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The Reality of Computer-Mediated Communication: An Examination of an Online Dating Service

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**The Reality of Computer-Mediated Communication:
An Examination of an Online Dating Service**

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

James W. Peoples III

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
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The Reality of Computer-Mediated Communication:

An Examination of an Online Dating Service

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University of Nebraska, 2006

Advisor: Dr. Randall Rose

Abstract

This was an exploratory study to investigate how online users portrayed themselves when using online personals in order to introduce themselves to a prospective partner in hopes of friendship, dating, or possible marriage. The primary method of examining the applicants was by the use of the online resumes that they placed on Yahoo. This study used 72 resumes from heterosexual applicants, male and female, between the ages of 18 and 67, evenly proportioned across 5 year age groups, to examine the close-ended answers and open-ended statements that applicants provided. The main perspectives used in analyzing the resumes included Erving Goffman's Presentation of Self and John Searle's Construction of Social Reality. Most applicants were willing to divulge most of information requested except when the topic came to income, and women were less likely to divulge this information than men. Men did not divulge some information when the topic was on preferences regarding their prospective partner, which seemed to make the men appear less decisive than the women. Applicants appeared to present a better image of themselves than reality, since there were a few obvious discrepancies in their presentations which allowed them to present a more desirable

image to others. The applicants were acting out a scene which was then presented to the audience, which included the online viewers of the resumes. All of this conforms to the Presentation of Self concept. The information is from a very localized arena of the stage though. As put by Searle, applicants hold a reality inside their minds that is separate from the reality held by the rest of the public. That reality which is shared becomes the reality of the group. That which is not shared is only real in the mind of the one primary actor. So this study only looks at the reality which the person portrays outwardly through their resumes. This study observed that many people were very careful not to let inconsistencies appear while others were not so careful.

Lastly, this study attempted to examine whether there appeared to be a change in the applicant's methods due to the type of medium which was used. This change is from Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory. This theory states that when people create the technology, technology then recreates the people. There does appear to be a change happening in the users of this medium, but is the change really due to the medium or is there another variable which is responsible? Another possibility is that the change was already happening and the medium is just an avenue to help it convert. These changes appear to be gender crossing, but this study did not arrive at firm conclusions regarding issues such as these and they are open to further investigation in future works.

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I would also like to thank my parents for their basic teaching in life. When my dad classified my ethnicity at school in Louisiana in 1968, he labeled me as a Human Being, as everyone else is on this planet. So I guess I am no different, nor any better than anyone else. And at least my mom knows for whom she is going to commencement, ahead of time, this time. No practical joke, this time.

And to my wife, Joanne, of 2 years, 7 months, 14 days, and 1 hour at the time of my commencement, I would like to thank her for her patience and encouragement that allowed me to complete this work through trying times. But it doesn't mean I am done learning.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A woman's attitude may predict the success of a long-term relationship with her mate (Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993). In a 15 year study of couples at four eastern colleges and universities, the traditional attitudes of women were a factor in predicting the success of future relationships. Men and women often marry mates similar to them in personality traits (Huston & Geis, 1993).

There are various ways of getting an introduction to a person to whom we are attracted. Some possibilities might include a blind date through the help of a friend, going to a public place (church, grocery store, singles club), going to a dating service, or going online and entering one of its various venues such as chat rooms or online dating services. In each of these methods we must give a projection of the self. The self is who the person is or who the person thinks he or she appears to be to the outside world (Goffman, 1959).

How we present ourselves in a resume tells others who we believe we are and from where we come. In meeting a possible partner face-to-face we have the option of picking up nonverbal cues which inform us of possible problems and deceptions emitted by the person. Online communication is a medium normally offering little or no nonverbal feedback. Short-term interactions may improve with the introduction of the photograph, while long-term interactions may be suited to online discussion without the introduction of the photograph (Walther, Slovacek, and Tidwell, 2001). It has also been found that online communication is not as effective as face-to-face communication (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has opened a whole new avenue of getting the message across. There are four benefits of technology which relate to this topic of online personals. These include higher living standards, opportunity for choice, more leisure, and improved communication (Barbour, 1992). Of these, opportunity for

choice and improved communication are of more concern in this particular study.

Yahoo personals is one method of online listing of possible intimate partnerships. Yahoo (2002) gives advice to those looking for the online meeting of their possible significant other. Yahoo also gives candid advice about the use of pictures in personals. This information is designed to improve the receptiveness of a person's message. Using documentation of this type to perform an analysis of a group is a valid method as long as the analysis is performed with an objective method as cited by Herbert Blumer in his analysis of Thomas and Znaniecki's "Polish peasants in Europe and America" (1969). His assessment was that their prior knowledge of the group through personal appraisal and scientific research gave credence to their study. This prior knowledge of the group allowed the researchers to delve into the depths of the documentation and perform, with a deeper understanding, a more objective analysis of the groups in question. They applied their subjective knowledge only when it was critical to the true nature of the information or when the objective information did not allow for a clear definition of the situation.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine online personals and to analyze how people introduce themselves to prospective mates and to analyze how users integrate this form of medium into their personal reality. Yahoo personals is only one avenue of introduction that a person has on the computer and it will serve as the source of data for this study.

To understand the role of the computer in the relational introductions of prospective mates, a historical accounting is undertaken into how the communication process evolved over time and its significance to our society as a whole. Because we are possibly on the brink of a new era in our communication process with the introduction and acclimation of the computer, we should be examining the relevance of the computer in our daily lives and the possible ramifications of using such a technology for various

reasons such as interpersonal relationships. In order to obtain this goal we must first understand the variables which make this technology such a flexible tool with which to process our thoughts and build our reality.

An attempt to examine how we see reality as it pertains to the computer and in accomplishing the various tasks in and out of virtual reality is important. Therefore, utilizing the theory of Construction of Social Reality, this study hopes to analyze the reality as perceived by the users of online personals. In this way we might begin to better understand how we view computers and the Internet, and how these mediums of our technology may be utilized in a more effective fashion.

Since this area of technology is advancing at an alarming rate when compared to any technological advance of the past, this study must continue to be an ongoing venture which will give results that will obviously alter as time progresses. The technology, as all communication advances have in the past, touches all aspects of our lives and alters every fiber of who we are and where our perceptions of reality lie.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Communication

Isaac Asimov wrote “Any technical advance can be dangerous. Fire was dangerous from the start, and so (even more so) was speech - and both are still dangerous to this day - but human beings would not be human without them” (1983, p. viii).

Communication has evolved over time with the help of technological advances. These advances, with the aid of enabling technologies or converging technologies, build upon themselves to use and reuse the old modes of communication but yet they evolve into a newer communication (Rheingold, 1991). Enabling technologies are those which make another technology possible while converging technologies include those which mesh scientific ideas in order to improve an old technology or make a new technology.

Marshall McLuhan saw these technological advances as defining points in our society through our communication advances (Griffin, 1997). The four eras which McLuhan named included the Tribal Age, the Literate Age, the Printing Age, and the Electronic Age. The first of these was the Tribal Age which took place prior to 2000 BC. This age was defined by the ability to speak which led to oral communication and the historical definitions of the elders and other speakers of the tribes. The second age started with the widespread dissemination of the written word. Although the time frame of the era is from 2000 BC to 1500 AD, the writings can actually be traced back to the signs and symbols of those from Mesopotamia around 4000 BC (Borgmann, 1999). These written inscriptions spread across to Egypt and the Indus Valley before continuing onto the Northern Semitic area where the 22 consonants evolved into the addition of the vowels at or about 1000 BC. The language then was handed off to the Romans who, in turn, brought it into Europe and the Middle Ages. There were other forms of written language whose origins could not be traced.

Technological advances such as papyrus, scrolls, and the codex improved the usefulness of the written word and allowed it to work for those who knew how to use the technologies (Lacy, 1996). These technologies were then improved to paper which was then utilized to increase the number of copies of the product with the invention of the printing press in the 1450's. What once took months to produce one copy by a monk in a monastery could now be produced in bulk in a fraction of the time. Much of the written word at the time was controlled by the authority in power. The one major drawback to those in power controlling the output of manuscripts and books was the ability to control the information that was disseminated throughout the populous. Many of the stories of different eras are based on those which were written by people in power and this can, at times, form stories that lack truthful information (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994). Those who knew how to use the written word held the power seats, while others less fortunate worked or slaved for those holding the knowledge. "The importance of writing in the cultural definition of self has long been noted. In the past several hundred years, Western definitions have been influenced by alphabetic writing in general and by print technology in particular" (Bolter, 1995, p.111).

The printed word actually increased the ability of governments to lose control which allowed the common man to control his own destiny by producing that product which he wished to print (Lacy, 1996). It also helped install ownership rights for the author or the controller of the documents in the way of copyrights. Things such as readers and magazines started making their way to consumers which opened new markets for the entrepreneur to make a business of selling information to the masses. But this copyright of yesterday might have a hard sell in today's markets of cyberspace for four reasons: (1) practical reasons-ease of copying, difficulty in policing, and the difficulty in finding copied material, (2) technical reasons-how can authorship be identified, (3) economic reasons-markets would become monopolized by fewer distributors leading to the possible

breakdown of the free market system, and (4) structural reasons-the copyright laws would slow down the agenda of the dynamic economy we live within at this time (Kleinman, 1996).

With the invention of the telegraph in the 1840's the dawn of the newest age began, the Electronic Age. This technological advancement, along with others that followed such as the telephone, the motion picture, and the phonograph, to name a few, opened the avenue of dissemination of materials to the masses. It also opened a new reality of real time information processing (Lacy, 1996). These advances closed the proximity of the users so that real time communication was made possible for those with the equipment or with access to the equipment.

Some of these technologies were used to incite or indoctrinate people into beliefs that were detrimental to others in their own society. This was proven by the actions of Hitler and Mussolini (Lacy, 1996). But governmental agencies were established in most cases to control the use and abuse of these new technologies. The best controls were self imposed by the industrial giants of the technology such as the Stationers Company, which controls the production of printed material, and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, which establishes rules and regulations for the ethical and proper use and distribution of filmed materials.

Television made its way into the homes of the typical American family, but few realized the social acceptability of this technology until nearly a decade after it's inception in the 1940's (Larson, 1995). Television has been blamed for many effects of its use, both positive and negative. One effect, which could be positive or negative depending on the view of the individual, is the homogenization of our culture (Gerbner, Gross, & Morgan, 1986 as cited by McQuillen, 2003) in that we are watching events from much of the rest of the world and are brought into a way of thinking that is more in line with the larger society. Studies have also indicated that social reality tends to alter with

the more frequent viewing of television (Shrum & O'Quinn, 1993).

Some can see the positive aspects of McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory as our society evolves back into a more close knit global village which can now extend outside of our physical boundaries to replace the outdated roles of yesterday (Strate, Jacobson, & Gibson, 1996). While others feel that the Theory lacks credibility with today's advanced theories. "In reality, almost no one recognizes Technological Determinism as a valid ontological perspective anymore; instead, there are now numerous alternatives that cast technologies as far more ontologically complicated" (Harrison & Zappen, 2003, p. 5).

Does Technological Determinism have credibility in our academic society today? Many have been shown to agree while others agree with certain stipulations. Others are not so lenient and are outright harsh about McLuhan's philosophy. This study will take the perspective that his theory is applicable due to how our ideologies and methods of today are being altered because of the Internet and computer-mediated communication. Whether it is the dawn of the information age or the cyberage, many of the strategies and methods of yesterday are becoming altered due to devices that are becoming more abundant at an ever increasing rate.

The Internet is a convergence of computer and television. The convergence of these technologies makes a new avenue for the population to explore. We continue to use the older technologies such as print and electronic transmission (both wired and wireless) of viewable signal, and these, coupled with the newer technologies, have more of an impact on what we see and say. Should the transmission not be to the taste of the user, that transmission can be changed to one closer to that which is acceptable. Internet technology would also be classified as a "cold medium" by McLuhan's definition as it is directed at multiple receptors, and the user is directly responsible for how the medium is used in completing his/her task. Some aspects of the Internet and the computer could be

seen as a “hot medium” if the user merely sits and watches or listens as he/she decides, but the avenue to expand out to guide the medium is still available.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

As with any type of medium in communication, people react or act differently than they do with face-to-face communication. Computers are no different, as people react differently with the computer when they believe there is someone on the receiving end of the transmission instead of just communicating with the computer to find a solution (Sundar & Nass, 2000).

The earliest use of the Internet was in the 1960's in the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) when “investigators used to ship crates of magnetic tape across the continent to the few computers with enough power to solve intricate technical models” (Brin, 1998, p. 33). Cyberspace was born in the late 1970's out of the United States Department of Defense’s ARPAnet. Many wonder as to the reason for the government allowing the Internet to go public after becoming a major part of the defense strategy. The answer goes back to Vannevar Bush of the Manhattan Project who said that we would actually be distributing the authority rather than concentrating it, which follows from the previously described doctrine of the founding fathers and the constitution established in the individual states. The ability for the Internet to route itself around problems has made it more useful and problematic at the same time. The routing around problems makes sure that a plan or order is still carried out while allowing for those who are attempting to cause problems to evade being caught. In an interesting twist of fate regarding the Internet:

it is interesting to note that this supremely connecting system, which ironically arose out of deadly suspicions dividing the human race during the mid-twentieth century, might not have received funding under any logical peacetime criteria. It’s deep sturdiness against physical destruction eventually implies robustness against coercion-or even, in the long run, legal authority. And yet there are worries. Will new tools empower

citizens, or exacerbate a widening gulf between 'haves' and 'have nots'? Oceans of information are available, but much is not well organized, cataloged, or verified. Data overload looms as a real danger, sometimes making it seem as if we are sipping from a fire hose. Controlled anarchy and creative chaos have their charms, but can they last for long before demands ring out for order? (Brin, 1998, p. 330)

The Internet is also seen as a hybrid of both interpersonal communication and mass communication since it utilizes both (Barnes, 2001).

John Walker of the Autodesk fame noticed five distinct generations of computers over the fifty year period since its inception. The 1940s were the generation of the plug boards where the computers were operated by switching the plugs on master boards of the main system. The 1950s computers were enabled with the use of punch cards. The 1960s were accomplished with time-sharing of the computer space. The pull down menus followed in suit for the fourth generation which is closely followed by the fifth generation with the advent of the point and click paradigm (Rheingold, 1991).

Although the power in the computer is great, its capabilities at times do not match the needs of the program. One process that was from the third generation with time sharing is expanded to give a greater output to the program. A transputer is a device or chip in other computers that gives a particular distant computer more power when called upon (Rheingold, 1991). Should the computer need a million computations per second to accomplish the goal of the program, it can call out to multiple computers to accept and accomplish this goal and to relay the information back after the task is completed.

Judge Dalzell of the U. S. District Court summarized four characteristics of the Internet from the 1996 Communications Decency Act:

(1) the Internet presents very low barriers to entry, (2) these barriers to entry are identical for both speakers and listeners, (3) as a result of these low barriers, astoundingly diverse content is available on the Internet, and (4) the Internet provides significant access to all who wish to speak in the medium, and even creates a relative parity among speakers (Morris & Berman, 2002, p. 121).

Another view of the legality of the Internet is that of John Gilmore who claims that “computers are literally extensions of our minds, and that their contents should therefore remain as private as our inner thoughts” (Brin, 1998, p. 13), or that of John Perry Barlow who in the “‘Declaration of Independence for Cyberspace’ proclaimed that the mundane jurisdictions of nations and their archaic laws are essentially powerless and irrelevant to the Internet and its denizens” (Brin, 1998, p. 13). John Perry Barlow also called the Internet the “most important human advancement since the Printing Press” only to recant and rephrase that the development was since fire (Brin, 1998, p. 38).

Virtual Reality

Is what most people are experiencing online or on the computer fitting what is defined as a virtual reality? Virtual reality is believed to have been a recent advancement in our society when in actuality it has a much longer history than that. Some believe that the first virtual reality test started in the era with the stone drawings in the caves in southern France at Lascaux (Rheingold, 1991). These pictures when viewed from photographs show images that are not as impressive as when viewed in the caves with lights placed in proper locations to give off the interesting and yet 3D images of those representations of the time. In the second century A.D., the Greek physician Galen identified the phenomena, binocular parallax, which is the principle on which the 1844 device called the stereoscope is designed. It is this early principle on which the virtual reality which our computers utilize is based. So, in reality, have we not been working towards virtual reality since people were drawing on the walls in the caves?

The first virtual reality engine was initiated on January 1, 1970 at the University of Utah and consisted of “a clipping divider, a matrix multiplier, a vector generator, a headset, a head position sensor, and a general purpose computer” (Rheingold, 1991, p. 106). Rheingold also noted that being in virtual reality was like being in two worlds at the same time. Abilities changed as the equipment changed and improved, but the sense of

the alternate world did not change. Myron Krueger believed in the importance of experimenting with the tools of the virtual world, but he thought that human experience should also be examined. Behavioral, psychological, social, and artistic components of the virtual world are also important.

Two ideas relevant to virtual reality are immersion and navigation (Rheingold, 1991). The idea of immersion relates to the illusion of being inside the computer generated world while the idea of navigation pertains to the ability to maneuver through the world. Surrogate travel is another term in the virtual reality industry that applies to the ability to look around a world in any direction of your choosing while the characteristics and environment do not change.

Another immersion into the virtual world is that of telepresence which is the “psychological experience that results when simulator technology works well enough to convince users that they are immersed in virtual worlds” (Rheingold, 1991, p. 207). The term telepresence was conceived by Robert Heinlein in his 1940's novel, Waldo, in which a human could project himself out to puppets through the use of a computer generated virtual world. How this is useful becomes apparent when sending in unmanned planes over hostile territory, bomb sensing robots into a possible danger zone, victim rescue robots or body sensing robots into collapsed buildings, or freeing a paralyzed person from the constraints of his/her condition with the freedom of movement.

What virtual reality did was open the door to possibilities of time and financial savings for users (Rheingold, 1991). Users are able to preexamine plans of buildings, roadways, and even cities. Matsushita Electric Works in Japan utilized virtual reality for customers to see their planned kitchen prior to purchase so they knew the feel of the newly acquired products. The main problem with the technology is in the computations required to perfect the images. The computer is working out many thousands of computations per second which causes a lag in the image that reduces the chance of

reality for the user. When the reality is that of a fighter plane in a dog fight and the pilot is there for training, that training becomes ineffective as the pilot is not seeing a reality of the situation. In interpersonal confrontations it is imperative to relay more than the message of the user. What becomes more important is the implied meaning of the message which is not always successfully relayed by the text message.

These problems, along with the complexity of virtual reality, cause the greatest amount of error in the portrayal of a picture (Borgmann, 1999). The complexity becomes more difficult with the implied meaning of the various human installments that the computer might not be able to present to the user. Virtual reality in its infancy needed to work out the minor problems of interpersonal characteristics displayed in order to make the scene more real and to display more realistic information (Rheingold, 1991). It is in the cognitive processes that the next phase of research is to be the most fruitful if the computer interaction with the user is to become a useful tool. At any rate, with the flow of technological advances taking place on our planet at this time, who is to say that these problems might not be classified as speed bumps of the future?

These problems that have been addressed reflect the technical aspect of viewing Cyberspace (Borgmann, 1999). Other problems evolve during the transition when reality in the real world comes into a meshing of truths with that of the Cyberspace. This forces an ambiguity in the eyes of the users which may alter the signs or meanings of those viewing the images. In the past, those who saw these realities changing attempted to designate signs of remembrance such as books or pictures or stories that projected the images which might have been lost.

Cyberspace

“Information is about to overflow and suffocate reality” (Borgmann, 1999, p. 213). Cyberspace is assisting in accomplishing this as people become more acclimated to becoming users. Three developments have changed cyberspace over the past age of

computers: (1) the growth of friendly graphic user interface, (2) the exponential explosion of microchip speed and sophistication, and (3) “the building of the so-called Information Superhighway is providing sufficient bandwidth on most links to accommodate such heavy signal loads” (Phelan, 1996, p. 41).

Much of the expansion of the computer and cyberspace is driven by the entertainment industry (Rheingold, 1991). People such as Brenda Laurel, Warren Robinett, and Jaron Lanier spent their whole time perfecting entertainment toys for the user which in return increased the capability of the computer for other areas of the spectrum. Many of the games in the beginning utilized the tools of the computer to entertain the users which, in turn, gave them the confidence to expand out into other facets of the industry. Many of the areas studied by scientists, sociologists, psychologists, as well as other people working in other industries have unwittingly opened up the playing field in the computer industry and vice-versa.

