communication-taking place on online dating platforms has a nature that is often secretive, scandalous and mischievous. Online dating can have detrimental effects on pre-existing relationships, families, marriages and society as a whole. The value placed on online interactions seems to be increasing, sometimes having dimensions of intimacy that face-to-face relationships may lack. Many online sites provide outlets for promiscuous emotional and sexual activities that can be hidden from others, such as sharing scandalous photos and messages.

One could argue that before the time of the Internet having affairs was much more complicated and challenging than it is nowadays. With dating apps and websites, people are now able to find romantic and sexual partners, outside of social circles, who significant others and spouses do not know of. Ashley Madison was a dating website encouraging and enabling married people to have affairs more easily. Recently the dating website was hacked and the email list of users was publicized. According to a recent CNN article, "Ashley Madison hack: Costly end of the affair," the author notes "State and federal judges and prosecutors, federal employees, military personnel, college professors, journalists, Hollywood celebrities, lawyers, teachers and even members of the British Parliament have already been identified in a preliminary sweep of an enormous 10 gigabytes of stolen data."

The hack is an example of how online dating can cause global issues. The infringement of data has also had more local effects, a friend of mine who works in the law department of the local headquarters of a tech firm told me that, employees who have been exposed as users of the site may be facing potential repercussions in the work place. Millions of people around the world are dealing with a global issue that never would have occurred without online communication.

Due to online communication platforms, novel issues such as modality switching have presented themselves. In the article “When Online Dating Partners Meet Offline,” Artemio Ramirez considers the issue of modality switching. Modality switching occurs when one has to switch from an online experience to an offline meeting. When people meet in person after chatting online, initial perceptions of others, behaviors and communications are naturally altered. According to Ramirez, in-person relationship capabilities can partially be determined by a variety of factors people experience in online dating. From the number of photos to the amount of time spent exchanging messages, success in person is altered online. These online factors, which can either promote or hinder trust and expectations, play vital a role in the perception of others, information seeking and future relationship potential¹.

Ramirez considers how online dating affects in-person meetings and post, online communications. How are specific in-person behaviors such as understanding of various communication, acts of intimacy and outcome success affected by communication over online dating platforms? Ramirez explains that modality switching plays a major role in the outcomes. He suggests that due to modality switching effects there are positive outcomes for short-term online relationships but negative outcomes for long-term

partners, assessing the question of how online dating determines face-to-face compatibility. Meaning that the more time people spend getting to know each other behind the screen negatively affects how people interact when they actually meet up.

Ramirez' article gives insight as to how online dating differs from traditional relationship formation, progression and maintenance. It is interesting to note how prior communication online, especially depending on the amount of time spent, can positively or negatively affect in-person relationships in regards to the expectations they have of a romantic partner, the information one self-discloses and the certainty one feels in the relationship potential¹. Due to the intersection of computer-mediated communication and its effects on relationships the present research also considers how overly positive online self-presentation can increase the interest of others and change perceptions of perceived intimacy.

In her social experiment of online dating Amy Webb also got a chance to review her competition by creating false male profiles to do more "market research." Upon looking at other profiles of women she was able to recognize the editing techniques in photos, and common phrases among women who were popular. The qualitative data revealed humor, tone of voice, communication style and quantitative data of profile lengths and time between messages¹¹. She applied her knew knowledge of successful online dating profiles to her own profile, to create a "super profile" which was optimized for the online environment, drawing in hundreds of new interested suitors.

Online dating applications and websites create new capabilities of enhanced self-presentation. Users of online dating sites have the potential to completely recreate their identities. Due to profiles that can either be fully dishonest or slightly enhanced, people

partake in new risks of entrusting online figures. According to Ramirez online daters are exposed to both hyper-personal and idealized impressions, which increases one's chances of expectancy violations and uncertainty upon their first meeting¹. The aforementioned therapist, Janet Buder, notes that there are many factors involved in in-person attraction that have changed with online dating such as the way people move, speak, dress and carry themselves¹⁰. Online profiles provide a medium for people to create "superior" versions of themselves in regards to their appearance, personality and social lives.

