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Online Dating Profile Analysis: The Intersection of Identity, Gender & Religion

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According to *standpoint theory*, individuals experience the world based on the social groups that they belong to. Using this theoretical lens, my content analysis compared how gender and religion were conveyed on the user profiles of three online dating sites: JDate.com, ChristianMingle.com and OkCupid.com. In my initial reading of data, I used inductive thematic analysis to distinguish seven categories of words and seven categories of photographs that were relevant to portrayals of gender and religion. These categories were then analyzed through frequency counts by adding the total number of word types and photograph types used by men and women on each site. Findings showed an emphasis on religious cultural background on ChristianMingle.com. Gender roles were supported overall with male emphasis on career and sports, and female emphasis on attractiveness and care.

Introduction

The emergence of the Internet as a medium in the 21st century has greatly influenced the landscape of dating. In particular, online dating services have had a significant impact on one's ability to find a romantic partner. In a 2006 research report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, there were several notable findings about online-dating:

Some 15% of those in this survey of the general public—representing about 30 million Americans—say they know someone who has been in a long-term relationship or married someone they met online. Twice as many know someone who has at least dabbled in the online dating scene. (Madden & Lenhart, 2006, p. i)

Studies such as these highlight the prevalence of online dating today. In 2014, an individual can quickly set up a date through the click of a button. According to Pew's research, 1 in 10 of all Internet users have utilized online dating websites. Many users have stated that they believe the online dating medium will increase their ability to find the right match by providing "access to a larger pool of potential dates" (Madden & Lenhart, 2006, p. iii). This growth in numbers has also caused online dating to lose much of the stigma that was initially attached to it. As online dating sites continue to become more socially acceptable, they will become a dominant medium for singles around the world.

Online dating has become a normalized aspect of romance in 2014. Therefore, it is an important place for communication researchers to examine when considering intimate relationships. Individuals who participate in online dating are unique because they "engage in relationships that are perceived by some scholars as nontraditional or understudied" (Emmers-Sommer, 2005, as cited in Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 153). While there has been an increased amount of online dating research within the past five years,

several areas require a deeper analysis. Much of the research focuses on use of the medium as a way of misrepresentation. For example, Toma and Hancock (2010) describe how online dating provides more options to enhance physical appearance because “self-presentations are static (i.e., the equivalent of a monologue rather than a dialogue) and rely solely on visual and linguistic cues” (Walther, 2007; Toma & Hancock, 2010, as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro 2011, p. 96). Although this research provides insight into online deception, it fails to explain how online identity might be shaped by other factors, such as one’s personal background.

When considering online dating profiles, there has been a limited focus on the role of gender. Additionally, there has been little focus on the role of identity portrayals on online dating sites exclusive to specific races, cultures or religions. Since online dating has become more common, there are now a number of niche dating sites that pertain to specific groups of people.

I have chosen to examine how faith-based dating sites might contribute to identity portrayals in online dating. This study is one of the few critical examinations of online dating profiles to focus specifically on faith-based websites in relation to identity. I will be examining the following websites: JDate.com, for Jewish singles, ChristianMingle.com, for Christian singles, and OkCupid.com, which has no religious affiliation. The purpose of this study is to provide a critical examination of the identity portrayals in each website. Two main hypotheses are addressed, each relating to communication, identity formation and construction:

H1: The online dating profiles on JDate.com, OkCupid.com and ChristianMingle.com will each reflect different patterns of identity portrayals based on the dominant religious values pertaining to each site. Specifically, I predict that values of faith will be most prevalent on ChristianMingle user profiles.

H2: Gender stereotypes will be present in both male and female user profiles across all three sites.

Background: JDate.com, ChristianMingle.com & OkCupid.com

The online dating website JDate.com is owned by Spark Networks Inc. JDate has over 750,000 active members worldwide, including www.JDate.com, www.Jdate.co.uk, www.Jdate.co.il, and www.Jdate.fr (Spark Networks, 2012). According to their portfolio on Spark. net, JDate was launched in 1997. JDate’s website describes a recent study performed by an independent research company, ResearchNow, which surveyed 1,000 married Jewish Internet users. They claim that findings prove that “JDate is responsible for 52% of the Jewish marriages that started online” (Spark Networks, 2012, n.p.). Therefore, JDate has become a dominant online dating site for Jewish singles.