What is Cyberspace? Cyberspace as a term was the brainchild of the novelist of Neuromancer, William Gibson (Rheingold, 1991):

We have many different definitions of cyberspace, some viewing it as a fictional construct, others as imaginary but in development, and others as real and present. Some equate cyberspace with virtual reality, others with the electronic storage and transmission of information, or with CMC, or with communication over computer networks. Some see cyberspace as an individual conceptual space, others as a product of social interaction. Part of the ambiguity surrounding this word may be related to its novelty, but it is also true that the term acts as a nexus for a variety of different phenomena, such as telecommunications, cybernetics and computer technology, CMC, virtual reality and telepresence, hypertext and hypermedia, and cyberculture (Strate, Jacobson, & Gibson, 1996, p. 4).

The telecommunications industry has adopted the term cyberspace to refer to the integration of computers within telephone lines as well as the phrase “information

superhighway” or “infobahn” to refer to the technologies within the system (Strate, Jacobson, & Gibson, 1996). This convergence of technologies has led to the need to examine the ways human beings and cultures have associated with the phenomena. Although the term technology refers to any use of tools and advancements within human society, it is commonly only seen as that advancement of the most recent era of our short existence (Phelan, 1996). “Also like technology, cyberspace evokes a shared space of common goals, for the human world requires both witness and collaboration, surveillance and competition” (Phelan, 1996, p. 41).

Randall Walser stated that cyberspace is also the place where one can leave his/her body and explore the alternate world enabled by the online system. If the body or the circumstance is not to the liking of the users, they merely leave it for a better body or circumstance (Rheingold, 1991). Walser also sees cyberspace as a place of imagination where a person can leave the real world to explore the depths of possibility within this imaginary world. The user of this imaginary world controls the possibilities to make the important decisions of which path to travel. This differentiates cyberspace from film and other forms of media. “Print and radio tell; stage and film show; cyberspace embodies” (Rheingold, 1991, p. 192).

Phelan felt that cyberspace was a step backwards in many ways. The ability to control or to obtain information or find results in a laboratory when one was not available made the task of learning and searching easier, but it removed us from the primary reality and experience of our society or culture and altered our method of researching and our critical reasoning (Phelan, 1996).

Cyberspace is a multifaceted experience for the user. It not only consists of material components of reality but also entails two nonmaterial components: relationships among individuals, and the cybercultural contents of their heads-the sense of belonging to cyberspace, and of what that might mean. Together, these three components make up a

new culture all in its own world (Beniger 1996). The term cyberculture goes beyond the original meaning of hackers and discussions and transmissions of scientific data. We now see cyberculture in our everyday relationships and interactions when we use computer-mediated communication. The new culture forces changes in our rules and regulations as well as the languages of our society which follow us into other cultures and alter these other cultures as well. This also gives us new forms of intolerance and hostilities such as flaming (hostile communication), spamming (messages that are too long or verbose), and less offensive forms of ranting (Strate, Jacobson, & Gibson, 1996). From the persuasion aspect of communication, cyberspace presents two attractive features: it gives the feel of interpersonal communication and it fosters the support of centralized control through accessibility, the ability to retrieve, and readability (Beniger, 1996).

Using the American postal service and telephone systems as models, Beniger gives eight speculations about what will happen as cyberspace continues to crystalize:

- (1) massive operations for downloading and mining the cyberslush and reorganizing it according to user identifications,
- (2) high-speed, programmable mailers to individual accounts on the Net,
- (3) new database marketing industries based on various data sets linked by inference to individual accounts,
- (4) greater standardization of Net account formats,
- (5) trafficking in specialized lists of user identifications,
- (6) detailed psychological profiles of individuals based on their past inputs to the Net,
- (7) word-of-mouth campaigns via individuals determined, based on their past Net behavior, to be most likely to spread rumors and gossip,
- (8) individual accounts run by software persuaders that are the modern natural-language processing equivalent of the ELIZA system (1996, p. 56).

But Kleinman feels that our position in the evolution of technology no longer allows us the convenience of old theories, and new models of communication theory have yet to explain the reality of the new culture in which we live (1996). A reevaluation of the present models might be necessary at this time.

Beniger goes on to classify two types of users in the future: those that will utilize

the system fairly and morally for the good of society and to use it to make an honest profit, and those that will utilize it for criminal behavior or in a manner that will benefit their ulterior motives (1996). Today the market is producing paraphernalia that are breaking the extreme limits of human behavior (Zettl, 1995). Actions such as murder, mutilation, rape, and road rage are running rampant on the computer screens of home computers. These actions are training the adults of tomorrow by playing the actions out today. But these actions also teach the adults of tomorrow the possibilities of today in technology use. Only by achieving the capabilities of this equipment of today can we expect to create new and better equipment tomorrow due to correcting the flaws and inadequacies of today. Another problem with those who would disrupt the use of the Internet is that of hackers. In the past, hackers were a group of computer operators that found ways around the established systems in order to improve online communications. Today hackers are those antisocial types that break into others' computers to disrupt normal operations and cause havoc in the lives of those following the rules (Rheingold, 1991).

McQuillen feels that although technology is making the individual more self-sufficient, it is also making him/her more isolated and reclusive (2003). In the end, what is achieved in progress through technological advances cannot be rescinded (Brin, 1998). We must work with the tools and toys of today in order to make a more productive and safer tomorrow. This has been proven through time as people have utilized technology to determine who they are in that era of time.

Most recent theories of globalization focus on the increasing rate of speed with which the process is unfolding - fueled largely by innovations in communication technologies and transportation networks that compress time and shrink the world (Giddens, 1991 as cited by Riley & Monge, 1998). Because notions of community are often grounded in face-to-face interactions and consensual standards of conduct and trust,

issues of cultural practice, power, and control will necessarily be renegotiated in both physical and electronic communities (Riley & Monge, 1998). Even though the Internet is thought to bring more people closer together, it sometimes continues the age of television as a mass media instrument (Oblak, 2003). In the area of political Internet use, the results indicate that instead of a discussion group atmosphere people are more apt to reference the information and send a quick e-mail to answer or question. This is not considered to be an interactive venture on the part of the participants.

That social interaction has altered in the face of a new technology is not a first in the age of technology:

Every media development alters the availability and nature of traditional private and public places. The newspaper influenced and defined, in part, the barbershop, the village green, and the cafe. The telephone shaped the nature of courtship. Radio altered the experiences of the living room, the car, and the doctor's office. The computer keyboard opens up distant retrievable vistas (Gumpert & Drucker, 1996, p. 30-31).

It is only through the inability to access the equipment or technophobia toward the new equipment that many possible users are disconnected from the new environments that other users utilize to their benefit.

Every significant new medium of communication has altered the distribution of power within societies. From increasing the power of print, to giving more reality to cinema, recordings, and broadcasting, the computer has taken hold of the new era in our society and has been identified as the most compelling advancement (Lacy, 1996). But this new medium does not necessarily impose the death sentence on the viability of old technologies when it makes its grandstand appearance. The wave of viewers of motion pictures continued to grow until the 1950's, when the invention of television started showing up in common households. Then it started to drastically drop off in attendance, but the motion picture industry has since realized its niche in the communication realm.

Marketing of books has made a resurgence since the introduction of the Internet to six times the number of titles of the 1950's in 1990, and 1993 recorded more than thirty times the sales volume of the 1950's, which is several times higher than the level of inflation for this time period.

There are many ways that the clash of the new and the desire for the old ways do not meet with the users of today. One such case that was identified by Shoshana Zuboff was the clash of computerization in the manufacturing plant, specifically the pulp mills. Over the years the processes had been fine tuned by the workers on the floors toward the objective that their abilities were an art form. This kept the communication system set up so that those people with the knowledge were on the floor so their eyes could remain on the process that they knew. After the integration of the computer into the control room, people who were the controllers on the floor were no longer needed in their old positions, and the controllers were now in the computer room watching the process from monitors and thereby removing themselves from the actual environment (Rheingold, 1991).

Another situation identified is in the classrooms where the communicators of tomorrow are prepared. But it is those trainers of tomorrow that are having the problems today with the technology. Technical report writers and instructors may not like the effect of the new technology and the need to teach and learn these new technologies, but they will need the knowledge in the future and the need to learn it is now (Selting, 2002). Stehr believes that we have entered a new modernity if you look at the production paradox. This paradox is highlighted by three empirical facts: (1) "highly skilled labor appears on the scene before information technology," (2) "the increasing importance of highly skilled labor is not a reaction to demand for such labor, but rather there is an autonomous supply shift," and (3) "information technology actually helps entrepreneurs and managers to catch up with and reverse the rising labor costs implied by this supply shift" (2000, p. 89).

Types of Online Interactions

E-mail is one of the most common online processes that is used to privately or locally communicate to a specific range of targets. As of 2002, almost 90% of Americans online were frequent users of email and instant messaging (UCLA, 2003). Email tends to be a hybrid communication system in that it is a mixture of formal text and informal dialogue (Barnes, 2001). This fact tends to “alter the symbolic form of written language” (Barnes, 2001, p. 37). The “formal messages tend to maintain a traditional use of language. In contrast, informal messages experiment with new symbolic structures that compensate for lack of emotional cues” (Barnes, 2001, p. 37). Although the problems of e-mail have been many, time erodes many of those problems as users become more familiar with the system. This happened in a longitudinal study over a 5 year period from 1994 to 1998 (Lantz, 2003). The study also showed the ability of the user to determine the importance of the message and ignore or place a proper perspective on the message.

On June 20, 2003 France passed a ban on the term e-mail in “governmental ministries, documents, publications or Web sites” (Keaten, 2003, p. 1). The move to have all e-mail called *courrier électronique* (electronic mail) followed that of the French Quebec move to remove the English language from its official messages. As to whether this move will come to reality in the international media remains to be seen, but other moves by the French make one believe that anti-American sentiment is behind this move since the French also banned proselytizing on French soil under penalty of fines and imprisonment. They also referred to the fact that a high percentage of those committing these acts were sent by American churches and felt that these acts were an attempt to alter French ideologies.

Another aspect of e-mail is how it distorts the distinction between past, present and future when we converse on the system. We are not actually returning the information at the same time as in face-to-face relationships (Barnes, 2001). This is not uncommon

since it resembles the asynchronous delivery of both the telegraph and postal letter delivery. But this asynchronous nature of e-mail and other aspects of the online culture is one that has the advantage over that of the synchronous face-to-face encounter as it allows the mulling of ideas that give the answer a less chaotic feel. It allows the individual to mull over the possible answers and to select that which is the best. In face-to-face communication, not giving an answer would be considered rude and might cause some uneasiness with those in the discussion. E-mail also has the advantage that one could ignore the mailing sent by another and this would possibly not have the same effect.

Chat is used to communicate to any who are online and in the target room at the time of the transmission. Chat rooms cater to a small percent of the population, less than 2%, and there is no evidence that they are growing in popularity (UCLA, 2003). In fact, more recent inductees have a higher percentage of chat room use than those that have been online for a greater length of time.

Chat rooms may be either open or closed. An open chat room has open access, as individuals are able to jump into and out of it without the interference of mediators or facilitators. Closed rooms must be enrolled into or invited into and anyone can be removed for nonconformity to rules or regulations. The fact that a chat room or discussion room is open or closed can alter the individual behavior of the participants in the rooms (Barnes, 2001). The closed rooms usually tend to be much more well behaved, but the fact that they are a closed room does not guarantee this conduct. Many individuals also go into a chat room in order to watch the discussion of others. These individuals are called lurkers and are characteristic of voyeurs in society, or they may be the product of other medium forms that have produced a group of consumers of mass media (Barnes, 2001). These lurkers tend to make up a higher percentage of users in the chat room than those actually talking.

Webboard is used to direct information to distinct targets for their reception at the

time of their bidding. This is a common method of messaging in cases such as the educational arena where students need to access information at their convenience, and they have more flexibility as to what their needs might be.

Instant messaging is a messaging system in which one user can target another in a closed room for private conversation or assumed private conversation. This is basically pulling the directed target aside and closing the doors, although as in every situation in face-to-face conversation, there is a chance of thin walls or eavesdropping devices.

Muds (Multi-user domains) are a package that a user signs into in order to become part of the scenario in which he/she is interested in participating. The user then designs a character and goes about the world exploring and participating with other users in the activities of the world which might involve online violence against each other. Many of the role playing games on the Internet use this format. Only about one quarter of the users in the UCLA study admit to playing games online, but this study did not differentiate between role playing types of games and gambling or board/card games (2003). Games online are designated as being either asynchronous or synchronous and being finite or infinite (Barnes, 2001). A synchronous game is one where players are talking in real time and can foster playfulness more than an asynchronous game where the discussion is not happening at the same time. Finite games are those which have a winner and the winning goals are known to players such as board games and cards games. Infinite games are those which the players continue to play with no clear-cut stipulation as to who is designated the winner. "MUDS are very popular for two basic reasons: the social quality of these systems and the richness of the metaphor they employ" (Curtis and Nichols, 1993, as cited by Barnes, 2001, p. 94). Online participants must learn the rules and regulations of the system and encountering other players in order to remain for fear of being ignored or locked out of the system. One area where MUDS do discriminate against other players is when another cannot touch type. This form of media requires a person with good social

ability to converse in the typewritten format.

Each of these methods and others have particular uses for those who are willing to employ this technology and each is not without positive and negative aspects, but face-to-face has been proven necessary in the relationships of people (Haythornthwaite, 2001), and online settings have been found to be less personal at this stage in history (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000). Also, each of these methods is considered a non-immersion form of virtual reality since the user merely sees the computer screen and the words of those with whom he/she is communicating (Barnes, 2001). An immersion type of virtual reality is usually one in which the user wears gear that can, within the mind, transform that user into a world generated by the computer.

Positive and Negative Aspects of CMC

The first place to start in addressing these aspects is with the central tool of the industry: the computer. Frederick Brooks identified three areas in which the computer does not have the capability to surpass the human: pattern recognition, whether visual or aural; evaluations; and obscure recollection. Where the computer does surpass the human brain is in: “evaluations of computations; storing massive amounts of data; and remembering things without forgetting” (Rheingold, 1991, p. 38).

Like all mediums of communication, the use of CMC has both positive and negative effects. The Internet has been blamed for decreased family time, strains in relationships, perpetuation of false information, and development or exacerbation of psychological problems (Beard, 2002). Beard also blamed the Internet for decreased productivity at work while the UCLA Internet report indicated that over 60% of its sources reported increased productivity (2003). Some psychological problems are those that have been classified as addictive in nature such as Internet Addiction Disorder and Problematic Internet Use which have signs similar to those addictive habits of drugs and gambling (Hall & Parsons, 2001). But, as with all problems in our existence, there are

always warning signs for those willing to keep watch.

Problems more directly related to interpersonal communication include the encouragement of infidelity and the inaccuracy of the image that is projected by the user online, disclosure of only those attributes that are positive and omitting those attributes which are negative or considered detrimental to the progress of the possible relationship, limited relational level messages to uncover emotional aspects of a relationship, and a time-out procedure before the answering of questions or the making of comments that is not available in real time face-to-face activity and that might give a truer accounting of personality (McQuillen, 2003).

Two common problems associated with online communication that are more prevalent than in face-to-face communication are flaming and spamming (Barnes, 2001). Flaming is an angry or bitter assault through an online message that attacks one or more people receiving the message. Flames are also used in group discussions to get the ire of a member or several members within the group. Flaming has been a useful method of moderators or facilitators to get a discussion going within a group, or it may be used to rid the discussion group of an unwanted guest or lurker. Usually, though, flaming is done by an individual or group of individuals who are attempting to disrupt an established online group. To spam is to send a repeated message to a group, or a series of groups, so as to disrupt the group's information by having large quantities of incoming messages (Barnes, 2001).

Some of the positive effects of CMC include financial benefits, social benefits, psychological and therapeutic uses, and educational benefits (Beard, 2002; Koivusaari, 2002). Also, while some may be more able in accepting the Internet, others might have more problems with some aspects of the online experience (Davis & Ralph, 2001; Brush & Uden, 2000). According to the UCLA study, people who have been receiving online experience for a longer time tend to be less technophobic about the Internet experience

than newer users (UCLA, 2003). This same study also indicated that as people become more acclimated to the Internet with use, they are more apt to stretch out to other avenues of Internet use and expand their experience (UCLA, 2003). Some people who are very open in the face-to-face experience might find online chats and learning arenas overwhelming, while others who are quiet face-to-face are considerably more open and talkative in online situations. This does not necessarily mean that all aspects of the online experience would be overwhelming, but that a particular avenue within the online communication experience might be the only part that causes the problems. The Internet, and in particular the computer, are found to be male dominated media that are set up in a manner more suited to the tastes of a male user (Barnes, 2001). This is not to say that only men are users since the percentage of women online is nearly equal to that of men in recent studies (UCLA, 2003). On the Internet, gender tends to take the persona of the illusion cast by the sender instead of the physical image seen by the receiver (Barnes, 2001). What is being seen is the establishment of male behaviors that are, in fact, picked up and used by female users or male users portraying themselves as female online in a role reversal. "This is a behavior pattern that currently goes against culturally defined gender roles. In CMC, both men and women have an opportunity to break traditional patterns of gendered behavior and establish new types of interpersonal and interdependent relationships" (Barnes, 2001, p. 78).

A study of 50 homes in Pittsburgh, where each home was introduced to the Internet and computer use, revealed that the largest number of users were the teens in the families, and the reasons for the use were to get information about local events and to keep in touch with those in local groups (Barnes, 2001). For all the studies that showed the ability to spread out into the world not obtainable without the Internet, it is interesting that people would accentuate the local face-to-face communication with the world enabled technology.

Web online learning does have positive aspects in the learning environment that include “(a) clear demarcations of individual members’ contributions, (b) a structure for group members’ participation, (c) easy access to group members’ contributions, (d) individual work space, and (e) commensurable resources for each group member” (Pychyl, Clarke, & Abarbanel, 1999, p. 138). Whether these are considered a positive or negative attribute ultimately depends on the perspective of those involved.

Since the intervention of the Internet into the public sphere and its ever increasing usage by the general public, the use of other mediums has been declining (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000). Even though the Internet fails at some very important aspects of social contact such as sociability, it appears to be catching on due to other aspects such as contactability and availability.

The Internet has allowed us to broaden our horizons. No longer do we allow the rigidness of our society to dictate our relationships. Now we can move out to the greater audience or to others who better fit into our pastimes or hobbies (Brin, 1998). This ability to reach a larger area is not going to equate to larger core groups of members in the realm of the individual’s reality. Christina Prell studied a community networking group in Troy, New York and found that individuals would select those that forwarded their needs as the primary recipients of their attention (2003). This would possibly go to the issue that even though one’s possibilities of members increase, the core members of importance would not exceed that of the needs of individuals. So when an individual becomes part of a larger community (i.e., the Internet community), he/she would select those groups or members of groups that would forward their own personal needs or desires.

CMC Group

As in face-to-face communication, the CMC group has many members who make up the intricacies of the whole and who exchange many types of information across technological paths in order to obtain an acceptable goal (Haythornthwaite, 2000). The

CMC group also includes a wide array of parts within the computer network that are used to varying degrees of success to complete many different jobs.

In describing the group as a significant entity of people, one can ask if this group can be classified as a community as a face-to-face group can be. A community is defined by two significant attributes: (1) "it is a web of affect-laden relationships that encompasses a group of individuals, and (2) it requires a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, mores, meanings, and a shared historical identity- in short, a culture" (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999, p. 241). Both CMC and face-to-face communication give access to users, breakout and reassembly, and cooling off mechanisms and civility. Face-to-face is superior in encompassing interpersonal knowledge such as identification, authentication, and accountability. CMC is superior in interactive broadcasting and memory (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999).

As in a face-to-face relationship, online group relationships also go through a cycle of stages in their histories (Barnes, 2001). These stages include: initial enthusiasm, evangelism, growth, community, discomfort with diversity, smug complacency and stagnation, and/or maturity. These stages are not unlike those stages that a face-to-face group goes through during its existence.

