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Online Dating Experiences with Filtering Profile Photos

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Abstract

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MA, California Institute of Integral Studies, 2012

BA, Clemson University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological analysis of male Tinder users'

experiences with women over-filtering their visual self-presentation on Tinder using

augmented reality (AR) smartphone technology. Tinder users frequently discuss how

their dates do not live up to their profile photographs once they meet face-to-face due to

the proliferation of filtered photos on dating apps and social media to make themselves

appear more attractive. Augmented reality, Tinder, social media, and smartphone filtering

are all ingrained in pop culture, yet have not been previously studied. Eight male Tinder

users were recruited and interviewed. Coding and thematic analysis were used in this

descriptive phenomenological study to analyze and interpret the data. The richness of

these experiences provided six themes: filtering out the filters, filtering is expected,

online competition and social pressure, multiple types of deception in online photos,

negative affect of first impressions, and chemistry and attraction are important. The

findings of this research illustrate the challenges visual self-presentation, authenticity,

interpersonal chemistry, online competition and social pressure, technologies creating

deception and negative affect, and the commonality of filtering technologies being used

to alter online photos pose on face-to-face dating impressions. The implications for

positive social change include the potential to help current and future Tinder users

recognize and manage their visual self-presentations as reflections of their actual self and

face-to-face encounters to avoid deceptive behaviors and self-sabotage to gain positive

dating experiences and relationship building.

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Dedication

For my family who has made all things possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A digital revolution has been ongoing regarding how people engage in courtship as technology is constantly growing to create new augmented reality (AR), social platforms, and spaces. Real human experiences have more of a prevalent presence in the virtual world than ever before. In turn, human affectual experiences such as intimacy, attraction, evaluation, and communication are being initiated to a greater extent in online environments. Consequently, the integration of smartphone technology and social media into online dating has enabled dating apps to quickly replace dating websites as leading the way in modern courtship.

Dating applications (apps) are software apps downloaded onto smartphones to prompt connections for users who are looking for in romance, casual sex, and/or friendship (Breitschuh & Göretz, 2019). Numerous scholars have conducted studies specifically on Tinder's impression management (Ward, 2017), the exploration casual and sexual relationships (Timmermans & Courtois, 2018), user motivation for use (Sumpter et al., 2017), and user activity (Tyson et al., 2016). However, after appearing less than a decade ago, there is still work to be done in addressing new and growing research gaps. As the popularity of dating apps is continuing to skyrocket, they too act as a moving target of study that is constantly evolving.

There is a considerable challenge in understanding how heterosexually inclusive dating apps have affected dating behaviors and experiences, as dating apps have only existed since 2012. The concurring rise in usage had created a progressive necessity for recognition in scholarly research and writing to articulate the deeper understanding dating apps offer in conjunction with their functioning counterparts (i.e., social media, smartphones, and AR filter

technology). The online dating phenomena is so new, yet the links dating apps have to smartphone AR filter technology and social media have only been clear in everyday conversations as there has been a lack of methodological research reflecting this connectivity.

Scholars have only recently attributed the usage of photograph filters on social media to AR (Alamäki et al., 2021; Kane, 2017; Yoke et al., 2019). Face filters have become customary across social media due to the integration of AR filter technology into apps. Forms of AR social media apps such as Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram engage in photo filtering technologies for professional quality photo augmentation that utilizes a user's actual face and body through the smartphone camera. AR filters are more than simply changing the lighting and contrast in a photo. Users use AR filters to change their facial and body features to be reflections of an idealized appearance that has a smaller nose, bigger lips, and a tapered waist.

AR filter technology makes idealized images possible through its integration into apps such as Facebook and Instagram. Then those filtered photos are used on Tinder profiles as Tinder links to social media accounts to confirm identities. Users transfer social media and filtered photos from their social media onto their dating app profiles for visual self-presentation. Scholars have commented on the risks augmented reality poses but have not yet investigated the impact and emotional responses sustained from users' online filtered photos as self-presentation (Alamäki et al., 2021; Flavián et al., 2021).

In this study, I explored user experiences with the dating app, Tinder. To understand the thoughts and emotions associated with the online dating phenomena, I explored the creation and curation of Tinder profiles by users, Tinder's ties to social media as a platform for AR filtered

visual self-presentation, and results based on the experiences of male Tinder users and face-to-face (FtF) first impressions when men meet matches (i.e., women) with heavily filtered online photographs created by AR technologies. As revealed in previous studies, women are more likely than men to engage in AR filtering of their photographs in online environments to appear more attractive (Dhir et al., 2016; Peng, 2020; Ramphul & Mejias, 2018; Toma & Hancock, 2010) and use Tinder for self-validation of attractiveness and for friendship (Busby et al., 2012; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Individuals' visual self-presentation depends on their psychological experiences and struggles (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2018). How individuals broadcast themselves over social media and dating apps is two-sided, with the need to self-present in a perfected manner yet maintain user authenticity. However, authenticity in appearance can only be affirmed or denied by opinion and interacting with someone in the real world versus online. In this study, male Tinder users who had been exposed to the phenomena of study expressed their realities, opinions, and experiences regarding dating impressions in their first FtF dates with women who had filtered their visual self-presentation using AR technologies.