According to JDate’s mission statement, its goal is “to strengthen the Jewish community and ensure that Jewish traditions are sustained for generations to come” (Spark Networks, 2012, n.p.). This suggests that members of JDate hope to find a partner who shares their own values and customs. Although JDate is a faith-based website, its mission statement shows that members are not necessarily religious. By focusing more on

commonalities and community, JDate's mission statement seems less focused on faith. This value probably connects to the minority position that members of the Jewish religion have in the world today. Being a part of a social group that has been persecuted in past events may cause individuals to strive to preserve their heritage and pass on their unique identity.

ChristianMingle.com (also owned by Spark.net), on the other hand, seems to highly value religious faith. Spark.net states that the site has "more than 7 million registered members, with more than 2 million members joining in the past year alone" (Spark Networks, 2012, n.p.). ChristianMingle is growing as a niche site for religious Christians and deserves attention within the academic community. ChristianMingle's mission statement below points to several site-specific values:

ChristianMingle is more than just a site for Christian dating; it's also a Christian community where members can interact with likeminded singles who share their faith, values and love for God in Christ. ChristianMingle's deepest desire is to see its members grow in their relationship with Christ while living out their spiritual journeys. (Spark Networks, 2012, n.p.)

This mission statement differs from JDate's in that it is more focused on its members' relationship to God. As a result, individuals who choose ChristianMingle as an online dating site are probably more religious than individuals who choose JDate. Because Christianity is not a minority religion in the world today, individuals do not need to go out of their way to find a Christian romantic partner online. For example, a non-religious Christian would have a relatively easy time finding a Christian partner on a site such as Match.com or eHarmony.com. However, a more serious Christian would join a site like ChristianMingle to find a partner who would match his or her strong religious beliefs.

The final website of analysis is OkCupid.com, which is operated by Humor Rainbow Inc. According to a February 2011 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the Internet company Interactive Corp. acquired ownership of OkCupid.com. The author of the article sums up how OkCupid.com operates: "OkCupid offers its services for free, supports itself through advertising, and generally attracts younger singles" (Freidman, 2011, n.p.). As a result, the site sometimes has a reputation for being a place for "hook-ups," rather than long-term dating. OkCupid's more casual atmosphere and non-religious affiliation indicates that members are likely to be less religious than members of both JDate and ChristianMingle. If users are simply looking for a casual date, rather than a life partner, they will be less concerned with meeting someone who shares their religious beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

My analysis is one of the first Internet studies to use the framework of *standpoint theory*. Originally deriving from Karl Marx's conception of ideology, standpoint theory is based on the notion that people experience situations differently according to the social group that they belong to (Harding, 1991). This impacts societal interactions because "members of each social group communicate in some ways that aren't shared by people outside that group" (Houston & Wood, 1996, p. 42). A commonly used example of standpoint theory can be illustrated by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1807) seminal

discussion of slave relations. Although the master and the slave are both participating in the same slavery process, they each experience slavery in completely different ways. Standpoint theory can reveal why members of different social groups may face communication barriers. For example, Marsha Houston and Julia T. Wood (1996) discuss a situation in which a Chinese exchange student was critiqued by her American peers and teachers for acting too unassertive. However, in the student's culture back in China, assertion was actually seen as "a sign of selfishness and arrogance" (Houston & Wood, 1996, p. 41). Looking at cultural values from the Chinese student's point of view illuminates how her background shapes her behavior. By seeing the world through the eyes of other people, standpoint theory helps us uncover cultural differences.

I have selected this theory to analyze JDate.com, OkCupid.com and ChristianMingle.com because it helps to highlight how members of each social group might have unique conceptions of romance. Although standpoint theory often focuses on gender, this paper uses the theory to observe *both* gender and culture on online dating sites. Since the websites examined are two faith-based and one with no religious affiliation, this outlook informs how members of each site might communicate identity in their own way.