Group Perspectives

Along with the possibility of a larger community is the desire for a particular type of community of choice. There are two perspectives that are of particular interest in the studies of the Internet (Stromer-Galley, 2003). The first is the possibility of the "homophily perspective" which follows the line that people tend to hunt out those online with whom they find more in common. In this way people will have more discussions with those who follow their own beliefs. In some cases the ability to isolate a topic based on the special interest of one group gives the ability to disclose claims or opinions (Russell, 2001). The Internet gave the Zapatistas of Mexico the ability to show the world

the claims of their indigenous population in their struggle for rights even though there were those who thought that the views being presented were less potent and authentic than live or face-to-face.

The second perspective of the Stromer-Galley study is the “diversity perspective” which follows the line that people tend to discuss topics with those having all types of perspectives so as to obtain a wider range of ideas (2003). This particular study showed the users as preferring the diversity perspective in their opinions on the questionnaire. Although this might have been the case in this study of political chat centers, it might not follow in other areas of interest, and especially in the area of romance or personals.

Along with the topics of interested users comes the responsibility of accepting the diversity of cultural differences in these users. Many users have specific cultural habits that they bring online with them, and they can be turned away from a prospective group due to the group’s habits not complying with those of the users (Chih-Hsiung Tu, 2001). These warming environments are what bring users into the group and are what holds them until they can become part of that group. But the receptiveness of the users is an important aspect of the reaction of probable new entries into the group (Koszalka, 2001). Whether this is important to the group is dependent on the group’s desire to allow others into the group who might not be of a particular type or follow a particular belief. One example of this is when a male attempts to infiltrate a lesbian dominated chat or romance group either under his own name or an alias. The group would probably take issue with his presence and force him out or cold shoulder him with an “ignore” command. This receptiveness must also encapsulate the ability to use the system and be comfortable in working with the new technologies. This includes the ability to discuss its possibilities with others in the system that will, in the long run, make the users more technology savvy which will, in turn, make the users more comfortable with the intricacies of the system.

Along with the receptiveness of the group comes the identifiability of the

individual. This factor comes into play when an individual attempts to enter the realm of the online group. The group members tend to talk more abstractly about the newcomer which will identify this member as an outsider until such time as the individual is accepted as a full-fledged member of the group (Douglas & McGarty, 2001).

Interpersonal Contact

An intimate relationship is defined as including one or more of the following characteristics: behavioral interdependence, need fulfillment, and emotional attachment (Brehm, 1992). Usually a person is going to attempt to fill the need that is most necessary for them when looking for a prospective mate. According to the stimulus-value-role theory, in the early stages of the relationship, the most important aspects of the meeting are those qualities that peak the interest of the participants (Brehm, 1992). People are attracted to others in the stimulus stage for various reasons such as physical attractiveness, perceived success, attitudinal similarities, or personality traits. One advantage (or disadvantage depending on the perspective of the user) in online communications is the fact that nonverbal is not present in the primary assessment by either of the participants. In some cases barriers may get in the way of an interpersonal relationship evolving. These barriers may be exterior (caused by people or conditions outside of the participants involved) or internal (psychological or physical conditions of one or both participants). If these barriers come to light while still in the early online phase of communication, it would be easier for one or both of the participants to remove themselves from the discussion than it would if they were talking face-to-face. Of course the costs of staying in the relationship would need to be compared to the rewards before one could justify removal from the relationship.

Another aspect of the first contact is self disclosure. Females are willing to disclose information on feelings toward parents, feelings toward closest friends, feelings toward classes, the things in life they are most afraid of, and their accomplishments

(Brehm, 1992). Men are most likely to disclose their political views, the things about themselves that they are most proud of, and the things they like most about their partner. In the social penetration theory information is divulged to the prospective partner in small proportions in the beginning and is increased as the relationship evolves. Whether this trend correlates with the new data in online communication is in doubt due to the fact that the loss of face-to-face communication seems to lead to an increased amount of divulgence of information in the early stages of a relationship.

While online relationships hold the same motivations and goals as face-to-face relationships, the strategies to accomplish these end results differ (Barnes, 2001). One skill that each individual user must gain is the ability to communicate using the keyboard. Effective writing skills are a must and are an important ability in the trek to meeting new people and beginning online relationships. But in meeting others we must accomplish our first task, the introduction of ourselves. In face-to-face communication information is received through observing physical appearance and behavior and personality traits (Hancock & Dunham, 2001) while online communications are compared to interactions at a costume party (McQuillen, 2003). "Relationships are not being initiated with 'real' people, but with the projected, edited, 'spun' images the users share on-line" (McQuillen, 2003, p. 622). Users of the Internet, when compared to face-to-face communication, were found to have a less than effective ability to pick up characteristics of the discussion partner, but those attributes that were found did have the possibility of being seen as exaggerated (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

Other than the physical arena becoming less apparent with the use of the Internet, limited availability of information on the participants is often the case. In adjusting this situation with the addition of a photograph, one would think that the relationship would grow stronger. In fact, those who stayed with the text based information and excluded the photograph grew to have a stronger relationship than those who included the photograph

(Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001). Interpersonal communication on the Internet was found to be much like that of face-to-face with the flow of information seeming to follow the same paths while the location and forms of attendance tended to differentiate (Barnes, 2001).

One of the better features of the Internet is the ability to retest old theories in new arenas (Baym, 2001). Baym also finds that there are three characteristics that are common when focusing on interpersonal issues online: “they are normatively regulated, hierarchical, and often very supportive” (2001, p. 70). “Nearly all of the research into computer-mediated communication has been conducted at the level of the group, or averaged across individuals; we know too little about the individual differences that make a difference in computer-mediated experience” (Baym, 2001, p. 73).

How do we describe ourselves to others and, more importantly, to ourselves? This definition will alter as we proceed through the new age that is engulfed by this new technology and that recreates our old selves into what is becoming the norm in describing the new user (Bolter, 1995). Instead of the self that is “regarded as an autonomous, authorial voice; it becomes instead a wandering eye that occupies various perspectives, one after another” (Bolter, 1995, p. 106). We define ourselves in terms of computer jargon: the size of RAM, the speed of our modem, and the quality of our machines and programs (Gumpert & Drucker, 1996).

When we are learning about one another in interpersonal relationships, we go through a process of tearing away the layers of ourselves as described in the removal of layers of the onion in “social penetration theory” (Griffin, 1997). These layers are removed as we familiarize ourselves and increase our comfort zone with those with whom we are communicating. One interesting aspect of CMC is how the layers dissolve away during the communicating process at a much quicker rate (Barnes, 2001). With the removal of the face in online interaction, the self of the individual is more open to another

individual who is less known. One aspect that makes this more apparent is that of anonymity. This anonymity allows individuals to be less fearful of the outcome when divulging information which can be, and in many cases is, used against them by a stranger with whom they are talking online. Men are usually thought of as masculine which includes the traits of “strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled” while women are thought of as feminine which includes the traits of “attractive, deferential, nonaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships” (Woods, 1997, p. 27). These traits are easier to see face-to-face than with the anonymity of the online scene.

Along with gender traits is gender style which entails the method of conversing with another individual. The seven aspects of the feminine style include: (1) “talk is the essence of relationships; (2) equality between people; (3) showing support for others; (4) maintenance work; (5) inclusiveness; (6) personal and concrete; and (7) tentativeness” (Woods, 1997, p. 170-172). The six components of the masculine style include:

(1) tend to regard talk as a way to exert control, preserve independence, and enhance status; (2) instrumentality; (3) conversation dominance; (4) men tend to express themselves in fairly absolute, assertive ways; (5) communicate more abstractly; (6) men’s speech tends not to be highly responsive, especially on the relationship level of communication (Woods, 1997, p. 173-175).

Another aspect that Paul Wright pointed out in 1982 was that “women tended to engage face-to-face, while men usually interact side by side” (Woods, 1997, p. 221).

Overall, the Internet has many advantages over the print media in those seeking others in personal columns:

First, using the Internet makes it easy to meet people with similar interests from around the world. Second, Internet personals’ sites have search engines which look through thousands of ads seeking those which match criteria preset by the person searching the ads. Third, communication over the Internet is rapid and cheap. Finally, people can portray the persona they

choose when communicating over the Internet while retaining their anonymity through a chosen designation or code name (Hatala, Milewski, & Baack, 1999, p. 124).

The most striking finding of this study was the lack of personal information given by those placing the ads.

Other aspects of CMC

One area of interest which could become more crucial in the realm of the computer is the need for accountability (Brin, 1998). Online communication is an avenue that, at this time, allows for many to go online with aliases to cause problems or sell scams or products to unsuspecting people with little or no worry of prosecution. Online dating or personals is no different in this assessment. If a technology has an avenue for deception built into the system, the unscrupulous will utilize it to the fullest until the avenue is shut down or those unscrupulous types are removed.

A second area comes from the fact that the Internet is a new realm of reality that needs to be kneaded with proper standards. It is the people of today that are going to dictate the habits of tomorrow. From the great teachers over time certain rules of order have been established on the proper conduct of society: 1) If you are the leader-take care of the people. See to their needs and keep them happy, 2) If you are the follower-obey the rules and respect the leaders, 3) Treat your neighbors with courtesy, 4) Conform, 5) Appease the scholars and clergy, 6) Be wary of strangers and deviants, 7) Work hard and respect your elders, and 8) Cooperate and get along (Brin, 1998). Many people are testing the bubble on the Internet today. They are attempting to establish rules that have been unacceptable or have just been underground in the non-virtual world. At the same time, this is the world that is being bombarded with messages from film to music to novels that we are to question authority and make up our own minds, so that when the time comes to make a decision, who is the user to believe or follow (Brin, 1998). Also, do the messages

differ between those on the Internet and those being projected in the non-virtual world? Is the answer in the old faithful methods of following the clergy and/or your parents or should one follow peers, who more than likely have less experience but more weight in their own youthful minds?

The ability of the Internet to place people in a greater global area has already been shown. What happens when people go too far into the extreme and zero in on only those facets of the Internet that pertain to the world they most want to know, or when people become so enthralled with a particular specialty or area of interest that they force out all other alternatives and begin redefining and creating their own version of reality:

In a related kind of pathology, a time may come when simulated experiences burgeon in number and quality to such a degree that people start having trouble distinguishing them from reality. Such brilliantly crafted hallucinations may help vastly expand human experience, carrying prudent travelers to remote milieus, enlarging the horizons of those who retain volition and control. Or else, simulations may become irresistibly addictive. As the humorist Scott Adams explained, 'Once anyone has a Holodeck, why would they ever leave?' (Brin, 1998, p. 171).

Our reality is being redefined by the technology that we are designing or experimenting with today to the point that our personal characteristics are being tested in new and refined methods which have never before been utilized (Rheingold, 1991). In essence, by the late twentieth century a majority of the American population is so ingrained with the audiovisual media that their very reality is being shaped by these mainstream technological advances (Lacy, 1996). What used to designate the borders and distinctive barriers in our world are diminishing. Everyone is beginning to jell as one society. This process began with the advancements in the modern era and is coming to its apex with the information age (Borgmann, 1999). As for one avenue of future technologies:

virtual reality is shared and objectively present like the physical world, composable like a work of art, and as unlimited and harmless as a dream.

When virtual reality becomes widely available, around the turn of the century, it will not be seen as a medium used within physical reality, but rather as an additional reality. Virtual reality opens up a new continent of ideas and possibilities (VPL Research, Inc., 1989 as cited by Rheingold, 1991, p. 154).

We are at the new dawn of another era. Plato saw this dawn with writing as this new form of communication was making its way into the general society of the Old World (Borgmann, 1999). There were many who ridiculed the wasting of time on writing and poetry. Plato himself was critical of the possibilities that lay ahead with the invention given to them from the Egyptian god Theuth. Plato was afraid that writing was stripping away the very essence of the story that was told by the orator. A speaker's inflection and presence brought a story to life. Plato was afraid those were lost in the writing of the story. The written word allowed readers to put their own twist of reality on the piece that was normally the job of the orator. But with all the criticism that came from those in power as well as the philosophers, writing made the people better able to cope with that which surrounded them. Their reality altered as their abilities changed and life was able to conform to the new reality as presented by the new technologies. This reading of the written material produced a type of virtual reality that is not unlike that conveyed by the present day computer.

J.R.R. Tolkien speaks from letters and manuscripts about his books, and in particular, The Lord of The Rings, when he looks at the subject of technology: "the use of magic or technology (including machinery) to control the world is not itself evil. Tolkien says: it depends on the motive. However, the use of magic or technology to control free wills is always evil: it is clear enough what Tolkien would say about brainwashing or other forms of mind control by technological means" (Purtill, 2003, p. 141). Is this not applicable in the real world? After all, much of Tolkien's work is looking into the real life situations of his reality and his faith in God to explain what is in his publications. Purtill

expressed the need for the author of fictional work to have lived the reality of the work in order to be able to express it properly and convincingly to the reader. In other words, another must pass on the reality of the imaginary world to the reader. Others wrote about the technologies that were not yet explored and which carved the way for readers to examine works for the possibilities of new technologies. Robert Heinlein and Ray Bradbury wrote of virtual reality in the 1940's and continued to show new ideas to readers only to have many of their revelations of yesteryear becoming the truth of today (Rheingold, 1991).

“Each medium leaves its mark by altering our institutions and personal attitudes and values” (Gumpert & Drucker, 1996, p. 35). Even now, investigators are wondering about the possible damaging effects that the computer and virtual reality will have on members of our society in much the same way that the investigators of Plato’s time wondered about the damaging effects of writing (Larson, 1995). The way we will view our reality will become different as we progress through the experiences of the virtual world. “It is a fact of life that any liberty, once enjoyed, swiftly becomes essential, a requisite as vital to happiness as food and air” (Brin, 1998, p. 152).

Construction of Social Reality

Symbolic Interaction is a theory designed by George Herbert Mead, which led to conclusions about the creation of a person’s self and socialization. Mead’s greatest contribution to our understanding of the way we think is his notion that human beings have the unique capacity to take the role of the other. Self is a function of language. Without talk, there would be no self-concept. So one has to be a member of a community before consciousness of self sets in.

The three core principles within the theory include: meaning, language, and thought (Griffin, 1997). These tie into the use of discourse analysis.

One or more of the following presuppositions inform virtually all studies

using discourse analysis:

- (1) Discourse is fundamental in the construction of social reality.
- (2) Discourse is organized and conditioned by the sociohistorical, cultural, social, political, economic and institutional contexts and processes in which it is produced.
- (3) Discourse is constitutive of situational context.
- (4) Language and discourse are fundamental in the constitution of persons and subjectivity.
- (5) Discourse is fundamental in the organization and expression of experience.
- (6) Discourse is structured and rule-governed.

These social constructionist presuppositions make discourse analysis relevant and useful in inquiries in psychology and culture and investigation of their dynamic interrelationships (Crawford & Valsiner, 1999, p. 260).

Social reality changes as individuals change the parameters, and no two individuals' perceptions of reality are the same even though they do overlap in many aspects (Barker, 1995):

All constructions of social reality are more or less affected not only by subjective understandings, but also by the social position from which the social reality is perceived. Secondary constructions exhibit differences that can be observed to vary systematically and significantly according to the professional or group interests of the constructors (Barker, 1995, p. 308).

Susan Barnes also added that "changes in conditions of time, space, attendance, and symbol systems extend beyond individual relationships and ultimately influence cultures" (2001, p. 3). *"I believe the one greatest moral contribution of Western civilization has been the concept of a difference between subjective and objective reality . . . the perpetual warning that says, 'Watch out! You may only think you know what you know'"* (Brin, 1986, p. 134).

The construction of social reality, or the "meaning" in Symbolic Interactionism, starts with the premise that humans act toward people or things on the basis of the meanings they assign to those people or things (Griffin, 1997). To understand constructionism you must distinguish "between its position on the level of observation,

on the level of action, and the relationship between the two” (Guzzini, 2000, p. 174). The observation depends on that of the members of the world, those who are actually carrying out the dictates of the society around them. The action is that which is accomplished by one or more members of that society. This relationship between the two could be from the individualist perspective, in which case the individual would dictate his reality in his own mind, or the intersubjective, where the reality is guided by the rules, norms, and interactions of the group.

To begin with, What is Reality? The American Heritage Dictionary (1981) defines reality as, “1) The quality or state of being actual or true, 2) A person, entity, or event that is actual, 3) The totality of all things possessing actuality, existence, or essence, and 4) That which exists objectively and in fact” (1981, p. 1085). But philosophically speaking, the same dictionary explains reality as “the sum of all that is real, absolute, and unchangeable” (1981, p. 1086). Berger and Luckmann define reality as “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition” (1966, p. 1). This does not mean that reality is set in stone as the reality that is institutionalized can vary with change in the mind set of the members of society. Another aspect that should be established here is that the reality of one society does not necessarily become the reality of another society. A saying that comes to mind when we examine this phenomenon is “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” or “Reality is Relative,” either of which would be applicable, especially when we are discussing institutional reality.

One view on this perspective is that of John Searle who is “interested in the specifics of social reality, the social facts - or, more precisely, the manner in which they are constructed” (Corsten, 1998, p. 103). Searle contends that we live in one world and there are a variety of conceptualizations that are occurring in this world.

Some would disagree with this analysis by contending that we, instead, live in an array of worlds that are running at the same time (Hund, 1998; Berger and Luckmann,

1969). John Wettersten feels that Searle missed the point in explaining reality from a scientific metaphysical standpoint, not that it cannot be done. Rather, the points made by Searle do not meet the facts, and use of “Anscombeian” metaphysics is not the best approach to reach the goal (Wetterston, 1998). Although there seems to be an inconsistency here about which thought is correct, the important point to remember is that reality for the individual is what the individual perceives it to be. That reality may not conform with the societal reality. Therefore, the person’s reality, in such a case, would be considered deviant (Berger and Luckmann, 1969).

Another opponent of Searle’s view is Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra who states that the attempt to defend the “correspondence theory” from the slingshot is not defensible from his perspective. He needs to find another criterion to defend his views in the correspondence theory. Rodriguez-Pereyra identified six different criteria which Searle could have used to assess his theory but none of these were utilized in Rodriguez-Pereyra’s opinion (1998).

Before we take the dive into Searle’s perspective of how reality is constructed in our society, let us identify an aspect of institutionalization formation from the perspective of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1996). One of the first pieces of the puzzle is to learn who we are, or to acquire an identity. This identity is a status or position in our society that is given to us and/or that we may accept. The identity is not always a permanent mark, but the earlier that it can be formed, the harder it is to break the bonds of the identity. An identity need not necessarily be given at the onset of institutional training. It can be learned or taught in secondary socialization.

We are initiated into our society through a primary socialization where our parents or guardians instruct us on proper behavior in accordance with the institutional rules of conduct that fit with the perspective of their reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1969). It is in this primary education that we receive our internalization of our reality. Internalization is

“the basis, first, for an understanding of one’s fellow men and, second, for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful and social reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1969, p. 130). It is this reality that is the formation of that essence we carry through our life. It is this reality that we base all of our future lessons on while we undergo the secondary socialization stage. This secondary socialization is that which we learn from our peers in society. These peers might provide lessons learned from schools we attend, groups we belong to, friends we hang with, or job opportunities we explore. Each of these groups are subuniverses in the society in which we live. How we relate to or accept each of these subuniverses is entirely dependent on our willingness and/or need to accept the reality of their society.

These subuniverses control the nature of the socialization of their part of society (Berger and Luckmann, 1969). They indoctrinate their charges in order to initiate a common thought process, and keep those not of this common thought outside their established walls. Keeping the outsiders at bay is done with tactics such as “various techniques of intimidation, rational and irrational propaganda, mystification and, generally, the manipulation of prestige symbols” (Berger and Luckmann, 1969, p. 87). On the other hand, the method of keeping those inside happy and content is to legitimize their reality. Legitimation is the process of the integration of subjective reality into an objective status in the mind of the inductee. This objectification must be completed prior to the legitimation. In a primary socialization process, this objectification is not usually an issue as the inductee is of an age or mentality that is more susceptible to the objectification. It is in secondary socialization, where the inductee has already been inducted with prior institutional training, that he/she has his/her established reality questioned. This is done through defining or redefining the rules of conduct of the secondary society. This secondary society might become a primary society if the group attempts to socialize the inductee in that manner and the inductee allows the socialization to replace his/her prior

reality. This, of course, is an extreme. Most secondary socialization takes a back seat to the rules of order installed from that of primary socialization.