Deception in profiles is a realistic and prevalent problem. A friend of mine, who I will call Serena, is in her late thirties and has been utilizing online dating, since her divorce 7 years ago. She often complains about the negative outcomes she has experienced. Since, you can only judge and perceive a person by their photos and what self-descriptions, much of the valuable information you can normally gage when seeing someone in-person is lacking. Serena told me a story about a man she met online who made it seem like his intentions for an online profile were to meet someone for a long term relationship. She met with him and upon the second interaction, her date made it clear he was solely meeting with her to have sex. When she rejected his wishes, he quickly became aggressive with her and made false hurtful verbal accusations. Negative experiences such as this have made Serena hesitant of who she meets with. However, she feels that because of the outlet of online dating people are not as straightforward in person and do not initiate as often as they do online, causing her to continue in dating online.

The reason people may not be as straightforward in person as they are online may be due to the extra level of self-protection the virtual world may provide. There is less

pressure of judgment, rejection and immediacy of interaction. In the article, “Putting Your Best Face Forward: The Accuracy Of Online Dating Photographs” authors Catalina and Hancock discuss the issue of self-presentation issues online daters face. The article specifically looks at the accuracy of online photos used in profiles, and whether they are viewed as deceptive by independent judges. The study resulted in 1/3 of the photos not being considered accurate. The article discusses the tensions people face to present themselves in a 'dateable' manner yet to not be considered deceptive in face-to-face meetings. The study reveals that the issues of self-presentation, occurs not only in the text aspect of online communication but also in the visual components. The issue of misrepresentation is a real and prevalent issue that will only continue as self-editing features become more enhanced.

In the experiment online daters both rated their own profile photo and another persons. The photos were rated on a basis of perceived physical characteristics such as weight, age, skin, hairstyle and length, teeth, and the photographic process of retouching, professionalism and cropping premises. The tensions of enhancement versus authenticity are explained in terms of social desirability, self-deception and selective self-presentation. All participants tended to rate their own photos as more accurate than how the independent judges rated them³. However, the photos of females were rated as less accurate than males on the basis of both physical characteristics and the photographic process, regardless of the rater gender, which brings up differences in how genders perceive personal values in online dating. Women also tended to use photos that were on average much older in time than the male profile photos³. Online daters face the constant tensions between being authentic and enhancing themselves, the article reveals that

people tend to err on the side of self-enhancement and selective presentation over authenticity, in quite large magnitudes³.

A friend of mine who uses dating applications, who I will call Melanie, recognizes the issue of self-presentation versus maintaining authenticity. She is fearful of meeting with some of her dates because she feels that she will be judged based on her photos, which may not be a fully accurate depiction of who she is reality. "To be honest, having dating profiles on apps is entertaining but I can't bring myself to actually meet with someone because one, I don't want to be judged on the little information I've provided and two they might be different from what I thought they would be like" says Melanie. Melanie wants to be matched with as many compatible bachelors as possible, so she has included appealing photos of herself but also tries to keep the editing of the photos to a minimum. She has heard some of her male friends joke about people they have met who looked "way better on their profiles," and worries that some of her dates may say this about her.

The online world provides numerous platforms for people to both deepen an understanding of one's self and personality, and an ability to re-formulate who they are. The act of dating in itself is also a self-exploratory activity, in which one can get a sense of who they are and what other people are like in more romantic settings. In "An Exploration Of Identity Re-Creation In The Context Of Internet Dating" the authors further explore identity recreation, beliefs and values via online dating presentation and feedback from others. The article explains how people are constantly at work, forming positive self-conceptions via identity re-creation. The study was conducted in an intensive interview process revealing personal experiences of online dating and profile

creation. The interviews revealed consistent themes of identity exploration, identity creation and the importance of feedback. Through a process of symbolic interaction people construct their personalities not only through how they characterize themselves but also through the reflexive acts from others⁴. Online dating is a modern platform for people not only re-create themselves but to get validated by others.

New modes of online communication, social media and dating platforms have added a new dimension of issues people have to deal with. In person there is perhaps a more obvious form of rejection, but with the protection of a computer screen, the blows to self-esteem can be lessened. Single people and even those in pre-existing relationships are faced with more options and thus, new outlooks, expectations and issues. Through online profiles people are learning how to better present themselves, in regards to how identities can be re-created and create value for through reciprocity and validation of others. Understanding how online dating can both positively and negatively affect interpersonal relationships has many implications for the future. As the number of dating platforms will continue to increase with time and technology advancements, computer mediated communication issues such as interpersonal motivation, social relations and self-expression, will prevail.

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