Literature Review: Communication, Gender and Identity

Stereotypes

A number of gender researchers have found that members of society often choose stereotypical labels when describing men and women. For example, men have been characterized as "adventurous," "active," "dominant," "forceful," "independent," "masculine," and "strong-willed," while women have been described as "emotional," "passive," "dependent," "delicate," "sentimental," "submissive," "feminine" and "nurturing" (Aries, 1987, 1996; Bem, 1974, 1993; Borisoff & Merrill, 1998; Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Ivy & Backlund, 2008; Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004; Wood, 2009, as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 104). These stereotypes become socialized and deeply influence the dynamics within male/female dating interaction. According to Laurie Arliss, "to the extent that one's self-image is gender-specific, romantic interaction will be understandably traditional" (2001, p. 120). For example, a woman who views herself as stereotypically feminine might expect her male romantic partner to open doors for her and pay for her meals. This notion can also be found on online dating profiles. When attempting to attract a member of the opposite sex, individuals might consciously or unconsciously stress attributes that they believe are gender specific. Despite the perception that our society has broken down certain gender barriers in domains such as the workplace, gender roles remain prevalent in the online dating world.

Language & Labels

An important aspect of these portrayals relates to the language that we use to describe ourselves. When considering online dating profiles, the labels used by individuals are a crucial element to the identities that they construct. As noted by Cheris Kramarae, "language creates and reproduces views of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation" (1996, p. 21). The labels used on the dating sites JDate.com, ChristianMingle.com and OkCupid.com may reveal how members want to portray their gender, religion, or culture.

For example, a male member of OkCupid who describes himself as “outdoorsy” and “thrill-seeking” might be attempting to appear more masculine to members the opposite sex.

Attractiveness & The Body

When considering gender norms in our culture, attractiveness becomes a focal point for young women. According to Borisoff and Hahn, these messages are given to children at a very young age. For example, parents who dress their daughters up in girly clothes and tell them to look pretty are stressing a “valuation of body image as intimately connected to self esteem, self-worth, and future success” (Borisoff & Hahn, 1997, p. 102). Along with socialization in the home, young girls receive cultural messages through interaction with peers and through the media. As a result, these values “become insinuated into romantic and professional relationships” (Borisoff & Hahn, 1997, p. 104). This emphasis is important when considering how females present themselves to the opposite sex. It influences both conscious and unconscious choices that they make, whether it be the clothes that they wear, use of diet and exercise, use of body language, etc.

Method

This is a preliminary study that focuses on these specific online dating websites: JDate.com, ChristianMingle.com and OkCupid.com. I examined a total of 60 profiles: 20 from JDate.com, 20 from ChristianMingle.com and 20 from OkCupid.com. The sample in all three websites is of the age group of 23 to 27 years old. I used the filtering function on each site by choosing to view only an age-range of 23 to 27 years old. Out of the 20 profiles chosen from each site, I examined 10 female and 10 male. Therefore, 50% of my sample is of female profiles and 50% is of male profiles. These profiles were examined between the dates of October 25, 2012 and November 10, 2012. The profiles were chosen through systematic sampling and were picked by choosing every tenth male or female profile. In the overall sample, 47 profiles listed Caucasian as their ethnicity; five profiles listed Latino as their ethnicity; four profiles listed African American; two profiles listed Middle Eastern, and two listed as Asian.

Profile Analysis: Language

This project used the quantitative method of content analysis. In my initial readings of profile descriptions, I first used inductive thematic analysis to distinguish seven categories of words that were relevant to portrayals of gender and portrayals of religion. These themes derived from the overall data in its relationship to my two hypotheses. The word categories were then analyzed by frequency counts to highlight the recurring patterns within the profiles of each site. I counted the frequency of each type of word as appearing in every individual profile. I then added up the total of these word types for each cohort: JDate males, JDate females, OkCupid males, OkCupid females, ChristianMingle males and ChristianMingle females. Below are the categories:

- 1) *Achievement related words*, defined as words describing someone with high achievement. Examples: hard working, motivated, ambitious, successful, driven.

- 2) *Career related words*, defined as words relating to one's profession. Examples: work, career, company, corporation, office.
- 3) *Activity related words*, defined as describing a physically active person. Examples: active, athletic, outdoorsy, work out.
- 4) *Sports related words*, defined as words pertaining to the category of sports watching or sports playing. Examples: sports, football, baseball, basketball.
- 5) *Care related words*, defined as words describing someone who is kind, giving, or caring. Examples: sweet, caring, nurturing, compassionate.
- 6) *Physical attribute words*, defined as words that relate to a positive physical appearance. Examples: pretty, attractive, good-looking, nice hair, nice eyes, good smile, cute.
- 7) *Faith based words*, defined as words pertaining to one's religious faith. Examples: God, Faith, Jesus, Godly, Temple, Church.