Our socialization is an ever changing process on which we base our reality, and which alters our reality as our thinking evolves (Berger and Luckmann, 1969). It is also these two socialization stages which help us to identify the facts in our personal reality and how these facts are placed in the institutional context of our society.

Any society must be protected against deviants within the membership. This is done through maintenance procedures to insure the institutional order (Berger and Luckmann, 1969). If the deviant's actions go against the institutional philosophy of rules, the deviant must either be removed or the deviant must be retrained in the proper rules existing in the society. If the deviant's actions, on the other hand, can be integrated into the institutional order, then the philosophy of the deviant is adjusted and can be integrated into the socialization process. If the deviant's perspective is not annihilated or curbed, it may evolve out into the society and begin to pick up other inductees to carry on that way of thought. This might cause strife in the institutional order or an upheaval in the society. It may be this upheaval or strife that becomes a new secondary institutional order within the society. "The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation" (Berger and Luckmann, 1969, p. 152). Conversation "maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1969, p. 152). As soon as a new idea is accepted and objectified by members, these members can then consciously begin a unification of ideas which become a reality for the group.

Now that we have discussed the individual and the individual's integration into societal groups, it is time to proceed to the reality construction of the individual. Searle identifies two types of facts: brute facts and institutional facts (1995). Brute facts are those that are there whether we admit to it or not, exist independently of institutional conditions, and do need the language of the society to have them recognized by that

society. An example of this is that there is snow on the summit of Mount McKinley in Alaska. Whether we wish to admit this is not important as there is still a substance that we have named as such on that mountain top.

Institutional facts are those which are in place because we assign them a place (Searle, 1995). Institutionalization gives us order and rules to abide by in order to be a part of a society to which we wish to belong (Berger and Luckman, 1969). The very presence of the institutional facts is entirely dependent on the society designing and accepting the entity that is present. Money is one example which Searle assessed. The coin that we use to pay for merchandise has a value. This value is one that our society has come to know as the worth of that coin. That coin can then be traded for its worth in merchandise. If we attempt to trade that coin to an Aborigine in the Outback of Australia, that native would probably not recognize the worth of the coin as the same as we do in the United States and refuse to trade with us for the merchandise. This outcome is based on the world view of our society which is not the same world view of the Aborigine. There are many other types of institutional facts that can be considered such as marriage, government, property, and laws which would not exist if not for the societal backing of the principles. "Our interpretations are based on a shared system of codes and symbols, of languages, life-worlds, social practices. The knowledge of reality is socially constructed" (Guzzini, 2000, p. 159). But these facts are not set in stone. This monetary unit that we know and use as a dollar bill is such until it is no longer of value to us in that manner. If we were freezing in the wilds of winter and needed a fire to warm ourselves, that wad of paper would come in handy as a fire starter and lose its value as a monetary unit (Borgmann, 1999).

Searle progresses the discussion from an ontological view which is a discussion "about how social facts exist" (1995, p. 5). In this discussion, it would then be considered important to understand how the social facts fit into the larger ontological investigation.

Searle then condenses the objective down to the statement that “we live in a world made up entirely of physical particles in fields of force. Some of these are organized into systems. Some of these systems are living systems and some of these living systems have evolved consciousness. With consciousness comes intentionality, the capacity of the organism to represent objects and states of affairs in the world to itself” (Searle, 1995, p. 7). The institutional fact is a symbolization of “We” (Corsten, 1998). “We” becomes a collective when the fact is being done. In order for the fact to be in place, the symbols, signs, or labels must already be accepted by the collective.

“Many species of animals, our own especially, have a capacity for collective intentionality. By this I mean not only that they engage in cooperative behavior, but that they share intentional states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions” (Searle, 1995, p. 23). The important aspect of collective intentionality is where members have the need to share these beliefs, desires, and intentions with others in the group (Searle, 1995, p. 24).

Searle approaches reality as a series of individual heads that see the world view as “We Intend” (Hund, 1998). Hund then goes on to show an individualist perspective where two heads, instead, see “I Intend, Believe, etc.” while the space outside the heads depicts “We Intend”. Instead of these two perspectives, Hund attempts to show that the two heads should be overlapped. In the non-integrated portion of the heads is “I, Me” while the integrated portion is “We, Us”. Each of these perspectives holds a certain amount of validity within the field of philosophy. Even Hund, who is extremely critical of Searle’s perspective, believes that this perspective deserves more intellectual discourse to assess its worth (Hund, 1998).

“Searle attaches particular importance to clearly delineating between constitutive rules and conventions” (Corsten, 1998, p. 109). The conventions are those aspects of transactions where the outcome would not depend on the choices of the participants. The game of chess is an example of this. Whether the board and pieces took the form of Star

Wars figures or colonial army figures is unimportant to the outcome of playing. These are conventions of the game. But altering the movements of the independent pieces on the board would alter the outcome of the constitutive rules and, therefore, alter the game mechanics. If one of the conventions was altered or utilized in such a way, that would show a consequence in the outcome. Then that convention would become a constitutive rule.

The ontological sense pertains to the entities and their existence. This sense can be examined from the objective as well as the subjective perspective. The ontologically objective statement is one that is independent of the speaker, such as “There is a chair in that corner.” An ontologically subjective statement is one that is dependent on the feelings of the speaker, such as “That chair is the most comfortable chair in this room.”

The other sense is the epistemic sense, which is based on the judgements of the speaker and can have objective as well as subjective properties. An epistemically objective statement is one which can be verified but is based on judgmental positions such as, “That mountain is one mile high.” Although the distance can be measured, it is still an arbitrary quantity based on our world view and not a physical idea. An epistemically subjective statement is one that is completely based on the judgment of the speaker and cannot be verified as fact such as, “That woman is more beautiful than all the other women in the city.”

One way to better understand the difference between the ontological and the epistemic perspective is to examine the facts of an ethnographic study of a researcher in the field. It would be very difficult for a researcher to give an accounting of a group of people with whom that person had close contact. A person from a group would hold certain biases that could interfere with his/her judgement, so the accounting would probably be more from the epistemological perspective but could still be objective if the researcher were aware of the biases and did not allow them to interfere with the findings.

This is not to say that a person from a group could not give an ontological perspective of that group, just that he/she would need to be aware of the possible flaws in the research due to their insider information.

When considering the place an object has in our reality, we must assess the function of the object in the perspective of the society. This function would not be apparent without the consensual acceptance of the society. The function is “never intrinsic; it is assigned relative to the interests of users and observers” (Searle, 1995, p. 19). For an object to become known to have a certain function, this object must somehow be advertised as having the function. After this advertisement is accepted by the general public, the object is then known by the function for future reference. This advertisement need not be the advertisement as we see it on the Super Bowl game in January. It can be through word of mouth from one user to the next or by the continued usage of a group. The time span for the spread of new technologies shows this in true form. It took thousands of years to spread the use of stone arrowheads due to the lack of outward communication. Today the Internet allows for the spread of information at an almost instantaneous speed which also allows the spread of new technologies and advertisements of the functions at an almost instantaneous speed. This could mean that the functions are being tested in smaller groups across the globe and that allows for the spread of these functions at greater speeds than thought by those endorsing them.

There are two types of functions assigned in society: one that is a naturally occurring function, and one that is a function that is assigned to an object by its users (Searle, 1995). The naturally occurring function is called a nonagentive function which is where a naturally occurring object is described by the task it performs. Searle utilizes the heart in the human body to describe the function of a blood pump.

The second type of function is the agentive function which is a function that is placed on an object that our society uses. An oil filter wrench is a specific tool that does a

specific job for which it is so named. Both of these types of functions have been accepted in our society as part of our reality even though one has been occurring naturally while the other was designed or redefined for use as a specific function. What is interesting about this agentive function is that the definition of the item is dependent on the society in which it is placed. I will return to the coin I described earlier. In our society that coin has a value because of its function. That value is described by the worth of the coin in trade. If an Aborigine were to acquire this coin, he might use it as a trinket or jewelry if he hadn't already learned of its function as a coin. This example is similar to the situation of the purchase of the land on Long Island by Europeans trying to settle there in the same way they settled in Europe. The only problem with this scenario is that the world view of the Indians' reality did not hold the same ramifications for the land purchase since the land could not be owned by the humans. It was merely part of the earth that they tread upon and shared. The agentive function is dependent in this case on the learned societal perspective of the individual.

Searle identifies six apparent features of social reality:

(1) the self-referentiality of many social concepts, (2) the use of performative utterances in the creation of institutional facts, (3) the logical priority of brute facts over institutional facts, (4) systematic relationships among institutional facts, (5) the primacy of social acts over social objects, of processes over products, and (6) the linguistic component of many institutional facts (1995, pp. 32-37).

The steps in the instillation of social facts include: (1) to allow the individual intentionality to work with the collective in forming the collective intentionality, (2) the introduction of the agentive function of the collective sort, and (3) "the collective imposition of functions on objects where the function assigned to the object cannot be performed solely in virtue of the object's intrinsic physical features" (Searle, 1995, p. 38). The key element in the last step is "the imposition of a collectively recognized status to

which a function is attached” (Searle, 1995, p. 41).

The language, or the source of meaning, states that meaning arises out of the social interaction that people have with each other. Symbols are arbitrary signs. A symbol is a stimulus that has a learned meaning and value for people. Thought is the inner thinking of the sender, also called minding. Minding is a pause that is reflective. It allows us to rehearse our next course of action. According to interactionist principles, there is no way that a person who has had almost zero human contact would be able to develop a language or think through his/her responses.

Language is a basic institutional fact. You can have language without all the other institutional facts such as money, marriage, and laws but the reverse is not true. You must have language in order to make sense of the other institutional facts (Searle, 1995). For language to work, you must have symbols to represent the words of the language. “Language essentially contains entities that symbolize; and in language, as opposed to prelinguistic intentional states, such intentionalistic capacities are not intrinsic to the entities but are imposed by or derived from the intrinsic intentionality of humans” (Searle, 1995, p. 61).

Searle then specifies the difference between language-dependent facts and language-independent facts. The language-independent fact is that fact that is there whether you specify the fact or not. There is, in fact, snow on the summit of Mount McKinley. With this language-independent fact it does not matter whether or not the language is proclaiming this fact. The fact that the snow is beautiful at the top of Mount McKinley is a language-dependent fact that is dependent on our analysis and on our ability to specify this fact. In the same way that institutional facts can have language-dependent facts, individuals can also have language-dependent thoughts. For us to hunger is a language-independent thought, but to utilize the microwave to cook food taken from the refrigerator is a language-dependent thought.

There are two conditions that must be met in order to make a fact a language-dependent fact: (1) “mental representations must be partly constitutive of the fact; and (2) the representations in question must be language dependent” (Searle, 1995, p. 62). “All institutional facts are, in this sense, ontologically subjective, even though in general they are epistemically objective” (Searle, 1995, p. 63)

Linguistic symbols symbolize something beyond themselves. They do so by convention, and they are public (Searle, 1995). Beyond this is that institutional facts require language to exist for four reasons:

(1) language is epistemically indispensable, (2) the facts in question, being inherently social, must be communicable, (3) in real life the phenomena in question are extremely complex, and the representation of such complex information requires language, and (4) the facts in question persist through time independently of the duration of the urges and inclinations of the participants in the institution (Searle, 1995, p. 77).

“The structure of institutional facts is a structure of power relations, including negative and positive, conditional and categorical, collective and individual powers” (Searle, 1995, p. 94). “Everything we value in our society must be created and maintained by the powers which rule or govern that society. These creations must be monitored by society to preserve fairness, efficiency, flexibility, and creativity, not to mention such traditional values as justice, liberty, and dignity” (Searle, 1995, p. 94).

“Where physical functions are concerned, the only limitations are provided by the sheer physical possibilities. But when it comes to institutional facts, improvements in technology do not change the possibilities” (Searle, 1995, p. 94). This entails the statement previously made that all institutional facts are ontologically subjective as the technology is an objective piece of paraphernalia. The technology is then utilized in the creation or maintenance of the institutional facts. “The possibilities of creating institutional facts by the use of the formula ‘X counts as Y in C’ are limited by the

possibilities of imposing new features on entities just by collectively agreeing that they have those features” (Searle, 1995, p. 95). “Because the creation of institutional facts is a matter of imposing a status and with it a function on some entity that does not already have that status-function, in general the creation of a status-function is a matter of conferring some new power” (Searle, 1995, p. 95).

This power, that is collectively created and/or accepted, has two primary features: (1) “the mechanism places no restrictions on subject matter so the enormous variety of institutional reality should seem less puzzling, and (2) the mechanism does not require that the participants be aware of what is actually happening” (Searle, 1995, p. 96).

There are three elements within an institution: (1) the initial creation of the institutional fact, (2) the continued existence, and (3) its official representation in the form of status indicators. The one general principle in the creation of a new institutional fact is “to the extent that the new institutional status is of major importance, we are more inclined to require that it be created by explicit speech acts performed according to strict rules” (Searle, 1995, p. 116). The collective acceptance of the institutional fact is the key to the continued acceptance of that fact. Without the acceptance, the fact would cease to exist. The status indicator is anything that represents the institutional fact to the collective. Whether we are talking about the driver’s license, marriage certificate, or police badge, the status indicators are the cues that represent the actual institutional fact that we see in our society.

“Some cases involve explicit intentionality, but that seems to me only one type of case. One way to impose a function on an object is just to start using the object to perform that function. The presuppositions of the use of entities that have a function are often in the form of background phenomena that are simply taken for granted” (Searle, 1995, p. 126). One example of this phenomenon is jargon, which becomes institutional fact after it is picked up in our society and carried on until it is a normal mannerism or institutional

fact, albeit a subjective one. People within a specific culture can begin to utilize a certain phrase in order to show their individuality. This individuality spreads through their culture or pack and is observed by one outside of their group. This other person or group begins utilizing it and makes it part of their own institutional facts that are observed by others from outside their own group. This pattern continues and is a major element in the continuation of the mannerism that, in time, makes it another institutional fact by just doing the act. The rules of creation of institutional facts are not codified in our society (Searle, 1995). They just happen unconsciously as we continue the process of existing. Those habits that are picked up and passed on are done so as a process of our continuing the inception of new institutional facts in this ever evolving world.

Searle defines four concepts in his thesis of “background”: capacities, enabling, intentional states, and function (1995). Capacities are the abilities, dispositions, tendencies, and causal structures of a phenomenon. Enabling is the causal notion. Intentional states are the conscious intent of the action. The function is the purpose of the sentence or phrase.

“In learning to cope with social reality, we acquire a set of cognitive abilities that are everywhere sensitive to an intentional structure, and in particular to the rule structures of complex institutions, without necessarily everywhere containing representations of the rules of those institutions” (Searle, 1995, p. 145). “We evolve a set of dispositions that are sensitive to the rule structure” (Searle, 1995, p. 145). “We should not say that the man is at home in his society, the man who is chez lui in the social institutions of the society, is at home because he has mastered the rules of the society, but rather that the man has developed a set of capacities and abilities that render him at home in the society; and he has developed those abilities because those are the rules of his society” (Searle, 1995, p. 147). “A person’s emotional and cognitive responses to a message determine the structure and content of event memories stored as a result of that message. The structure as well as

the content of those event memories determines how that information is later used to make social reality decisions” (Shapiro & Lang, 1991, p. 687).

Searle identifies six presuppositions of our contemporary world view: (1) external realism realizes that the world exists independently of our representations of it, (2) people are connected to the reality in a variety of ways, (3) the representations purport to resemble how things appear in society, (4) the language, and the symbols that make it up, are human creations and are therefore arbitrary, (5) the humans attempting to get a representation to become part of reality are influenced in a variety of different ways that are independent of the person’s attempt, and (6) “having knowledge consists in having true representations for which we can give certain sorts of justification or evidence” (1995, p. 151).

“Realism is the view that there is a way that things are that is logically independent of all human representations. Realism does not say how things are but only that there is a way that they are” (Searle, 1995, p. 155). Reality is the environment and the experiences of the person where the reality is happening (Zettl, 1995). Virtual reality is the “computer-generated three-dimensional image and stereo sound that displays events and that is interactive with the user” (Zettl, 1995, p. 86).

Strictly speaking, there is an indefinitely large number of different points of view, different aspects, and different conceptual systems under which anything can be represented. If that is right, and it surely is, then it will be impossible to get the coincidence between truth and reality after which so many traditional philosophers seem to hanker. Every representation has an aspectual shape. It represents its target under certain aspects and not others. In short, it is only from a point of view that we represent reality, but ontologically objective reality does not have a point of view (Searle, 1995, p. 176).

In the end, and in the words of one of my undergraduate and graduate professors, “It depends.”

Presentation of Self

The next aspect of this study, after analyzing the mode of communication and the social construction criteria, is to analyze the presentation characteristics of the performer and the audience. Erving Goffman produced an analogy of how our society reacts when confronted with other parts of our society (1959). To quote a famous playwright, William Shakespeare, “All the world’s a stage” is not necessarily the truth when we are dealing with the acting put on through relationship management. We are either the actors in the communication process or the audience. Most interpersonal relationships are diametric processes which switch off actors and audiences, or the participants are playing both roles when communicating.

Our communication process places us in the scene as the performer or the audience (Goffman, 1959). This scene has a “front stage” and a “back stage”. The front stage is that area that is present to the audience or the person who is perceived as the audience by the performer. The performer might have a multiple number of audiences that he/she is performing for at the same time. Behind the scenes is a backstage where the performer maintains his/her independence and secrecy from the audience. For a member of the audience to enter this backstage without permission from the actor or actors (should there be a team effort) would be a break in etiquette by that member. The repercussions from this action could cause the audience member to be recast as a member of the team of actors, cast out of the scene completely, or admonished for crossing the line between the front stage and back stage without authorization. The penalty for this action is dependent on the conditions as set by the actor(s) or the conditions of the social situation. At times the audience may be more attuned to the antics of the actor(s) of the scene but will not let on to the knowledge so that they may continue as participants in the audience. And, at times this fact may be known to the actor(s) but will not be divulged to the audience. The situation may instead be treated differently than it would have been had

the audience member not been present. What is important here is that each piece of the staging has variables that the actor(s) or audience member(s) must understand and act upon to achieve their final goal.

For the rest of this discussion it will be understood that there is only one actor. This may not be the situation in most communication processes but for this study the criteria being analyzed hold true that there is but a single actor giving his/her impression of himself/herself to the audience. The performance in the online personal service is a resume as established by the actor. Since there is no way to immediately verify the information, the performer has the ability to take liberties with that information. The only problem is when it comes time for a member of the audience to meet the actor face-to-face and any apparent information will come out in the meeting. Any hidden secrets must remain hidden until such time as the actor is comfortable with releasing this information or, more important, comfortable that the audience will be accepting of receiving the secret.

This hidden self, or the backstage information that does not come to the front, needs to be resolved at some point for the relationship to become fruitful and continue. A person that has forgotten some minor points, yet is sincere in the attempt to bring this information forward, may have the infraction overlooked by the performers. But the actor that knowingly conceals some point will cause strife in any future possibilities for the relationship. But variables might alter these outcomes such as the feelings for the other person, the cost of continuing the relationship, and/or the availability of a replacement. Needless to say, credibility is an important factor in the honesty of the resume that is produced by the actor.

Another problem with the credibility of the actor may come as a product of the reality of the audience. When the resume is accessed by the audience, the member reading it might put the actor on a pedestal or might see the actor as a knight in shining armor.

Since the Internet allows access to more sites by the audience member, the chance of finding the “perfect one” is greater. Also, the chance of narrowing the search to fit the criteria is greater which would remove much of the searching and weeding out of the unfit or not so fit actors.

Because of the ability to confirm the characteristics on the first meeting, much of that information given in the resume must be fairly accurate when it deals with information that can be obtained by nonverbal cues. Another factor in how accurate the information is deals with the physical distance the actors are in relation to one another. The greater the distance, the higher the cost of meeting, which means that the actors must give more of themselves in order to accomplish the connection in their relationship. This increases the costs, as discussed earlier. Another factor in the distance between the two members of the relationship is in the reality of the region from which they come. Should one reality not mesh with the other, the possibility of their carrying out the goal of creating a union could be in doubt. One example is when a woman from a lower caste in India attempts to form a relationship with an American from an upper class. The cultural differences could cause havoc in their relationship. Even the use of certain words or certain topics in one culture might be taboo in another culture which could end the relationship prior to its beginning.