JDate

Several patterns stand out in the language of male and female profiles on JDate. In particular, the male profiles had eight *achievement related* words while the females only had four. The males had 23 *career related words*, while the females had nine. The males used 10 *activity related words*, while the females used three. The males used 30 *sports related words*, while the females only used one. In terms of *care related words*, the females used 12 while the males used only two. For *physical attribute words*, there was only one counted for males and zero counted for females. There were zero *faith-based words* used for both males and females.

OkCupid

There was a higher use of *physical attribute words* for both sexes; the females had eight, while the males had five. Similar to the results on JDate, the male profiles had a high number of *career related words* (27), while the female profiles had 11. However, there were no *achievement related words* for males and three for females. Similar to JDate, the males had 11 *activity words* while the females had only five. There were six *care related words* for women and zero for men. There were zero *faith-based words* used in both male and female profiles.

ChristianMingle

The largest distinction in the results for ChristianMingle was the high frequency of *faith-based words* used in the profiles. There were 61 *faith-based words* overall, with 41 used by females and 20 used by males. Another difference was that the females had 16 *activity related words*, while the males only had two. There was very low use of *sports related words*, as the males had one and the females had zero. There were also three *physical attribute words* used in the male profiles and zero used in the female profiles. Similar to JDate, there were 11 *achievement related words* for males and only two for females. In terms of *career related words*, there were nine used by men and

only one used by women. Another distinction was that there were eight *care related words* used by men, while there were only six *care related words* used by women.

Table 1. *Summary, Profile Analysis of Identity.*

Category	Achievement related words	Career related words	Activity related words	Sports related words	Care related words	Physical Attribute words	Faith based words
JDate Males	8	23	10	30	2	1	0
JDate Females	4	9	3	1	12	0	0
OkCupid Males	0	27	11	12	0	5	0
OkCupid Females	3	11	5	1	6	8	0
Christian-mingle Males	11	9	2	1	8	3	20
Christian-mingle Females	2	1	16	0	6	0	41

Profile Analysis: Photographs

In my initial reading of data, I used inductive thematic analysis to distinguish seven categories of photographs that were relevant to portrayals of gender and portrayals of religion. I then used frequency counts to count the patterns for each specific cohort. Similar to the word analysis, I counted the frequency of the photograph types for each specific profile. I then added the total for each cohort: JDate males, JDate females; OkCupid males, OkCupid females; ChristianMingle males and ChristianMingle females. Below are the categories:

- 1) *Headshot*, defined as a close up photograph of one's face from the shoulders up, typically smiling.
- 2) *"Sexy" body shot*, defined as a photograph of someone's entire body wearing clothes that are sexually revealing. For females, this includes tight and/or short dresses or skirts. For males, this includes a shirtless photo.
- 3) *Regular body shot*, defined as a photograph of someone's entire body wearing clothes that are not revealing and are typically casual.
- 4) *Professional attire shot*, defined as a photograph of someone in the attire of their profession. Examples are photographs in a business suit, scrubs, and/or holding props specific to a career.
- 5) *Shot with family/friends*, defined as a photograph showing one or more family member or one or more friend. These photographs are often displayed with a caption explaining who is in the photograph.

- 6) *Silly/Miscellaneous shot*, defined as a photograph of someone engaging in a silly activity such as making a funny face, dressing up in a costume, or making funny movements/gestures.
- 7) *Religious affiliated shot*, defined as a photograph of someone at a religious event or activity, often at temple, church, during a religious ceremony, or wearing religious paraphernalia.

JDate

The majority of both male and female photographs were composed of *headshots*; the males had 11 *headshots* and the females had 27. The females had 11 “*sexy*” *body shots*, while the males had zero. The females had one *regular body shot*, while the males had four. The males had six *professional attire shots*, while the females had zero. The females had eight *shots with friends and family*, while the males had three. The females had only two *silly/miscellaneous shots*, while the males had seven. There was only one *religious affiliated picture shot* overall in one of the male profiles.

OkCupid

Similar to JDate, the majority of the female photographs were *headshots*; there were 12 female *headshots* and nine male *headshots*. There were eight “*sexy*” *body shots* in the female cohort and one in the male cohort. However, there were zero *regular body shots* for the females, and two *regular body shots* for the males. Similar to JDate, the male cohort had seven *professional attire shots*, while the female cohort had zero. The males had two *shots with family/friends*, while the females had three. There was a high occurrence of *silly/miscellaneous shots* for both males and females; the females had 11 while the males had 10. There were zero *religious affiliated shots* for both males and females.