Because there will always be the wolf in sheep’s clothing viewing the resumes and attempting to establish contact with unsuspecting actors, it is important that certain stipulations be established prior to meeting the possible match. One is in utilizing members of the backstage staff of the service to prepare the actor for the meeting (Goffman, 1959). This may be in the way information is given online to all who partake of the service or information available online to all who might take advantage of any online service. A second method is to utilize a trainer who will work individually with the actor prior to the meeting, or during the set-up of the resume to seek out a particular type

of audience. Confidants and colleagues are two other roles that the actor of online personal services can turn to when attempting to supply a resume. These are people who might not be knowledgeable about an online service but who are familiar with the actor and can assist in making a decision.

What is important at this stage of the game is that the actor must remain consistent, not only on the resume, but throughout the relationship's first impression. Falsehoods on the resume which can be deciphered prior to the meeting, as well as those which might become apparent at the first face-to-face meeting, will surely impede the progress of the relationship. After the members of the relationship have incurred some cost in the relationship so that it might appear too great to lose, only then might falsehoods seem more insignificant.

The online arena is a social barrier with rules and regulations on proper conduct. These rules are outlined on the site where the service is seated. As stated earlier, Yahoo is one of these sites which carry an online personal service. When dealing with online introduction services, the person advertising is placing the advertisement which can be viewed by any who have the ability to retrieve it from an online service. In the past the methods of accomplishing the same task were done through newspaper services, telephone services, magazine advertisements, and personal introduction services (which scanned the prospective matches for their clients to insure that sufficient criteria had matched). Not many studies have been done on these services with the exception of content analysis (Rajecki, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991). Even though Yahoo is open to all types of relationships (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual), this study will only analyze heterosexual relationships.

Research Questions

1. What are the ways in which applicants to an online dating service present themselves to other applicants in their resumes?

2. Are there differences based on sex in how applicants to an online dating service present themselves to each other in their resumes?
3. Are there differences based on age in how applicants to an online dating service present themselves to each other in their resumes?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample

From a random grouping of resumes taken from a Yahoo personal site this study will analyze the content of 36 males and 36 females from within 25 miles of a large Midwestern city. Yahoo was selected because of its widespread success in reaching a large number of people and ease of getting the information from the site. Only the men seeking women and women seeking men will be analyzed in this study.

For the purposes of this study the 72 applicants will be placed in age groups in 5 year increments with the exception of the last group. This will start at the first possible age classification of Yahoo for this service, the age of 18. Specifically, the age increments employed in this study are: 18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-42, 43-47, 48-52, and 53-62. The last group includes a ten year span due to the low number of applicants in this age group compared to the rest of the age groups.

This study does not presume to know the validity of the applicants' resumes. There will probably be a number of fraudulent applicants that are attempting to receive email addresses or connection to advertise other web sites or for other deceptive purposes. This study will include, in order of the most recent resume, all applicants within that age category up to a total of 4 applicants of each sex for each age group.

Data Collecting and Coding

Appendix B includes the pop-up possibilities for applicants during the online registration. Some aspects of the online registration have changed as Yahoo is constantly attempting to improve the process for the users. Examples of this include the elimination of the three conversation starters from the online registration and the addition of the qualities which are considered "must have" in the prospective mate.

The first part of the Yahoo site gives the applicants an opportunity to answer

closed-ended questions about themselves on such topics as age, race, political affiliation, etc. This allows the applicants to quickly give demographics which will better enable Yahoo to categorize information for selection by an online viewer. The same procedure would then be used to obtain the applicants' answers to the close-ended questions regarding what type of characteristics they were seeking in a prospective mate. Yahoo does utilize these demographics to better give applicants a group of individuals which will more closely resemble their own self-disclosed characteristics. This study will utilize these closed-ended questions of the applicants to obtain a sense for the demographics of the study group in the area. Another item of interest for this study includes what the applicants are willing to divulge in a resume that is open to the public.

The analysis will then turn to the open-ended questions about the applicants and their prospective mates. This information will be categorized to give a better analysis of the perspectives of the groups of individuals. The categories will be broken down into specifications dealing with the applicants' description of themselves and their perception of what they want in a prospective partner. The applicants' specifications about themselves will be broken down into their activities and their own self-disclosed characteristics. Any other topics that do not meet the specifications will be singled out and placed in a proper alternate category for analysis. Again, these perspectives will be used to obtain more information about the demographics of the test group and how willing they are to divulge information to the public.

Yahoo then allows the applicant to place photographs in his/her resume and gives an opportunity in a separate area to give three conversation starters (preselected by Yahoo) that the applicant can ask the interested party. The party can answer the questions as a starting point in their reply if they so desire. These two sets of entries into the resume will be analyzed to see if the applicants placed them in the resume and how the applicants utilized these sources of information to build their resumes.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study will then complete both a quantitative analysis and a qualitative analysis of the information found in the applicants' resumes. The quantitative assessment will use descriptive statistics to give figures of participation concerning certain facts and the applicable percentages of those involved. Since the total number of participants in each group is small, the percentages will only be used to descriptively understand how the applicants utilized the source. The validity of the study would be compromised if greater emphasis were placed on the quantitative results. However, these quantitative results are important in obtaining a sense of the perspective of the applicants in the study. They will be supplemented by a qualitative analysis of themes in answers to the open-ended questions on the resume.

This study will then attempt to assimilate the data received to find a semblance of the reality of the applicants who have participated in the online interview. This reality will be based on the assumptions which John R. Searle and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann made in their theories of "the Construction of Social Reality." One major issue which has been explored by each of these researchers, and others, is where does the reality of the individual begin and end. In the detailed explanation of the literature review, John Searle believed that we saw reality from both the "We" and the "I" perspectives in our heads. John Hund, on the other hand, felt that the two heads overlapped and we saw the "I" on the portions of the heads not overlapping while the "We" was sensed by each of the individuals in the overlapping sections. It will be assumed for the duration of this study, rather, that we see the "I" in the separated heads of the individuals, and there is a "We" circle which surrounds each of the separate individuals which might overlap with the "We" circles of other individuals. Those individuals whose "We" circles overlap coincide in their perception of reality, while those individuals whose "We" circles do not overlap do not coincide in their perception of reality. This model is closer to that of John

Searle, but separates the “I” and the “We” in the assumed reality of the individual since the “We” of the society is distinctly separate from the individual.

Most of the Construction of Social Reality in this research study will emphasize the realities of the individual not overlapping the realities of other possible applicants. For us to examine the “We” reality of the individual that does overlap, another examination would have to include the similarities between the receiver of a message and the applicant who sent it. This study is simply, rather, an attempt to understand how the individuals present themselves to each other, how they see the personal world around them and to better understand their reality of the Computer Mediated Communication process with regard to the personal world. Since some would feel more comfortable with the computer world in general, there may be a difference between the ages of the applicants in their personal reality while on the computer; or there may be a difference in gender while on the computer since past studies do suggest that the computer world is a man’s world that discriminates against women who attempt to utilize this source. The gender issue is explored in Research Question 2 while the age issue is explored in Research Question 3. Research Question 1 is an overall assessment of ways in which Yahoo personal applicants present themselves to prospective mates online.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This set of results includes all of the data resulting from the analysis of the resumes within the study group. A total of 36 male and 36 female resumes were downloaded from the Yahoo personals on May 1, 2006.

The specifications for the resume group included those applicants 18 to 67 years of age within 25 miles of a large Midwestern city. There was a total of 5,054 men and women with resumes in the Yahoo personals which were within the limit of 25 mile radius to the city in question. Of these, 64.9% (n=3,280) were found to be men seeking women and 35.1% (n=1,774) were found to be women seeking men.

This proportion of men versus women was not found to be consistent when looking at other cities. The proportion did follow with a West Coast city which was found to consist of 66.5% (n=11,621) men seeking women and 33.5% (n=5,845) women seeking men from a total number of 17,466 resumes. In an opposite proportion was an East Coast City which had 30.6% (n=1,322) men seeking women and 59.4% (n=2994) women seeking men from a total number of 4,316 resumes.

It was due to the inconsistencies of those cities analyzed in the beginning of this study that the more appropriate path to selecting the number of applicants per group was to select a specific number. This was also made appropriate when looking at the types of questions being asked in the study due to the comparison factor of the questions. The resumes were grouped into 5 year increments and the upper limit of the study group was reduced to 67 as participation of those above that age was small or non existent. The last two groups (58-62 & 63-67) were consolidated into one group due to a smaller number of resumes available online compared with other age groups.

Not all of the categories which the online service has available are assessed in this thesis. If the information is relevant for the research questions due to expressing a trend

among the genders or age groups, then that information is useful for the purpose of identifying who uses the online service. Second, should the selections be ambiguous or vague and allow for interpretation on the part of the applicant or the viewer of the resume, then the information is assessed for its presentation features. Third, should all of the information be examined that is available, there would be too much information for the purpose of this thesis.

Demographic Information

The first part of the data examined includes the demographic information about the applicant. The demographics of the applicant include the marital status, ethnicity, educational background, occupation, income, religious affiliation, political affiliation, and languages spoken by the applicant.

The information about the prospective partner is examined when the data is of particular interest to this study. As an example, this study looks at information which might be viewed as vague since it allows more freedom in interpreting the meaning of Yahoo descriptive categories and, thus, in presenting self to others. In particular, this thesis examines information which the applicant placed on the resume about the prospective partner's proximity to the applicants, as well as about ethnicity, and income, among other things.

Proximity

Table 1

Preferred Proximity of Prospective Partner

	W/I	5 m	10 m	15 m	25 m	50 m	100 m	250 m
Female	2	0	1	2	8	18	3	2
Male	2	0	1	4	5	15	7	2

W/I = Within the city limits

The first area of interest is only apparent when the applicant is talking about the prospective partner. This answers the question of ‘How far will the applicant go for a husband or wife?’ Table 1 gives the indications by the applicant on this question. As is seen from the table above, 50% of the females were willing to go 50 miles from the city limits while only 41.7% of the males were willing to do the same. Some of those males were willing to go a little farther, though, with a choice of 100 miles. What is interesting about these numbers is that the only other city within close proximity to the city in question is approximately 50 miles away. So by selecting this distance, most of the applicants are leaving the possibility open to meeting someone from this large neighboring major college city.

Marital Status

Table 2 indicates the marital status of the applicants. This table is two-fold in its purpose. First, it shows the groups with the age ranges and the number of participants in each of the groups. Second, it gives the marital status of the applicant at the time they are filling out the online resume.

The applicants fit primarily into the “Never Married” or “Divorced” status with a strong tendency for one of the choices depending on the age of the applicant. For women the change from “Never Married” to “Divorced” appeared at the 33-37 age group and for men the change appeared at the 43-47 age group.

Table 2
Marital Status of Applicant

Group	Females					Males				
	No.	NM	Div.	Other	N/A	No.	NM	Div.	Other	N/A
18-22	4	3	0	0	1	4	4	0	0	0
23-27	4	4	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	0
28-32	4	3	1	0	0	4	2	1	1	0
33-37	4	3	1	0	0	4	2	2	0	0
38-42	4	1	3	0	0	4	1	2	0	1
43-47	4	1	3	0	0	4	1	3	0	0
48-52	4	0	4	0	0	4	1	3	0	0
53-57	4	0	2	2	0	4	0	3	1	0
58-67	4	0	2	2	0	4	0	4	0	0
	36	15	16	4	1	36	15	18	2	1

No. = Number of participants

NM = Never Married

Div. = Divorced

Other = Widowed or Separated

N/A = No answer given

Ethnicity

Table 3
Preferred Ethnicity of Prospective Partner

	AA	A	C	EI	HL	IR	ME	NA	PI	O	N/A
Fem.	4	1	28	1	8	1	0	4	2	3	6
Male	2	8	17	2	7	4	5	4	4	2	18

AA = African American

A = Asian

C = Caucasian

EI = East Indian

HL = Hispanic Latino

N/A = No Answer

IR = Interracial

ME = Middle Eastern

NA = Native American

PI = Pacific Islander

O = Other

Ethnicity of the test group for this test city was primarily “Caucasian” with 86.1% (n=31) of the female applicants and 86.1% (n=31) of the male applicants citing this ethnicity.

The selections for the prospective match of the female applicant included few responses for the “No Answer” with only 16.6% (n=6). Of those females who favored a particular ethnicity, “Caucasian” was the primary possible response with 77.8% (n=28). Besides those applicants who selected “No Answer,” and the 28 selections for a “Caucasian,” there were 24 other selections made for the ethnicity of the prospective partner. The applicant was permitted to give more than one preference when not giving the “No answer” selection. Table 3 illustrates those selections chosen by the female and male applicants for the ethnicity preferences of the prospective partner.

As can be seen in table 3, the male applicants showed less selectiveness in the ethnicity of the prospective partner with 50.0% (n=18) indicating “No answer” on their response. Of the 18 remaining applicants, 17 selected “Caucasian” as a possible ethnicity. What is of interest on this factor is that of those applicants giving the ethnicity of the prospective partner, females selected 52 possibilities which averaged out to 1.7 (n=52) ethnic origins per female applicant giving an answer to this question. For males giving an answer the average number of possibilities was 3.1 (n=55) ethnic origins per male applicant.

Educational

The educational level of the applicants was primarily at the “Some College” to “College Graduate” level as indicated in table 4. These results do not differentiate whether the applicant graduated from or attended a college or a junior college.

Table 4
Education Level of Applicant

	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	Post Graduate Degree	No Answer
Female	0	4	19	11	2	0
Male	0	8	18	6	1	3

Occupation

The next category is the occupation of the applicant. Females appeared to have employment predominantly in “Clerical/Administrative” with 16.7% and “Medical/Health Services” with 25%, while males had a larger portion in “Technical/Science/Engineering” with 13.9%. Both of the genders had a large portion in the “Other” category: 16.7% for females and 13.9% for males. And both had a large portion of applicants recording “No Answer” on their resume, with 13.9% for each gender.

Table 5
Occupation of Applicant

	Females	Males
Artistic/Musical/Writer	1	1
Banking/Financial/Real Estate	2	0
Clerical/Administration	6	1
Computer Related/Hardware	0	2
Construction/Craftsman	0	4
Education/Academics	2	0
Entertainment/Media	0	1
Executive/Management	2	1
Food Service	0	1
Hospitality/Travel	0	1
Legal Services	0	1
Manufacturing/Distribution	0	1
Medical/Health Services	9	1
Political/Government/Military	0	1
Sales/Marketing	2	1
Technical/Science/Engineering	0	5
Transportation	1	4
Other	6	5
No Answer	5	5

Income

Table 6
Income of Applicant

	<25K	<35K	<50K	<75K	No Answer
Females	2	7	6	2	19
Males	3	5	11	4	13

Along with the occupation follows the income of the applicant. As is seen in table 6, females were less willing to divulge their income than males. Another factor to notice is that none of the applicants indicated an income of greater than \$75,000. Whether there are any with incomes greater than this and they prefer to give no answer to hide their income or do not wish to brag about themselves is unknown.

Table 7
Preferred Income of Prospective Partner

	All	>25K	>35K	>50K	>75K	No Answer
Females	0	2	8	14	15	19
Males	3	1	2	3	3	30

Table 7 females are just as likely as not to specify a particular income for their prospective partners while men are less likely to specify an income level. The reasons for this are not apparent from the resumes. Most of the female applicants who did give an answer on the resume, 82.4% (n=14), wanted their prospective partner to have an income of above \$50,000. Male applicants were not as definitive about the income of their prospective partner.

Religious Affiliation

Table 8
Religious Affiliation of Applicant

	Christian	Christian/ Catholic	Other	No Answer
Females	10	12	10	4
Males	7	8	18	3

The religious affiliation of the applicants is shown in Table 8. The “Other” category includes the Yahoo categories such as “Christian/Protestant,” “Christian/Other,” “Spiritual but not religious,” “None/Agnostic,” “Not Religious,” and “Other.” Most of the applicants, 88.9% of females and 91.7% of males, gave some form of religious affiliation.

Political affiliation

Table 9
Political Affiliation of Applicant

	V. Con.	Con.	Middle	Lib.	V. Lib	Not	N/A
Females	1	0	12	7	1	6	9
Males	1	3	10	6	1	5	10

The next category includes the results given for political affiliation of the applicant. Table 9 shows that most of the applicants stayed in the “Middle of the road” category, with 33.3% (n=12) of the females and 27.8% (n=10) of the males selecting this option, or they refused to divulge an answer, with 25% (n=9) of the females and 27.8% (n=10) of the males selecting this option. Few applicants in the test group were willing to place themselves in the “Very Conservative” or “Very Liberal” category, but those who gave a response and affiliation that was not “Middle of the road” tended to lean toward the liberal side or were “Not Political.”

Languages Spoken

The language spoken by the applicants was primarily only English with 91.7% (n=33) of the females and 86.1% (n=31) of the males selecting this option. A small number of the male applicants, 5.5% (n=2), refused to divulge their languages spoken. Other languages spoken included Spanish, Italian, German, and French. There is no indication whether English was the primary language of any of those who listed themselves as multilingual. There is also no way of detecting whether those indicating English as their only language do actually speak some other language.

Applicants Presentation of Selves

In this section of the study, I examine those aspects of how applicants present themselves to a prospective partner. The particular subjects include the number of photographs placed online, the applicants body type, sense of humor, impressions in a social setting, smoking habits, drinking habits, whether or not the applicant wants more children, employment, and interests. As in the demographics, some areas have terms used by the online service that can be vague or confusing. These are of interest as they allow applicants some leeway in presenting themselves to others.

As in the previous section, information pertaining to the prospective partner is examined to identify what the applicant is saying about what characteristics, habits, or traits they may be looking for in a significant other. In particular, these areas of interest include body type, sense of humor, impressions in a social setting, smoking habits, drinking habits, whether or not the prospective partner wants more children, and employment.

Photographs

The photograph of the applicant gave additional information which could be

viewed by a prospective partner. Table 10 shows how willing the applicants were to attach a photograph to their resume if they had the capability to do so.

Table 10
Number of Photographs of Applicant

	None	One	Two or More
Females	12	14	10
Males	11	13	12

As can be seen from this table, 66.7% (n=24) of the female applicants attached at least one photograph while 69.4% (n=25) of the males attached at least one photograph. Reasons for not attaching a photograph were not apparent but the importance of a photograph becomes apparent when the person viewing the resume wishes to verify some of the information given by the applicant. Having a photograph is not a guarantee that the person in that photograph is necessarily the person for whom the resume is written.

Body Type

Body type gave the applicants the ability to give a description of their perception of their own body. This closed-ended section allowed the applicants to select one of the preassigned categories or to select "No Answer." The selections left a little vagueness in the description due to the overlap in definitions. This gave the applicants the ability to select one description that might sound a little better than another selection. The different selections included slim, slender, athletic, average, thick, a few extra pounds, voluptuous, large, and fit. No definitions were given for the assigned descriptions. The descriptions were left up to the applicants to select. This allowed an opportunity for self-presentation by the applicant who was completing the resume. Also included in this classification is the applicant's selections for their prospective match.

Table 11 indicates the selections given by the applicants in the resumes. The right side of the table indicates the selections given by the applicant for the body type of their prospective partner. Since there was more than one selection allowed by the applicant for their match, there will be more total selections in this section of the table.

Table 11
Body Type of Applicant

	Females	Males	Females Match	Males Match
Slim	2.7% (n=1)	2.7% (n=1)	4.7% (n=5)	15.3%(n=17)
Slender	8.3% (n=3)	5.5% (n=2)	7.5% (n=8)	15.3%(n=17)
Athletic	13.8% (n=5)	27.8% (n=10)	18.7% (n=20)	16.2%(n=18)
Average	36.1% (n=13)	38.9% (n=14)	22.4% (n=24)	18.9%(n=21)
Thick	2.7% (n=1)	0.0% (n=0)	9.3% (n=10)	3.6% (n=4)
A Few Extra Pounds	13.8% (n=5)	8.3% (n=3)	9.3% (n=10)	5.4% (n=6)
Voluptuous	13.8% (n=5)	2.7% (n=1)	0.9% (n=1)	2.7% (n=3)
Large	0.0% (n=0)	0.0% (n=0)	2.8% (n=3)	0.0% (n=0)
Fit	0.0% (n=0)	11.1% (n=4)	16.8% (n=18)	14.4%(n=16)
No Answer	8.3% (n=3)	2.7% (n=1)	7.5% (n=8)	8.1% (n=9)
Total	(n=36)	(n=36)	(n=107)	(n=111)

The largest category in this classification for both genders was “Average,” with the females identifying themselves with this description 36.1% (n=13) of the time while the males identified themselves with this description 38.9% (n=14) of the time. There was little difference between the genders in this category except where 13.8% (n=5) of the females selected “Voluptuous” while only 2.8% (n=1) of the males did the same. A higher number of males selected “Athletic” with 27.8% (n=10) while only 13.9% (n=5) of the females did the same. Another category where males were more prominent was in the

“Fit” category where the males selected this option 11.1% (n=4) of the time. Females did not opt for this selection on the resumes.