ChristianMingle

Consistent with JDate and OkCupid, the most frequently used photograph type was the *headshot*; there were 32 in the female cohort and 23 in the male cohort. There were only three “*sexy*” *body shots* for the females and zero for the males. There were five *regular body shots* for females and three for males. Consistent with the previous websites, there were zero female *professional attire shots*; there were five for the males. There were 10 total female *shots with friends/family*. For male photographs there were only two. There were six *silly/miscellaneous shots* for the females and four for the males. For the males, there were three *religious affiliated shots*; for the females there were zero.

Table 2. *Summary, Photo Analysis.*

Category	Head-shot	“Sexy” Body Shot	Regular Body Shot	Prof. Attire	With family/Friends	Silly/Misc.	Religious affiliated
JDate Males	11	0	4	6	3	7	1
JDate	27	11	1	0	8	2	0

Females							
OkCupid Males	9	1	2	7	2	10	0
OkCupid Females	12	8	0	0	3	11	0
Christian-mingle Males	23	0	3	5	2	4	3
Christian-mingle Females	32	3	5	0	10	6	0

Discussion

Male Identity as Career

It is not surprising that the majority of the males emphasized their career in their online profiles. In all three websites the number of *career related words* on male profiles was nearly triple the number on female profiles. On OkCupid, the highest frequency of word types in the male profiles was in the *career related words* category. On JDate, they had the second highest frequency after *sports related words*; on ChristianMingle, they had the third highest frequency after *faith-based words* and *achievement related words*. In addition, the photograph analysis demonstrated *professional attire shots* for the men in all three websites (JDate had six, OkCupid had seven and ChristianMingle had five), while there were zero for the women in all three websites.

The men in my sample were communicating a masculine identity connected to their professional lives based on their perception of what they thought was “ideal.” Men have been socialized to feel pressure to be the “breadwinner” and to provide for the family. When presenting themselves to women online, the men in my sample seemed compelled to emphasize their lives in the workplace to fit into that standard.

The significance of career in a man’s life has been eloquently summed up in Sam Keene’s 1991 book, *The Fire in The Belly: On Becoming a Man*. Keene explains how this importance is made clear very early in childhood. These messages are constantly reinforced and play into how a man feels about his first full time job, which “is a rite of passage for men in our time” (Keene, 1991, p. 52). This is an important aspect to consider about the cohort of the dating profiles I examined. Since they were in the age group of 23 to 27, they were probably working in their first or second job. As the members of my cohort strived to create their own identities in the workplace, their efforts were also channeled into their online dating profiles.

The male emphasis on work also relates to my cohort’s choice to portray photographs of themselves dressed in the uniform of their career. This relates to sociologist Fred Davis’s assertion that men’s clothing choices stem from “the overweening centrality accorded work, career and occupational success for male identity” (Davis, 1992, p. 39). These choices extend to the conscious decision made by the males to post photographs wearing

professional attire. By repeatedly sharing pictures in their work costumes, the men in my study viewed professional achievements as highly linked to their romantic potential.

It is important to bring attention to the fact that the males on ChristianMingle used a higher frequency of *achievement related words* (11) and the highest frequency of *faith-based words* (20) when describing themselves over *career related words* (9). This connects to standpoint theory in that their male identities were more defined by their faith, which they saw as most important to demonstrate on their profiles. In addition, it is necessary to point out that there was a moderate frequency of *achievement related words* in both the JDate profiles and ChristianMingle profiles, while there were zero in the OkCupid profiles. It is possible that this stems from religious/cultural values related to hard work and dedication. This also might relate to the overall diversity of the users of the OkCupid website and the scope of ways that members portray their identities.

Male Identity as Active/Sports Related

A dominant pattern in both the JDate and OkCupid profiles was the high frequency of *activity related words* and *sports related words* in the male profiles, and the low frequency of those word types in the female profiles. The largest disparity was in the JDate profiles, as there were 10 *activity related words* in male profiles and only three *activity related words* in the female profiles. There were also 30 *sports related words* in the male profiles and only one in the female profiles. In addition, the males used *sports related words* the most of all of the word types.