When the genders prospective match was examined, women were shown to prefer the men to be athletic, average, or fit, while the males prefer the women to be slim, slender, athletic, average, or fit.

Sense of Humor

Table 12
Sense of Humor of Applicant

	Females	Males
Friendly	26	26
Clever/Quick Witted	21	17
Goofy	18	12
Slapstick	2	6
Dry/ Sarcastic	12	11
Campy/Cheesy	2	5
Raunchy	6	6
Obscure	0	4
Other	3	7
No Answer	2	2

A second area of the closed-ended resume interview process which allowed for a little flexibility on the part of the applicant was when they gave their perception of their own sense of humor. This section of the process also allowed the applicant to select more than one possible answer to describe themselves. Table 12 shows the most common response in this category was “Friendly” with 72% (n=26) of each of the genders selecting this option to describe themselves. A close second of the overall categories was

“Clever/Quick witted” where 58.3% (n=21) of the females and 47.2% (n=17) of the males made this selection. “Goofy” was selected by 50% (n=18) of the females while only 33.3% (n=12) of the males did the same. An average of 2.6 responses were given by the female applicants and an average of 2.8 responses were given by the male applicants since multiple responses could be given by the applicant who gave a response other than “No Answer.”

Table 13
Preferred Sense of Humor of Prospective Partner

	Female	Male
Any	17	29
Friendly	19	7
Clever/Quick Witted	17	5
Dry/Sarcastic	5	4
Goofy	10	5
Slapstick	4	3
Campy/Cheesy	3	3
Obscure	3	2
Raunchy	2	0

Table 13 identifies what the applicant was looking for in a prospective partner. Females selected “Any” sense of humor 47.2% (n=17) of the time while the males selected “Any” 80.5% (n=29) of the time. All of the remaining applicants who selected particular sense of humor descriptions did select friendly as a characteristic for their prospective partner. “Clever/Quick Witted” and “Goofy” were also selected a high percentage of the time by the females.

Impressions in a Social Setting

The next category, for which the applicants could again give multiple answers, is the closed-ended perception indicating the “Impression in a Social Setting.” The choices which the applicants had were established by Yahoo and each applicant had the option of selecting a “No Answer” instead of choosing that selection which they believed described how they saw themselves in a public setting.

Table 14
Impressions in a Social Setting of Applicant

	Female	Male
Shy at first but warm up quickly	22	26
Social Butterfly	11	4
Life of the Party	3	3
Sidekick	3	5
Homebody	9	3
Better in Small Groups	8	10
Comic Relief	3	11
Flirt	7	8
No Answer	1	1

As can be seen in table 14, 61.1% (n=22) of the female applicants and 72.2% (n=26) of the male applicants who responded in this category identified themselves as “Shy at first but warm up quickly.” Only 2.8% (n=1) of each gender did not report a description of themselves in a public setting. Females had a higher number of selections in two areas in the social setting. These included “Homebodies,” which the females selected 25% (n=9) of the time while males only chose it 8.3% (n=3) of the time, and “Social Butterfly,” which females chose 30.5% (n=11) of the time while males only chose

it 11.1% (n=4) of the time. The only option where the male applicants were more prominent was “Comic Relief,” which 8.3% (n=3) of the female applicants and 30.5% (n=11) of the male applicants selected.

Table 15
Preferred Impressions in a Social Setting of Prospective Partner

	Female	Male
Any	16	25
Life of the party	6	3
Shy at first, Quick to warm up	15	8
Social Butterfly	10	6
Side Kick	7	5
Flirt	4	4
Better in small groups	8	3
Comic relief	8	4
Homebody	10	4

Table 15 shows the applicant’s desire regarding the preferred social setting impressions of the prospective partner. The female applicants selected “Any” social setting preference for their prospective partner 44.4% (n=16) of the time while the male applicants selected “Any” 69.4% (n=25) of the time. Of those applicants making particular selections for the social setting of the prospective partner, females selected “Shy at first but warm up quickly,” “Social Butterfly,” and “Homebody” the most while the male applicants selected “Shy at first, Quick to warm up” the most.

Smoking Habits

Table 16
Smoking Habits of Applicant

	Do not smoke	Occasionally	Often	No Answer
Female	22	9	4	1
Male	22	6	5	3

The self-disclosed smoking habits of the female and male applicants are indicated in table 16. This table shows that 61.1% (n=22) of the female applicants and 61.1% (n=22) of the male applicants revealed being a non-smoker. Whether they were never smokers is yet to be disclosed and some subjectivity remains between the “Occasional” smoker and the smoker who smokes “Often.”

Table 17
Preferred Smoking Habits of Prospective Partner

	Do not smoke	Occasionally	Often	No Answer
Female	11	4	1	21
Male	13	5	2	18

Table 17 indicates the applicants perception of the prospective partners smoking habits. As can be seen from these tables, the approximate proportions of each answer remained consistent when comparing the genders’ habits with the habits desired in prospective partner. Where a difference is apparent is when a large quantity of applicants gave “No Answer” to the prospective partner’s smoking habit. This might mean that they were not concerned with whether or not the prospective partner smoked, or applicants might mean that they were not willing to lose a possible partner in the beginning of the relationship over the smoking issue.

Drinking Habits

Table 18
Drinking Habits of Applicant

	Non Drinker	Social Drinker	Regular Drinker	No Answer
Female	4	32	0	0
Male	6	26	1	3

The second habit-revealing category pertains to drinking of alcohol. Table 18 shows that 88.9% (n=32) of females and 72.2% (n=26) of males revealed themselves to be a “Social Drinker.” Whether “Social Drinker” means having one or two beers or glasses of wine at the dinner table or drinking a few drinks every weekend at the bar with friends remains unclear.

Table 19
Preferred Drinking Habits of Prospective Partner

	Non Drinker	Social Drinker	Regular Drinker	No Answer
Female	4	25	0	10
Male	10	18	2	15

When comparing the drinking habits of the applicant with those preferred in the prospective partner, the following information becomes available as seen in table 19. “No answer” might mean either the applicant did not care to take a stand on the prospective partner’s drinking habits or any of the possibilities were acceptable. Females gave “No Answer” 27.8% (n=10) of the time while males gave “No Answer” 41.7% (n=15) of the time. Of those applicants declaring a position on the prospective partner’s drinking habits (n=25 for females and n=21 for males), 16.0% (n=4) of the females and 47.6% (n=10) of the males were willing to accept a “Non Drinker” while 100% (n=25) of the females and 85.7% (n=18) of the males were willing to accept a “Social Drinker.”

Wanting more children

Table 20
Applicant Wanting More Children

	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Answer
Female	7	13	11	5
Male	8	11	11	7

Whether or not a person wanted more children in their future is an important statement for some people looking for a prospective partner. Table 20 gives the overall indications of whether the applicants felt this subject was important enough to divulge to those reading their resume. Only 16.7% (n=12) of the applicants refused to answer this question.

Little difference between the genders was seen when examining the data on wanting more children, but when the age of the applicant was factored into the question, there appeared to be a dividing age group of 33-37 years of age. Table 21 shows the division of how the women answered the closed-ended question on wanting more children with the age groups less than the 33-37 as one group and those in the age group greater than 33-37 in a third grouping.

Table 21
Female Age Difference of Applicant Wanting More Children

Females	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Answer
18-32	5	0	7	0
33-37	2	0	2	0
38-67	0	13	2	5

Of those in the age groups greater than 37 years of age, 81.25% (n=13) stated positively that more children were not in their future. Other options for women of these advanced ages would be taking on the added responsibility of raising the children in the

lives of the significant other or adoption of a child after marriage.

Table 22
Male Age Difference of Applicant Wanting More Children

Males	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Answer
18-37	8	1	5	3
38-42	0	0	3	1
43-67	0	10	3	3

Men were a little less decisive about whether to have more children as seen in table 22, but that same approximate age group of 38-42 appeared to be a dividing line between males wanting more children and those not wanting them. The indecisiveness of the males about having any more children in their lives appeared to be across the board although the indecision was less during the later years. A “No Answer” in this category could be from not wanting to scare any prospective partners away before they had the chance to meet and discuss other options or criteria. The “No Answer” was chosen by males both early and later in their lives when compared to the females in this study who selected this option later in their lives.

Table 23
Preference on Wanting More Children of Prospective Partner

	No	Yes	Not Sure	No Answer
Female	15	8	8	8
Male	9	3	5	22

Table 23 shows the disclosed information when wanting more children became the subject regarding the prospective partner. Females in this table appeared to be more decisive about the prospect of having more children. Males showed themselves to be unwilling to take on the possibility of more children, or they were unwilling to cut off a

possible prospective partner by making a decisive choice on children. Those giving “No Answer” to this option were in almost all of the age groups. As there were multiple options for any not giving a “No Answer,” some of the applicants gave several options for their prospective others.

When age was factored in with wanting more children, most of the applicants of higher age were less willing to take on more children as can be seen in tables 24 and 25.

Table 24

Preferred Female Age Difference and Wanting More Children of Prospective Partner

Female	No	Yes	Not Sure	N/A
18-32	0	8	4	2
33-37	0	0	1	3
38-42	15	0	3	3

Table 25

Preferred Male Age Difference and Wanting More Children of Prospective Partner

Male	No	Yes	Not Sure	N/A
18-32	0	3	1	9
33-47	2	0	2	9
48-67	7	0	2	4

The female applicants became more negative about the possibility of taking on the excessive burden of a future child at the earlier age of 38 while the males generally withheld this statement until 48. Both sexes were more positive about taking on more children in the earliest age category (18-32), but this was more pronounced for the females.

Employment

Table 26
Employment of Applicant

	Student	Part Time	Full Time	Home Maker	Self Employed	Retired	No Answer
Female	1	3	26	1	1	3	2
Male	1	1	24	0	5	1	4

Table 26 show that applicants generally identified themselves as “Full Time” employees, 72.2% (n=26) for females and 66.7% (n=24) for males. For those with other classifications identified, two classifications were found to be of interest. “Self-Employed” was identified by 8.3% (n=6) of the applicants with one female and five males fitting the classification. “No Answer” was also selected in 8.3% (n=6) of the applicants with 2 females and 4 males selecting this option. Also of interest was the classification of “Retired” which 5.5% (n=4) of the applicants selected. All of the retirees were above the age of 48 and three of those were males. “Unemployed” was also a possible selection for the applicant although none of the applicants in this study utilized this possibility.

Some of these classifications could hold some ambiguity since applicants listed as “Students” might also be working “Part-time” and some listed as “Retired” might be retired from government service but working full or part-time on the side. The online service only gave the applicants one selection to describe their employment.

Table 27
Preferred Employment of Prospective Partner

	Female	Male
Full Time	24	9
Part Time	4	4
Home Maker	1	1
Retired	7	0
Self-Employed	12	6
Student	6	5
Unemployed	0	1
Work at Home	9	5
No Answer	10	26

Table 27 show that males did not seem as concerned about the employment status of the female as females were about the males as 72.2% (n=26) of the male applicants gave a “No Answer” while only 27.8% (n=10) of the female applicants did the same. Of the remaining applicants who did give a response to the question of employment of the prospective partner, 92.3% (n=24) of the females and 90.0% (n=9) of the males cited “Full Time” employment as one of the possibilities for their prospective partner. Since this question was another where the applicant could cite multiple possibilities for their prospective partner if they did not give a “No Answer,” it should be noted that the females gave an average of 2.4 responses per applicant while the males gave 3.1 responses per applicant.

Interests

The close-ended section of the resume program allowed the applicants to divulge their interests inside and outside of the house.

Table 28
Interests of Applicant

	Females	Males	Total
Arts	16	8	24
Cooking	18	19	37
Crafts	15	3	18
Computer/Internet	12	16	28
Community Service	7	6	13
Dancing	15	10	25
Dining	22	19	41
Family	21	19	40
Gaming	2	5	7
Gardening	12	10	22
Health/Fitness	13	20	33
Listening to Music	26	24	50
Movies	28	30	58
Outdoor Activities	17	26	43
Photography	7	11	18
Playing Music	5	10	15
Playing Sports	5	9	14
Religion/Spirituality	8	4	12
Reading	20	10	30

Table 28
Continuation of Interests of Applicant

	Females	Males	Total
Television	12	13	25
Theater	14	6	20
Travel	20	13	33
Watching Sports	11	15	26
N/A	0	0	0

The top interests of the sample group included “Movies” with 80.5%, “Outdoor Activities” with 59.7%, and “Listening to Music” with 69.4%. “Movies” and “Listening to Music” were listed evenly when compared between the genders and across the age groups. “Outdoor Activities” was more prominent on the male side of the table while only 47.2% of the females listed this interest. Those interests where the female applicants showed a greater preference included: “Arts” with 44.4% for females versus 22.2% for males, “Crafts” with 41.7% for females and 8.3% for males, “Reading” with 55.5% for females and 27.8% for males, “Theater” with 38.9% for females and 16.7% for males, and “Travel” with 55.5% for females and 36.1% for males. The only interests for which the males indicated a higher preference than the females were “Health/Fitness” with the males at 55.5% and females at 36.1%, and “Outdoor Activities” with the males at 72.2% and females at 47.2%.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS

Research Question 1

What are the ways in which applicants to an online dating service present themselves to other applicants in their resumes?

Who are the users? They are men and women, 20 to 45 years old, single if before 30 years of age and divorced if after 30 years of age. Most define themselves as having an average body, 5 foot 5 inches tall for women and 5 foot 10 inches tall for males. Most indicate blond or brown hair. Most applicants are Caucasian. Most classify their personality as friendly and clever or quick witted and when placed in a social setting are shy at first but warm up quickly. Most of the applicants do not smoke and only drink socially. Most live alone, with pets, or with children. Whether the applicant wants more children is highly dependent on their age. If they are below 38, the answer tends more toward yes, if above 38, the answer tends more toward no. Most applicants have at least completed some college and are full time employees in a wide range of employment fields, but income can be a touchy subject to get the applicant to divulge, especially for females. Most of the applicants are Christian or Christian/Catholic and regularly attend services. Most of the applicants are politically middle of the road citizens if they are willing to divulge political affiliation at all. Most of the applicants only speak the English language. The interests of most applicants include going to the movies, listening to music, outdoor activities, dining out, family, and cooking at home.

Who are they looking for when using these online services? They are looking for a prospective partner who is generally within 50 miles of their selected location, and who is single, divorced, or widowed. They are looking for someone who is generally average size or less (athletic, fit, or slim). Women want their men taller, men want their women

shorter. Most do not care what color the eyes or hair of the prospective partner are. Most would prefer the race to be close to their own but males are less firm about this preference than females. Most do not show a preference on the smoking habits of the prospective partner, but for those who do, the preference is for non smoking. Most applicants prefer social drinkers as partners. Most of the applicants show no apparent preference for whether the prospective partner wants or has children, but should the applicant care, the tendency is towards no children in the present or the future. Should the applicant care about the prospective partners education, the tendency is toward some college completed. Females appear to care more about the prospective partner's employment and income than do males. Females also appear to care more about the prospective partner's religious affiliation and political affiliation than the males. Lastly, of those applicants who showed a preference regarding the prospective partner's interests, the interests of choice coincided with those selected by the applicant; namely, going to the movies, dining out, listening to music, family, and outdoor activities.

As is seen from these two paragraphs, the applicant begins divulging who he/she is, what he/she looks like, what his/her particular credentials are, and where he/she stands on certain issues. Some of this information is withheld, just as in a face-to-face introduction, but some people appear more able to divulge information when there isn't a face attached to the other side of the discussion, or maybe it is due to the fact that the face looks like a computer screen, making the face impersonal. Whether this conclusion will remain this way as we assimilate into the world of computers is beyond the scope of this study.

Another possibility is whether we are really withholding information face-to-face which we are so readily willing to divulge in the online resume. In the face-to-face situation we have the physical appearance of the prospective partner as we talk to him/her in a meeting area (i.e. a bar, restaurant, grocery store). We have the nonverbal cues given

off by each of the people in the discussion. We have the two way communication as the two people converse with all of the feedback and interference. And we have the possibility of one of the people standing up and walking out of the conversation at any time, only with the other person witnessing this last action taking place. In this study, I am using resumes where the viewer of the resume can see the information given, or not given. The image is only there if the applicant willingly places his/her picture online. But, in the case of online personals, there is limited nonverbal communication to help the viewer confirm the accuracy of a statement (that is if they are even able to accomplish this task face-to-face). Also, the applicant has no information to show that a viewer has seen the resume or has exited after seeing a particular fact of which the viewer may not approve. Anyhow, this system of introduction of new acquaintances does cross a few borders not crossed in face-to-face encounters.

The most important part of this online setting is that it is asking a list of set questions which may, or may not, be introduced into a face-to-face introduction. The old adage that we never talk about religion, politics, or sex is broken as this set of questions asks about the applicant's preference on all three of these topics. Religion and politics are given in the answers to particular questions on these topics, and sex is given when the applicant states in the beginning of the resume application whether he/she wishes to find a man or woman to meet for some reason, whether it be for romance or friendship. But more information on these topics is only provided if the applicant further discusses the topic in the open-ended section of the resume.

Some information was not divulged by the applicant. The reasons for this could vary and include: the opinion that the information is no one's business this early in the discussion, the applicant may be a little self-conscious about the information, or the applicant might not wish the information to be placed online for all of the world to see. There was likely a greater degree of caution regarding some information with the increase

in identity theft associated with the technology user in today's world. This makes some users quite suspicious when using any technology and divulging too much personal information. But, there are some who are still naive about the possibilities of what might happen should this information fall into the wrong hands. This situation should become less problematic as the user becomes more assimilated into the world of new technology.

One aspect of whether the applicant gave an answer may be whether he/she believed the reader of the resume would feel that there was an attempt to hide information by not divulging a fact. In this case the applicant might prefer to divulge the information to make themselves more open to the reader. Whether the applicant meant to actually answer a question which he/she might not normally divulge, or to give an answer that is not as accurate but projects a better image than the more truthful answer, is dependent on the message he/she is attempting to send. After all, he/she is attempting to persuade someone that he/she is worthy of that person's time in pursuing a relationship. The only problem with this second, less honest, approach is when the applicant actually meets the other person in the future and might have to explain the discrepancy on the resume if the viewer were to remember the fact. The difference between this online experience and a face-to-face situation is that this experience has set questions that are seen by both the applicant and the person viewing the resume. A face-to-face situation may or may not have many of the more confidential questions asked. So the issue of hiding due to the "No Answer" option is not readily visible.

The one area of the study group which fell into the category of "better not to answer at this time" was when the applicant was asked to divulge his/her own income. The reason for this silence on the subject is not known, but the group in this study that appeared most affected was the women applicants instead of the men.

Overall, the applicants were willing to give most of the information about themselves. One must also realize that answers were given by a person about

himself/herself which the person might truly believe. This does not say that, should the information not be factual, that the person is a liar. Some people have a distorted image of themselves with their own constructed reality. We all have an image of ourselves in our mind. This image, sometimes better than real and sometimes worse, is how we are independent of the way others view us. When we describe ourselves in writing for others to read, that image from our mind is projected and becomes the image given to the other person. The truthfulness of that message becomes apparent in pictures and when we meet others face-to-face. Any lack of truthfulness may indicate a lack of self awareness, or it may be that a person wishes to present a particular image of self to others.

There are two points that need to be addressed. First, which follows along with the discussion on withholding of information, some of the information given by the applicant may or may not be factual. The person may outright lie about certain facts, or may decide not to answer certain questions, or may steer the discussion in another direction instead of answering the question. As stated in the literature review, this is also done in face-to-face at times. Some features can be seen online when dealing with physical attributes if the applicant has placed a picture on the resume, and if the picture is actually one of the applicant. A viewer of the resume needs to understand that applicants may not be who they say they are. But, persons that you are talking to in a night club, bar, laundry mat, grocery store, or city street may not be fully honest in their appearance or oral information about themselves either. An example of this could be when examining the “political affiliation” the applicant indicates. The applicant may vote liberal at the polls and/or follow a liberal agenda in their discussions, but so as not to scare away a prospective partner they may indicate that they are actually “middle of the road” or “not political.” This should not become a problem unless the applicant finds that the prospective partner is actually a conservative and the applicant begins taking offense at the subject matter or decisions the partner is making. Since it is often difficult to detect lack of truthfulness, all

of the information received in this study is taken at face value and presumed to be truthful.

Second, some of the answers may overlap with other choices or may appear somewhat vague in their meaning. In an attempt to explain this, I will examine two categories where vagueness of the descriptions and/or overlapping of definitions are more apparent: "Body Type" and "Sense of Humor." Vague and overlapping definitions allow some leeway in how an applicant presents himself/herself to others.

Yahoo personals gives 9 descriptions of "Body Type" for the applicant to select: "Slim," "slender," "athletic," "average," "thick," "a few extra pounds," "voluptuous," "large," and "fit." Let us define these terms according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary (1973) as we proceed through the description of our study. "Slim" is defined as "slender, slight, thin." "Slender" is defined as "slim, thin." These two definitions use each other in the defining process. They could mean the same depending on the reality of the applicant. For this study, few applicants used either of them to describe their own physique; for "slim" there was 1 male and 1 female, for "slender" there were 2 males and 3 females. That is only 9.7% of the total number of applicants from both genders using these two terms to describe themselves.

"Athletic" is defined as "sturdy, muscular." The definition for "fit" is "physically and mentally sound." These two definitions appear to be fairly close in their description except that "athletic" specifically identifies muscles while "fit" adds in the concept of the mental state of mind along with physical characteristics. These are primarily male dominated descriptions as only 13.8% (n=5) of the females utilized "athletic" to describe themselves and none of the females utilized "fit" to describe themselves, while 27.8% (n=10) of the male applicants used "athletic" and 11.1% (n=4) of the male applicants used "fit". Four out of five of the female applicants were willing to talk about their physical interests leading to an "athletic" lifestyle in the open-ended discussion. Primarily

this discussion was about the athletic endeavors they enjoy and how they love the outdoors. A 43 year old female stated, “A good match for me is a man who enjoys some level of fitness and enjoys being outdoors.” The males were willing to add to their open-ended statement about their own fitness endeavors, but a 54 year old male stated about his prospective partner that she will “value keeping her body, mind and spirit in optimum working condition.”

“Voluptuous” is defined as “giving sensual gratifications.” “Voluptuous” is relative as sensual gratifications differs from person to person. “Voluptuous” was used primarily by the female applicants in this study. Whether the male who used the term to describe himself in this study knew the meaning of the term, or whether he was attempting a little humor in his resume is not apparent. But he stated in his open-ended section that he is “a large framed man and I clean up pretty good. I do own my own tuxedo for those ‘once in a while’ occasions. I am humorous, gregarious, love to laugh.” His photograph, of his chest up, shows a man who might be better classified as “large” or “a few extra pounds.” Women who call themselves “voluptuous” could easily be redefined as possibly “a few extra pounds” or possibly even “thick” depending on the makeup of their bone and muscle structure. For the two women, ages 20 and 22, who placed a picture on their resume, this fact was apparent, even with only seeing the shoulders and head. What both of these women did was to accentuate their lips, by pursing them, and thinned their eyes so as to make their appearance more mysterious and alluring. The only issue with this is where one of the women does not state in her open-ended discussion a very alluring and sensual type of woman:

I am a 20 year old woman who is looking for someone to enjoy company. I love having a big group of people at my house or just two people saying ideas and thought. I am a wild child I must warn you. I am loud and know how to have a good time. I am a little bit rock and roll with a soft edge. I have 6 tattoos and my tongue is pierced. I do crazy fun things for no reason. I love to cook, try new exciting things. I think that dorks and geeks

are hot. I love a man that can take me in his arms and consume me. So if you like to have a crazy wild time but still like to chill at home. Then I am your girl.

This self presentation does not give a sense of “giving sensual gratifications” to most people, but might give it to a select few who would happen to run in a group similar to hers. A 37 year old female, who indicated “voluptuous” as a description of herself, says that she is “content, yet passionate” and is a “romantic person with simple needs.” Here again, we can see a person willing, in her self presentation, to give physically and emotionally to another, yet this subject is about the body type and not the love style of the applicant.

But, given a preference, would not a female prefer to characterize herself as “voluptuous,” which is more enticing of a description, and as the definition states, more sensually gratifying to the male (or female) eye. When asked what the meaning of “voluptuous” was, most people might not even be able to give a definition, but might add that Marilyn Monroe was “voluptuous” yet, 13.8% (n=5) of the female applicants in this study utilized this definition to present themselves to others.

The next four definitions are in order of physical size although there may be overlap in this distinction. “Average” is defined as “being not out of the ordinary: common.” What is ordinary? Common? These are relative terms, again, to describe a typical person and are open to interpretation. Depending on the magazine description of normal, or what is on television, most people might believe slimmer is more typical of a normal person. According to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, the average height in the United States for a human male, 20-74 years of age, is 5 feet 9.4 inches, while the average height of the human female is 5 feet 4 inches (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_height). The height of the individual is not something that a person can usually physically alter without artificial aids such as lifts in

their shoes. But these terms for body type are typically not dealing with the height of the applicant, rather the muscle and fat content. According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE) (<http://www.acefitness.org/>), the range of acceptable body fat for a female is 25-31% while for a male the acceptable limit is 18-24%. With the headlines at ACE of “Waistlines expand in 31 states” and “Excess belly fat is not your friend,” the emphasis is on leaner and slimmer bodies to give a healthier lifestyle. But without doing a dunk test, or a skin fold test, or a circumference test, who would really know their body fat.

So what is an “average” body type? Many applicants answering Yahoo questions might not hold the same reality that is held in the perfect world. Also, it would be hard to measure this reality without the actual measurements of applicants. It is important to remember, however, that the interpretations of applicants are central in the self presentation process. In this study, females cited an “average” body type 36.1% (n=13) of the time and males cited an “average” body type 38.9% (n=14) of the time. This was the most selected option from both genders for body type, and “average” more than doubled any other response. Many of the females citing “average” as their body type still exercise and are active in sports, family, and outdoor activities, yet they are also content to lay back, soak in a little peacefulness between their bouts of running around. Males cited many of the same activities as the females, with more of the males who classified themselves as “average” showing more of an interest in working out, exercising, sports, and other more active endeavors. Also, looking at the photographs of the applicants who classified themselves as “average,” at most some of the males might be better classified as “a few extra pounds” or “thick.”

“Thick” is defined as “heavily built.” Only one applicant, female or male, used “thick” as a description of his/her body type. “Thick,” like “voluptuous,” might be a term used in place of “a few extra pounds” or “large,” and it might be a kinder term to use than

“large.” But “thick” might appear to reflect the mental state of the applicant as thick minded or dense. This variation of the answer might appear less than attractive for a person viewing the resume, should it be seen in this fashion. The one applicant utilizing this term gave a picture from the chest up and was not unlike the two pictured applicants described in the “voluptuous” category. She had the same full mouth, but not pursed, and enticing eyes, except she gave the expression of a young innocent girl instead of actively accentuating her features. Her one statement that indirectly reflects on the body is “I’m looking for a guy that will treat me right, a guy that’s gonna like me for me.” All too often someone will take a partner and immediately begin trying to change those things not as appealing, in that person’s eyes, instead of accepting the person for who he/she is.

“A few extra pounds” is self defining but is relative to what the applicant defines as average. Females used this term 13.8% (n=5) of the time while males used it 8.3% (n=3) of the time. Females are thought to be healthier with “a few extra pounds” as was shown on the body fat description from ACE above. But how much is a few extra? This might be where the relativity of the answer appears. Some applicants might actually be a “large” persons who do not wish to be called such in terms of self presentation. Therefore they prefer a kinder term such as “a few extra pounds.” Most of the applicants who used “a few extra pounds” were younger (30 or below) or older (48 and up). Most applicants classified themselves as fun loving and doing outside activities, but they also enjoyed sitting home watching television and cuddling. A 24 year old female said, “I am not the type of person that gets hooked up on looks,” while a 30 year old female said, “ Looks are important but not the most important thing- I just think physical chemistry can’t be beat even if a couple is really compatible otherwise.” To cite an applicant who is showing motivation for the future, a 53 year old female said, “I am working on getting my body back into optimum shape.”

“Large” is defined as “exceeding most other things in quantity or size.” “Large”

was not cited in this study by any of the applicants in presenting themselves to other applicants. This is not to say that people never use this term to describe themselves. There are books and self help guides for BBW's or Big Beautiful Women in bookstores and online such as Big and Beautiful by Margaret Greaves, Wake up, I'm Fat by Camryn Manheim, and Big, Beautiful, and Pregnant: Expert advice and comforting wisdom for the expecting plus-size woman by Cornelia van der Ziel and Jacqueline Tourville. These women are proud of their body type and tell others that it is ok to be a large person and not conform to the norms of our society. The important message they are expressing is the need to love yourself, no matter what your appearance might be.

The second area where vagueness was apparent was in the applicant's "Sense of Humor." There were 9 descriptions for this category which included: "friendly," "clever/quick witted," "goofy," "slapstick," "dry/sarcastic," "campy/cheesy," "raunchy," "obscure," and "other." According to Merriam Webster dictionary (1973), friendly is described as "a person attached to another by respect or affection" or "one who is not hostile." There were 72% (n=26 for females and n=26 for males) of the applicants, from both the male and female groups, who described themselves as "friendly." But when introducing oneself to another person, would not "friendly" be a term that would appear more attractive to a possible prospective partner. "Friendly" was also positively accepted by both females and males as a possibility for their prospective partner with all of the applicants citing this possibility who did not cite "Any."

One problem appears when you ask if "friendly" can really be a characteristic of "sense of humor." "Friendly" is definitely a personality trait attached to an outward ability of getting along with someone. But to use "friendly" as a "sense of humor?" What the online term might be looking for is if applicants are good natured about their humor and never hurt or insult others in their jokes or humor. They would use humor that is not derogatory or humiliating toward a person or a group of people. In our world of humor,

this would be rare with the influx of comedians whose forte is to talk about racial groups, sexual groups, gender groups, or groups with a particular heritage. But, nearly three quarters of the applicants in this study cited “friendly” as a description of themselves, and all of the applicants were willing to accept another as a partner with a friendly sense of humor. Many of the applicants do classify themselves as fun loving individuals who are looking for someone to love and respect. What may also be happening is that applicants were not actually looking at the classification of “sense of humor.” Rather, they looked only at the words available in a list of options and chose “friendly” as the one they most liked in describing themselves to other applicants.

Clever is defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary (1973) as “1: showing skill or resourcefulness 2: marked by wit or ingenuity” while wit is defined as “3: quickness and cleverness in handling words and ideas 4: a talent for making clever remarks.” “Clever/Quick witted” was the second most used description by the applicants, after “friendly,” as 58.3% (n=21) of females and 47.2% (n=17) of males used this term to describe themselves. When examining the females preference in a prospective partner, “clever/quick witted” was a more accepted selection for a man’s “sense of humor.” One 24 year old female shows this in the open-ended answers by stating, “Two years out of undergrad is enough and am compelled to further my learning in law school in the fall. I miss learning and intellectual conversations.” Most applicants appear very sure of themselves and are able to define their needs for the viewers. They are not willing to compromise with half-hearted attempts to show who they are, what they want, and where they are. Whether males attach the same meaning as females to the term “clever/quick witted” is unknown. Many of the applicants of both genders also choose dry/sarcastic, goofy, and slapstick from the options available, but males at a younger age appear a little harsher in their discussion, with an attempt at tenderness. Females appeared more tender with the brush of surety and cockiness.

Goofy is defined as “crazy or silly.” “Goofy” was used 50% (n=18) of the time by females and 33.3% (n=12) of the time by males. Some people may feel that the term has some negative connotations, while others may feel the need to let loose and act up a little once in a while. Overall, “goofy” may not be as negative as some other terms on this list. There may also be a fine line in the actual character of the individual where “goofy” might overlap a little with “slapstick” or “campy.” But as one 54 year old male put it, “laughing, smiling, joking around and being silly feels good.” This was a father of “3 good, decent, and honest children” who took part in their activities and rarely missed a school function for them. Continuing with the same theme is a 47 year old female who is a “suit” by day and a “throw back hippie” by night and weekends. She adds in her open-ended section, “make me laugh and I’ll follow you anywhere.”

But “goofy” was not a characteristic which applicants selected solely from the list. Rather, “goofy” was an additional characteristic added to other selections for “sense of humor.” Therefore “goofy” accentuated the other choices and was most commonly used with “friendly” and “clever/quick witted.”

Females selected “goofy” as a possible “sense of humor” for their prospective partner 27.8% (n=10) of the time while males selected goofy for their prospective partner only 13.9% (n=5) of the time. This might give the impression that women are more willing to accept a man who is a little goofy without the knowledge that, in this category, the male appears more willing to accept a woman with any type of sense of humor. Therefore males might be just as likely to accept a goofy female as a partner.

Slapstick has no definition in the Merriam Webster Dictionary (1973), but the definition of slapstick films in the Wikipedia Online Dictionary is “1. Pain with no real consequence, 2. Editing to turn a situation more unrealistic, 3. Impossible situations, 4. Zooms to confuse the audience, and 5. Off screen use of sounds for impossible stunts and tension for audience.” Typically, when asked to define slapstick, a person may say Laural

and Hardy films of the 1930's and 1940's, or The Three Stooges films of the 1930's and 1940's. Only the first definition of slapstick films could apply to slapstick humor. In today's world, the Home Alone series is what the Wikipedia Dictionary assigns to slapstick, but America's Funniest Videos would probably classify as such also. For this study, "slapstick" was used to describe the female applicants 5.5% (n=2) of the time and male applicants 16.7% (n=6) of the time. So this is probably perceived as a predominately male characteristic. Not many women would likely willingly identify with the significance of "Whoop, whoop" and poke two fingers in the eyes.

Dry is defined as "Marked by a matter-of-fact, ironic, or terse manner of expression." Sarcastic is defined as "1: a cutting or contemptuous remark 2: ironical criticism or reproach." There were 33.3% (n=12) of the female applicants who cited this characteristic as their "sense of humor" while 30.5% (n=11) of the male applicants did the same. This type of "sense of humor" was the fourth most selected by both genders in characterizing their personalities. "Dry/sarcastic" is another characteristic that primarily accentuates other "sense of humor" choices. One 41 year old male did classify himself as only having a "Dry/sarcastic" "sense of humor." He answered his open-ended question with a straightforward approach and no nonsense, but did not appear in his picture or in his writing as a stiff or contemptuous person with no humor.

Campy, from the French word camp, is defined as "1: exaggerated effeminate mannerisms 2: something so outrageous or in such bad taste as to be considered amusing." Cheesy has no definition to cite, but Wikipedia Online Dictionary redirects cheesy to campy. So the meaning is similar. There were 5.5% (n=2) of the females who selected this option to describe their "sense of humor" while 13.9% (n=5) of the males made the same selection. As to whether those making this statement knew the meaning of the terms is unknown since there were no statements made in the open-ended section to verify their claims.

Raunchy is defined as “obscene or smutty.” There were 16.7% (n=6) of each gender who cited this characteristic as their “sense of humor.” The females who cited “raunchy” range from 19-35 years of age while the males range from 30-56 years of age. Most of the women are larger in physical size, like some extremes in music, most like tatoos while others also have tatoos, and many enjoy motorcycles and fast cars. The males citing “raunchy” enjoy outdoor activities and many say that although they are rough around the edges, they do enjoy cuddling and/or are compassionate.

Obscure is defined as “not readily understood.” Females did not cite this selection for “sense of humor,” but males cited this selection 11.1% (n=4) of the time. The four males included a long haired, tattooed, musician; a regularly drinking military man; a T-4 paraplegic who enjoys living history and Native American lifestyles; and a man who cited all of the possible “sense of humors” on the list. They appear to say that people do not get them at times which fits the definition of obscure as stated above.

The last term used is “Other.” Females cited this description 8.3% (n=3) of the time while males cited this description 19.4% (n=7) of the time. What type of humor falls under the category of “other” is unknown. Maybe they want to be mysterious in presenting themselves to the viewer of the resume. Maybe none of their definitions of the terms above fit with what they perceive is the reality of their personality. Therefore, “other” was a way of saying that Yahoo did not give them a term to fit what they believe their “sense of humor” really is. The applicants did not elaborate in their open-ended discussion why they selected this “sense of humor.”

What is apparent with these two criteria is the overlap in the terms used by Yahoo, more with “body type” than with “sense of humor.” The applicants could only select one option with “body type” to describe themselves. They had to select the one that was closest to the truth, if they wished to be accurate in their resume, but also one that would be most appealing to the viewer so as to receive a response from a serious prospective

partner. The applicants had more flexibility with “sense of humor” to select more than one alternative, if they so wished. Females averaged 2.6 selections per applicant when not choosing “No Answer” while males averaged 2.8 selections per applicant under the same conditions. Those characteristics with a more appealing “sense of humor” were the selections most chosen by the applicants: “friendly” and “clever/quick witted.” This fact, in itself, shows the probability that people, when asked to describe themselves, tend to give the view through rose colored glasses. Even with job resumes, people have started getting more creative with their personal information and/or giving half truths, if not outright lies, causing interviewers to have to spend more time on follow-up interviews and researching the backgrounds of candidates.

These possibilities, deception or withholding of information by the applicant and the vagueness in the definitions of the terms used, may lead to problems with the resume not getting the correct information across to the viewer, but the resume still allow applicants to “present themselves” to each other. Yahoo is continuing to tweak the system to get the best product out to the user. Just since the start of the results gathered for this study there have been two additions to the resume sheet which might, or might not, appear on a resume, depending on when the applicant placed the resume out for viewing. The two changes include “Love Style” and “ Personality Type” (which might have been a better place for “friendly” than in “sense of humor.”) In the meantime, the viewers need to understand that the resume is a tool used to understand who the applicant is so they can make a good decision about whether to converse with the applicant. Essentially Yahoo serves as a gatekeeper in this process between societal norms and the self presentation techniques of individual applicants.

More than half, 66.7% (n=24) of the females and 69.4% (n=25) of the males, were willing to place a picture of themselves on the resume. While not all of the pictures were clear, they may be able to confirm some of the descriptive information given in the close-

ended and open-ended sections. Some pictures appeared unclear as though they may have been taken with a cell phone or a web cam with less than adequate resolution in the camera. Also, while most of the pictures were of the applicant, some were of landscapes, children, pets, and family members. Many of these photographs got through the guards established by the Yahoo programs as pictures of landscapes and pets are usually removed and those of children and other people are usually not recommended for publication on the resumes. But the non applicant pictures that did get through were few.

Some of the applicants would not post a picture but promised to send one if anyone answered (“I don’t have a pic on here but will email it to you”). Others had a picture on their resume but wanted to let the reader know they wanted one to be sent in return (“Drop me a line tell me what makes you tick. I Promise a response, and please send a photo”). And lastly, some did not have a picture accessible but promised to get one placed when they had the next opportunity. One applicant, for example, stated, “I will try to get a pic on here soon.” Either this person had forgotten to edit the resume or meant to put another picture on the resume since there was a picture posted.

The other alternative is when the applicant is not sure whether posting a picture is in his/her best interest (“I don’t know if I want to post a picture. Ask, and you might get lucky”). This is not an uncommon worry as many might not wish to post such information for fear of people using their post for unscrupulous activities. This alternative might be the best approach according to Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell (2001) as their findings show that those applicants who stayed with the text-based information longer and kept the pictures offline as long as possible had a better chance of a longer standing relationship after the participants united. But this would only be after the applicant receives the call back from the prospective partner, as there is an option on Yahoo personals for the prospective partner to ask for only those applicants who placed a resume with a picture. This might reduce the number of viewers for the applicant, on one hand,

but could increase the number of serious viewers, on the other hand. These findings, however, are beyond the scope of this study.