An explanation for the male emphasis on sports can be illustrated by a 2001 questionnaire distributed by Chesebro and Fuse, which asked undergraduates across the country to assess the characteristics that they associated with masculinity. One of the variables they found was linked to the stereotype that “a masculine male possesses physiological energy” (as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 32). This common cultural view might relate to why the male profiles on JDate and OkCupid chose to include a high frequency of activity related words. Another stereotype found in Chesebro and Fuse’s survey was that men should “be a sports fan, identify with a sports team and even display the name and insignia of their favorite sports team” (as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 33). This expectation might account for the high frequency of *sports related words* in male profiles in OkCupid and especially JDate. My sample’s affinity for sports and sports teams could be linked to their standpoint of wanting to be perceived as masculine.

The profiles on ChristianMingle, however, demonstrated different results for these word types. The frequency of *activity related words* was dominated in the female profiles of 16 total, while the male profiles only had two total. This suggests that the females highly defined themselves in their physical activities and took pride in this. It also suggests that the men on this site may have felt more defined by their religion rather than their masculinity. In addition, there was only one *sports related word* for males and zero for females. This could relate to the fact that the males feel stronger ties with the church and their community. In the standpoint of ChristianMingle members, an ideal male partner is someone who is highly religious, rather than athletic.

Feminine Identity and Attractiveness

In the photograph analysis, a common theme between both male and female profiles was the emphasis on the *headshot*. In each website the most frequent type of photograph for both males and females was the *headshot*, with the exception of the OkCupid males, who had 10 *silly/miscellaneous photos* to nine *headshots*. This shared pattern relates to the fact that “during the initial stages of courtship, individuals are particularly concerned with the impression they are making, for instance, how attractive they look” (Berger & Bell 1988; Kunkel, Wilson, Olufowote & Robson 2003, as cited in Hall et al., 2010, p. 118). Since users were interacting through the medium of an online dating profile, their ability to show attractiveness was through use of the photographs. However, research has found that the importance of physical appearance plays a more dominant role for women (Bernard, 1981; Borisoff & Hahn, 1997; Davis, 1992; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Freedman, 1986; Harfield & Sprecher, 1986; Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Freedman, 1986; Harfield and Sprecher, 1986; Tarvis, 1992; Wolf, 1991; as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro 2011, p. 109). Therefore, the female use of the *headshot* was an intentional emphasis on physical attributes.

One of the most notable distinctions between the female and male photograph types overall was the female emphasis on the “*sexy*” *body shot*. In the JDate female profiles, the second most common type of photograph was the “*sexy*” *body shot*; In the OkCupid female profiles it was the third most common. In the male profiles, the “*sexy*” *body shot* was absent in all three websites with the exception of one member in OkCupid. This connects to women’s cultural standpoint, which values beauty and body image. This traces back to some of the early messages that young girls are taught about being cute, sweet and feminine.

While the “*sexy*” *body shot* was used more than the *regular body shot* for the majority of the females, the ChristianMingle cohort had a higher frequency of the *regular body shot*. This could be in relation to religious beliefs on premarital sex. In addition, *physical attribute words* played an insignificant role for both males and females on JDate and ChristianMingle. However, they were more common in OkCupid, with eight total for females and five total for males. It is possible that this might relate to the site’s more casual outlook on dating and sex. The standpoint of an OkCupid user might picture the ideal member of the opposite sex as sexy, as opposed to religious.

Femininity and Care

In both the JDate and OkCupid profiles there was a high frequency of *care related words* in the female profiles and a low frequency of *care related words* in the male profiles. This portrayal relates to the traditional stereotypes associated with femininity in our culture. This image is traced back to early socialization. For example, research has found that parents often place daughters in “the gentle, sweet, and delicate role” (Macoby & Jacklin, 1974; Rubin, Provencano, & Luria, 1974; Stern & Karraker, 1989, as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 108). However, results differed dramatically in the ChristianMingle profiles. There was a higher frequency of *care related words* in the male profiles (8) to the amount in the female profiles (6). This might relate to their standpoint of religious values related to service, sensitivity, and empathy.