Most of the people appear to be looking for others with similar interests and some similar criteria for appearance (i.e. race, height) or personality while others enjoy the differences. But one of the proofs this study has to offer for the similarity issue is with the interests listed by the applicants. Those interests most commonly included: movies, listening to music, outdoor activities, dining, family, and cooking. When examining those interests the applicant preferred in a prospective partner, the list included: movies, listening to music, outdoor activities, dining, family, and cooking, with the addition of dancing and travel. Many applicants chose “No Answer” for their selection with 80.5% (n=29) of the males selecting this option while 52.8% (n=19) of the females did the same.

Research Question 2

Are there differences based on sex in how applicants to an online dating service present themselves to each other in their resumes?

Males appear less selective than females when giving information about criteria they preferred in a prospective partner in five categories. First, let us examine the applicants preferences in ethnicity. Even though males had the same proportion of ethnic origins when compared to the females in this study, males appeared more willing to accept the possibility of a prospective partner who was from a different race. Each male who selected a possible race for the prospective partner gave an average of 3.1 selections per applicant while the females only gave an average of 1.7 selections per applicant. Males were also less willing to give an answer about what ethnicity would be their preference as 50% (n=18) of the male applicants refused to give a preference for the prospective partner while females selected “No Answer” 16.6% (n=6) of the time.

Second, on the preference of “Sense of Humor” of the prospective partner, males selected “Any” 80.5% (n=29) of the time while females made the same choice only

47.2% (n=17) of the time. Third, on the preference of “Impressions in a Social Setting” of a prospective partner, males selected “Any” 69.4% (n=25) of the time while females selected the same only 44.4% (n=16) of the time. Fourth, on the preference of “Wanting More Children” of a prospective partner males selected “No Answer” 61.1% (n=22) of the time while females did the same only 22.2% (n=8) of the time. Whether this has to do with the fact that females are traditionally seen as the care givers for children and some of the males may not understand that this isn’t always the case remains to be seen. Lastly, on the preference of “Employment” of the prospective partner, males opted for “No Answer” 72.2% (n=26) of the time while females selected the same 27.7% (n=10) of the time. This could partly be due to the fact that the male is generally thought of as the breadwinner of the family and the female’s income or employment is there to supplement the male’s in the household.

All of these cases where the males opted out of answering the question could be due to several factors. Whether they were more willing to leave the topic open for a later discussion with the prospective partner or any option given by the prospective partner would be satisfactory remains unclear. This may lead to assumptions such as males were not as committed to the relationship from the start or that males are less biased about the various characteristics of their prospective partner, or it may also be a combination of these two assumptions. The one common parallel in all of these cases is that they are indications of the preference of the male about the prospective partner. This parallel does not give credence to either of the assumptions stated above, but does show that males are less decisive than females when they are establishing criteria for their prospective partners. But remember the Peplau, Hill, & Robin study when they found that a woman’s attitude may predict the success of the long-term relationship with her mate (1993). The decisiveness of the woman may be the factor that will unite the couple in the end.

Another difference appeared in the career fields where males were more likely to

be in “Technical/Science/Engineering” with 13.8% (n=5) indicating this field, and “Construction/Craftsman” with 11.1% (n=4) indicating this field, while females were more likely to be in the “Medical/Health Services” with 25% (n=9) indicating this field, and “Clerical/Administrative” with 16.6% (n=6) indicating this field. While these numbers may not seem very high to base an analysis on, there were 17 different career fields from which the applicants could select, the choices did not include the possibility of “No Answer.” This is not out of the ordinary in the career classifications as men are typically in the construction and engineering fields while women are typically in the health services and clerical fields. Some changes are already happening as more women are entering the science, engineering and technical fields with the rise in computer programming and engineering, and men are entering health care jobs other than the medical doctor positions that were primarily dominated by the males in the past.

Females used discretion in only one area when compared to males. Females are less likely to indicate their income than males, but females are just as likely not to indicate their preference regarding their prospective partner’s income. What this might mean is that females hold the same criteria for themselves as they do for their prospective other when the subject is income. Males differ on whether they give their income and whether they specify an income for their prospective partner. Males tend to be more ready to give their own income with 63.8% (n=23) indicating this option, but far less willing to declare a particular income of the prospective partner with 83.3% (n=30) giving a “No Answer.”

But did the females and males follow the characteristics for their genders in interpersonal relationship as cited by Julia Wood? Wood (1997) stated that males characteristics were: strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled. Males did show themselves to be strong as “Athletic” and “Fit” were a male dominated body type. Males tended to play sports and have interests in outdoor activities. To a

certain degree, females also showed these interests, but more females watched sports than played, especially at the older ages. Males did show themselves as ambitious. But were they more ambitious than females? Many of the females knew what they wanted and where they were going, and careers and family were a major part of their lives. A male that was selected by a female had to realize that he was not going to get in the way of her doing what was important to her.

When a male was successful, he told of his success. Whether he was an accomplished musician, worked on computers, was a manager for a construction company. These accomplishments were important to him and he stated them proudly. Females did the same, except not as often. And their accomplishments were in their children. Males were also proud of their offspring and the work they did for them. The father of 3 children stated that he doesn't miss many of his children's individual functions, and one father is caring for a mentally retarded daughter. But males most often talked about their work accomplishments while females talked about their personal life accomplishments.

Males were rational to a certain degree, but this study did not find women any less rational. They stated clearly what was important and what they were looking for in life. There appeared to be just as many males as females who described irrational desires. Most of those, of both genders, who were more irrational were of the younger ages, but this would follow the Wood's statement as more of those irrational at the younger ages were females who just wanted a man to have fun with. The females still wanted a possible relationship, but he had to be fun for them. But were the males emotionally controlled? This characteristic was beyond the scope of this study since emotional control is a face-to-face quality.

In the same study, Woods (1997) stated that females were: attractive, deferential, nonaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships.

Females did try to show themselves as more attractive by stating a body type that appeared kinder to the imagination, and attempted to show pictures that appeared kinder to their appearance. But, this study did not find that males did not do the same when given a chance.

Woods also states that females are more deferential than males. This study did find that females were courteous and had regard for the prospective other, but there were few males who did not show the same attribute toward their prospective other, and the males showed themselves more willing to accept a prospective other with different characteristics. Females are also said to be nonaggressive. Most women in this study were nonaggressive, but so were most males. Few viewers would willingly accept a possible relationship with an applicant who showed himself/herself to be aggressive toward a possible significant other. Aggression is apparently not a socially desirable trait to include when presenting self to another in this context.

That women are emotional is a characteristic that shows itself when the person is face-to-face with another person as is the case with males in terms of emotional control. Women who were nurturing did appear in this study with females stating that they wanted a man who they could be there for and who would be there for them when they needed the emotional support. Females were also concerned with people and relationships. This appeared with their concern for their family, friends, and others. Males also showed this concern, except to a lesser degree than the females.

In most cases women were seen as depicted in Wood's analysis. There were areas where men were not seen in the manner depicted, such as aggressive. But this type of trait would have been detrimental to a possible relationship in the online personals context. As Barnes says, gender differences are seen crossing the lines in CMC (2001), and online personals are no different as the world is opening up as more people go online. Plus, online communication does give the chance for people to examine the written message

before submitting the work for review.

Research Question 3

Are there differences based on age in how applicants to an online dating service present themselves to each other in their resumes?

There was one big surprise found in this study. It was assumed that the older the applicant is, the less likely the chance that he/she would post a picture online as the technology is more likely understood by the younger applicant more than the older applicant. This was not the case as the photographs were found posted by all age levels with no major differences in posts. It may be that the older applicants had help from children, grandchildren, or friends if they did not understand the technology, or that Yahoo has made the experience easy enough for the most inexperienced to accomplish their goal of posting the information that they want to post.

Whether this was actually the case in this study is not apparent from the data presented. The reason for this statement comes from the pre-test assessment, made for this study, of who uses the Yahoo personals page to find a prospective partner. But a follow-up test run on October 6, 2006 and run in the same geographical area and with the same criteria as before confirmed the quantity of age groups for the same city as this study. The results of this test are as follows and correlate with the proportions of males to females. There were more applicants on this run with 6,404 resumes compared to the previous number of 5,054 applicants in the same area. Again, there might have been instances of an applicant with more than one resume online, which would not be visible with this simple test.

Table 29
Comparison of Females to Males Using Personals Online

Age Group	Female No.	Female %	Male No.	Male %
18-22	286	13.4	454	10.7
23-27	424	19.8	836	19.6
28-32	322	15.0	718	16.8
33-37	280	13.1	681	16.0
38-42	253	11.8	534	12.5
43-47	220	10.3	457	10.7
48-52	192	9.0	314	7.4
53-57	102	4.8	165	3.9
58-67	62	2.9	104	2.4
	2141	100.0	4263	100.0

From Table 29, a comparison shows that there is an age difference of Yahoo online personals as a larger percentage of those between 23 and 37 are utilizing the online service. In the same table, a comparison also shows that males are more prominent users of this online service (66.6%) than are females (33.5%).

One set of results, that was of no surprise, was in the area of wanting more children. After the age of 38 for females and 43 for males the answer to this question is a definitive "No." Before those ages both genders were willing or not sure of the desire to have more children. Those who had children in their lives wanted someone who was a positive influence, and they were clear about the fact that the children were a major part of their activities.

Other than this one area dealing with wanting children there was no activity which showed a marked distinction between the age groups in the study. This may be due to the small sizes of the age groups.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This study's primary goal was to seek out how the users of online personals presented themselves to others. The secondary goal was to show the ramifications of this information and how it related to the other processes and theories discussed in the literature review. These goals were achieved by analyzing the first step of interpersonal relationships, namely the introduction of online applicants to prospective partners. This was accomplished by examining the way the applicants presented themselves to another person using one of the newer technological mediums, the online personals page that is available through Yahoo. Although this type of computer mediated communication is not fully accepted by all users, it still has the possibility of research in order to better understand how users use this type of tool, as well as how people are evolving in their thinking and actions due to this new technology. The use of older theories is revisited in order to accomplish this task. The theories that are examined in this study include Marshall McLuhan's "Technological Determinism Theory" and John Searle's "Construction of Social Reality." Presentation of self is an important concept utilized in order to better understand how users perform their introductions in an online personals context..

Most of the applicants were willing to give most, if not all, of the information requested about themselves in the online medium. This information included photographs, as most of the applicants were willing to show their physical appearance with pictures, in addition to the answers to questions posed by Yahoo. Most of the applicants appeared to put themselves in a fairly good light and did not discredit themselves too badly. This is to be expected in the self presentation process. The resumes were positive, usually stated what was important to the applicant, and usually expressed what the applicant wanted in a partner. Applicants looked for others who had similar

interests which is not unusual as people tend to want to find someone with whom they can do things, go places, and enjoy each other's presence. If the applicant were to meet another at a church function, one of the interests would be somewhat apparent (i.e. religion or spirituality), although some people go to various church functions in order to meet a significant other for the possibility of future relations even though they may not be religious or a member of that denomination, or any denomination for that matter.

The applicants appeared willing to divulge more information than in face-to-face conversations as they appeared more willing to answer all of the questions placed before them, with the exception of women who would not divulge their incomes and men who would not divulge several preferences regarding prospective partners. But, in reality, how many of us would stay in an introduction with another person at a bar or at a party while they were quizzing you with a set of questions? Some of the information in the online service is too personal for normal conversation. The approach which is used by Yahoo can give a prediction of compatibility based on the number of answers that the viewer has in common with the applicant.

Although lying and withholding of information could not be readily seen with the online applications, evidence was apparent where some applicants were not completely honest in their descriptions. Again, some of this is to be expected in the self presentation process. Either the description did not fit with the picture posted by the applicant or some piece of information did not correlate with other information that was placed by the applicant. Having a person describe themselves as a blond when visible brunette roots were showing is one possible reason for this concern. Many applicants withheld information by answering a question with a "No Answer." The reason for the non disclosure of information is not apparent in this study. The ramifications of this action could include less trust by the viewer causing less calls from prospective partners. But this is a type of decision the applicant needs to make when entering information about

themselves with online personals.

Computers have been a man's world, as stated by David Bennahum (1998) in his recollections of his life growing up in the 1970's and 1980's. He watched the computer world blossom from the world of individual programs the programmer could personalize. The world has evolved into the user friendly/user locked out world which gives many users the ability to navigate and immerse themselves in the world of computerization, but not the ability to personalize the program unless the programmers made that option openly available. And as such, most of the users were men when generally dealing with computers. This is changing, though, and the computer world is beginning to become just as much a woman's world in many respects.

What is very apparent from this study in terms of self presentation is when the applicant gives answers to close-ended questions which might be vague or overlapping. This vagueness and overlapping of definitions may cause some confusion in the users of the online system. Two areas were of interest in this study which dealt with this matter. Body type used several terms which overlapped in their definitions. Which term is more appropriate? Both terms might be appropriate for one person where only one term is appropriate for another. And one term, which was used, might be kinder to the applicant than another term, which was not used, but which was closer in reality to the applicant's body type.

Males and females followed most of the gender traits when filling out the application for the online resume. There were differences in gender traits which do not follow the norms of the research studies that studied those traits. This is not unusual as males and females have been crossing the boundaries in the past, and will continue to cross the boundaries as CMC becomes more prevalent in the future. One issue to consider here is, are the users really crossing the boundaries or is this just a symptom of the user's ability to sit back and think out their best and kindest approach to their introduction. After

all, one of CMC's advantages is the ability of the user to mull over the options and return a result that puts on the best face, but is less honest. To put this into a perspective as Erving Goffman (1959) would have said it, the new medium is the stage, which gives the applicant the ability to design his/her own mask by presenting himself/herself in the best possible light. This image is then used to present the scene to the viewer of the resume, in hopes of the rave review or an introduction with a member of the audience. This is similar to the presentation of self to another person with a more asynchronous feedback time from the receiver.

Yahoo will continue to tweak its system in order to perfect its capabilities, but there will always be hackers ready to break the rules of any system. And what is the difference between a computer hacker who attempts to bypass the gates and guards of the system in order to go where he/she is not allowed, or a person who goes online and portrays himself/herself as another gender or another persona and an applicant in an online personals service who is deceptive in presenting himself/herself in order to acquire information from another person that would not be within his/her grasp normally. If there is any afterlife in the introduction of individuals, any deception should appear in a face-to-face encounter, should the discussion proceed that far.

The constructed reality that applicants provide could be a modified reality. It could be a constructed act which they portray in order to make themselves more appealing. They know the truth. As Golda Meir says, "Show me a sensible person who likes himself or herself? I know myself too well to like what I see. I know but too well that I'm not what I'd like to be." (Taken from Believing in Ourselves calender, October 16, 2006) The applicants might very well be the sensible people who might or might not like themselves but have a package to sell to a prospective partner while others are telling the truth. But honesty doesn't always make the sale.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the biggest limitations of this study is not knowing what the truth is about the applicant. It was never in the scope of this study to follow up on the honesty of the applicant as there was a greater interest in how applicants “presented themselves” to others. Therefore this study was taking information at face value. One possible future question to assess is the truthfulness of the applicant. A study could give an applicant the ability to fill out the information online while receiving the truthful information from another source to compare the honesty of the applicant online.

Another of the biggest limitations is with the size of the individual groups and the number of cities studied. To increase the size is a probable method of receiving more accurate and reliable data, but to increase group size too much is to overwhelm the researcher unless there is support for recording purposes. Since this was an exploratory study, taking smaller groups and getting a wider array of information was the best approach.

Another possible approach to using these resumes is to analyze only certain aspects of the input of the applicant. By investigating fewer criteria for each individual applicant, the researcher would be free to examine a larger group of applicants, thereby giving more credibility to the data gained within a narrower framework of issues.

Since this study is only examining heterosexual relationships, is there a difference in the approach of a homosexual, or a bisexual who is looking for a partner for love or companionship?

There are so many ways of using and reusing resumes that are gained online that older theories could be reexamined using these new mediums. But with a new medium, there is an old problem that arises with the lack of users. Until the new medium is in use by a larger proportion of the population, and that day is not too far in the future, will the information gained from a study researching these new methods of communication show

the true reflections of the population of our society?

It is this researcher's opinion that this study, along with others that examining online resumes, could become a jumping off point to a whole new perspective about the way people approach an introduction while utilizing a new medium. Do our habits change? It appears so. Are we really crossing gender stereotypes? We might be testing the limits to see just how far we can get in the new medium. Does this new medium change us? Marshal McLuhan probably would have thought so. Although this study does not shed any new light on the affirmation of a new Cyber-Age, it is not out of the realm of possibility for future research.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval
for James W. Peoples III



NEBRASKA'S HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)

April 24, 2006

James Peoples, III
924 Hugo Street
Omaha, NE 68107IRB#: 152-06-EXTITLE OF PROTOCOL: The Reality of Computer-Mediated Communication: An Examination Into Online Dating Services

Dear Mr. Peoples:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for *Exempt Educational, Behavioral, and Social Science Research* on the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 4. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol **approval period of three years** from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ernest Prentice, PhD/MD/IRB".

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/gdk

Appendix B

Pop-up possibilities of online registration

Appearance

I consider myself

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Fit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slim | <input type="checkbox"/> Thick |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slender | <input type="checkbox"/> A Few Extra Pounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Average | <input type="checkbox"/> Large |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic | <input type="checkbox"/> Voluptuous |

I am

- I'll tell you later
 (Any height from 3'0" to 7'11")

My eyes are

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Gray |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Green |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue | <input type="checkbox"/> Hazel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown | |

My hair is

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Dark Brown |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auburn | <input type="checkbox"/> Red |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Gray |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blonde | <input type="checkbox"/> Bald |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Light Brown | <input type="checkbox"/> A little Gray |

I am mostly

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American (Black) | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian (White) | <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-Racial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino | |

Home and Family

My situation

- I'll tell you later
- Single - Never Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated

Have Kids

- I'll tell you later
- No
- Yes - At home full time
- Yes - At home part time
- Yes - But not at home

Want (more) kids

- I'll tell you later
- No
- Yes
- Not sure

Professional Life

My education

- I'll tell you later
- Some High School
- High School Graduate
- Some College
- College Graduate
- Post-Graduate Degree

My employment status is

- I'll tell you later
- Full-time
- Part-time
- Home maker
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Student
- Unemployed
- Work at home

I specialize in

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Artistic/Musical/Writer | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing/Distributions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking/Financial Services/ Real Estate | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical/Health Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical/Administrative | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/Government/Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Related/Hardware | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales/Marketing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction/Craftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical/Science/Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education/Academic Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/Media | <input type="checkbox"/> Food Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Executive/Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality/Travel | |

My annual income is

- I'll tell you later
- \$50,000 to \$74,999

Less than \$24,999
 \$25,000 to \$34,999
 \$35,000 to \$49,999

\$75,000 to \$99,999
 \$100,000 to \$149,999
 More than \$150,000

Lifestyle

I smoke

- I'll tell you later
- No
- Socially
- Daily

I drink

- I'll tell you later
- No
- Socially
- Daily

Personal

My religion is

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Christian/Catholic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist/Taoist | <input type="checkbox"/> Atheist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Christian/LDS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu | <input type="checkbox"/> Christian/Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Islam | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual but not religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> None/Agnostic | <input type="checkbox"/> Scientology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian/Protestant | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

I try to attend religious services

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Only on holidays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly | |

My political views lean towards

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very Conservative | <input type="checkbox"/> Very Liberal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservative | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Political |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle of the Road | |

My astrological sign is

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'll tell you later | <input type="checkbox"/> Libra (Sept. 23- Oct. 23) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aries (March 21- April 19) | <input type="checkbox"/> Scorpio (Oct. 24 - Nov. 21) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taurus (April 20 - May 20) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 22) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gemini (May 21 - June 21) | <input type="checkbox"/> Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer (June 22- July 22) | <input type="checkbox"/> Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22) | <input type="checkbox"/> Pisces (Feb. 19 - March 20) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22) | |

My Match

Look for matches within ___ of zip/postal code

- Only within city
- 5 miles
- 10 miles
- 15 miles
- 25 miles
- 50 miles
- 100 miles
- 250 miles

I prefer to view profiles with

- Photos
- No photos
- Photos or no photos

I'm interested in people who've been active

- At any time
- in the last 24 hours
- in the last week
- in the last month