Family & Friends: Female And Religious Emphasis

It is important to note that the male cohort of all three websites had a very low frequency of *photographs with friends and family* (three in JDate; two in OkCupid; two in ChristianMingle). However, for the females on ChristianMingle it was the second most frequent photograph type, while on JDate it was the third most frequent. This demonstrates the fact that these females chose to portray their identities as being social or family oriented, while the males chose to portray their identities in other ways such as professional or silly. While the males could have relationships that were just as strong as the females, they did not choose to expose that information to the opposite sex. This illustrates how the male standpoint of my sample does not believe that friendship is a significant quality to show off to the opposite sex. The females on OkCupid, however, had a very low frequency of these photograph types. This difference might relate to the religious orientation of JDate and ChristianMingle. Since values such as friendship and community are highly important in religion, this could describe the emphasis that females demonstrated on both faith-based sites.

Religion as Faith vs. Religion as Culture

One of the greatest distinctions between the profiles shown on JDate and the profiles shown on ChristianMingle was the extent that identity was grounded in one's spiritual beliefs. It is important to note that the most frequently used words in both male and female profiles on ChristianMingle were *faith-based words*. However, in both male and female JDate profiles there were zero faith-based words. This demonstrates the fact that members of ChristianMingle strongly emphasize religiousness as part of their identity. While there were no *faith-based words* in the JDate profiles, there were several cultural references to being Jewish. For example, one profile mentioned the traditional Jewish food of Bagels and Lox and several mentioned Israel vacations. This distinction illuminates standpoint theory by showing how religion means two separate things to two separate social groups. To the ChristianMingle members, religion is tied into God. However, to the JDate members, religion is tied into cultural background and history.

Future Directions and Limitations

My research provides new information about the role of identity, gender, and cultural/religious standpoint in online dating profiles. However, further studies are to be conducted. In particular, I studied a limited age range in my sample of 23 to 27 years old. For the future, research should be done with a wider sample of ages. In addition, my sample had little racial variation as the members were predominantly Caucasian. Therefore, future studies should include a more ethnically diverse sample. Another limitation to the study relates to the formatting of the website OkCupid as opposed to the formatting of JDate and ChristianMingle. Since the same company has ownership of JDate and ChristianMingle, the set up of the profiles appears to be more similar. OkCupid's profile setup asks a wider range of questions that might have led to certain word types that were used. For example, I noticed a high frequency of *physical attribute words* in only the OkCupid profiles. However, many of them were in response to a specific answer box on the website which was: "The first thing that people notice about me is ____." In addition, the main goals of OkCupid as a dating site might differ from those

of JDate and ChristianMingle. While the aims of JDate and ChristianMingle are to help people develop long-term relationships and marriage, the aim of OkCupid might be oriented towards more casual dating. Therefore, this could contribute to differing word types and photograph types that appeared in my sample.

This study should be expanded to other group-specific dating websites in order to examine how standpoint may or may not influence these portrayals. Further faith-based websites can be included such as Muslima.com, which is oriented towards Muslim singles. In addition, it would be helpful to analyze race-based online dating websites. This might include the following: African American oriented sites such as BlackSingles.com; Asian oriented sites such as AsianPeopleMeet.com and Latino oriented sites such as Amigos.com. In addition, this study could be expanded to a sample of older ages such as Ourtime.com, which is a 50+ dating site. Same-sex oriented dating profiles should also be studied, such as Manhunt.com for gay males and Ldate.com for gay females. Lastly, over the past few years we have seen the rise of image-based mobile match-making applications such as Tinder, Hinge and Grindr. Studies should assess whether *standpoint theory* persists in user photographs as they did on the Internet dating sites within my research project.

Conclusion

Studies on online dating profiles can add to the discourse about love in the twenty-first century. Since online dating has increasingly become a standard way for romantic relationships to develop, this area begs for further exploration. Through these sites, men and women can negotiate identity and create meaning in romantic interaction. As online dating sites continue to impact marriages and relationships throughout the world, further analyses should be done on this medium.

In addition, *standpoint theory* has proven to be a valuable analytic lens for comparing different online portrayals. As emphasized by Julia T. Wood, “different standpoints generate diverse values” (1993, 1995, as cited in Houston & Wood 1993, p. 45). These values are manifested in the ways that men and women communicate identity to the opposite sex on online dating profiles. Additionally, the standpoint of individuals from different religious backgrounds shapes how they choose a romantic partner. For example, the women on ChristianMingle were seeking a romantic partner who valued God over all other qualities. The women on OkCupid, however, were seeking a romantic partner who valued ambition. By understanding the standpoints of different cultural groups online, we can begin to uncover how digital portrayals shape social interaction in 2014.

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