By examining how male Tinder users feel, perceive, manage, and form impressions once matches move from Tinder to offline, I developed an understanding of their reactions associated with AR, visual self-presentation, and discrepancies in women's appearance. By understanding these phenomena, I was able to analyze an experience that is spoken about by Tinder users, but not empirically researched. This research may result positive social change because it may be used by current and future Tinder users to recognize and manage their online self-presentations

in a way that is in line with their actual selves. This may result in their avoiding deceptive behaviors, eliciting positive dating experiences, and engaging in positive relationship building.

Chapter 1 includes an overview of the background of literature, the problem statement to clearly identify the literature gap, the purpose statement, a review of current understandings of the intersections and complexities of the phenomena, and a discussion of how this knowledge could benefit the population of dating app users. This chapter also includes the research question and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that I used to frame the study.

Background

Online dating first started as an electronic gateway for singles to find romantic connections through dating websites, but quickly evolved to have higher availability through smartphones (Ward, 2017). Online dating now serves as an umbrella term that includes dating apps and website dating to be culturally and empirically inclusive in definition (Casimiro, 2014; Ellison et al., 2012). Dating apps are used to locate potential friends, partners, and dates using proximity smartphone technology (Chan, 2017). In Tinder's beginning, the dating app world was stigmatized as being used only for casual sex (Sumter et al., 2017; Ward, 2017). However, studies found numerous users engaged in relationships with matches from dating apps that turned into long-term relationships (Chan, 2017; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020).

Part of the boost in Tinder usage is due to the affordances of the app (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Ranzini and Lutz (2017) attribute the changes in attitude toward online dating to be partly due to the evolution of online dating going from websites to apps as using smartphones enables more flexibility for meeting potential partners. Van de Wiele and Tong (2014) explained dating

apps have a positive component that allows two people to simultaneously bond with each other in online and real-world environments. Further, two people who find each other desirable can match and communicate online while using dating apps, and the usage of proximity on dating apps allows users to easily match with a person who could be less than a mile away, or in the same building.

Tinder amplifies the ability to find potential matches based mostly on physical attributes that people provide on their self-created profiles. Photographs and short biographies are self-presented on dating profiles for users to share as potential matches can view each other's profiles as they *swipe* (Blackwell, et al., 2015). The allure of dating apps is that users have the space to make quick decisions with the swipe of a finger, left for disinterest and right for interest in that person (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Ward, 2017). Users can swipe on as many potential matches as they wish, but only match with someone when they mutually swipe right.

Schrock (2015) proposed four affordances which attribute to Tinder's success: portability, location proximity, availability, and connectedness with social media. Due to these affordances, Tinder is commonly used in American culture and has multiple purposes such as evading boredom, socializing, improving social skills, flirting, and engaging in casual sex (Chan, 2017; Clemens et al., 2015; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017).

In a 2016 poll, over 61% of American dating app users claimed online dating allows people to find better matches, get to know more people, and that they believe online dating is more efficient than meeting people offline (Smith, 2016). Tinder's relevance, usage, and

performance has steadily increased due to its partnership with smartphone usage. In North America, 77% of the population uses a smartphone (Pew Research Center, 2017) and dating app usage increased from 53% to 71% during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (Meyers, 2021).

Prior to the link between smartphone usage and dating apps, there were numerous studies conducted on the use of online dating websites (Ellison et al., 2006; Toma et al., 2008, Toma & Hancock, 2010; Whitty 2008; Whitty & Carr, 2006). Toma and Hancock (2010) focused on the rate of photograph discrepancy, gender differences, and the types of photograph discrepancies that appear in online dating environments. They found that although men are more likely to lie about their height and income, women are more likely to have discrepancies in their appearance than men. Toma and Hancock (2010) found there are higher rates of physical discrepancies in women's photos on their dating profiles as well as on their social media. Toma and Hancock (2010) laid the groundwork for their results to be further expanded to include gendered experiences on dating apps and social media.

 In terms of online dating, Ellison et al. (2006) stated that online daters who wish to meet potential partners offline will avoid conscious misrepresentation online to balance accuracy and desirability in contrast to those who have no intention of meeting people in real life. Ellison et al. (2012) confirmed people engaging in online dating use the prospect of FtF dates as a reason to present their authentic selves in their online self-presentation. Blackwell et al. (2015) expanded upon Ellison et al. (2012) and showed that location-based dating apps such as Tinder present further incentive to provide authentic self-representation because of the ease of meeting someone in person.

Recent studies have produced results contradicting genuine authenticity with dating app users (Duguay, 2015; Ward, 2017). Duguay (2015) interrogated Tinder's authenticity production. The architecture of Tinder is constructed to authenticate users' identities through social media to ensure people are who they claim, yet the inclusion of both human and technological influences on the manufacturing of authenticity with social media creates complications.

Once there was an integration of social media into research on dating apps, contradictory findings arose regarding authenticity and visual self-presentation (Duguay, 2015). Ward (2017) conducted a study using Goffman's self-presentation theory to explain self-presentation as a conglomerate of idealized and actual self to appear more enticing for user visage. Ward (2017) found self-presentation is constantly and carefully maintained to have a continuity of impressions to appear attractive and desirable by others. The issue of self-presentation is not a fake Tinder profile with a different person operating behind it, but that users do not fully resemble their visual self-presentation in real life.

Despite motives for hook ups or relationships, people present themselves as more attractive to others while seeking matches online. Users carefully choose their profile photos as reflections of themselves that have been validated by others on social media platforms or friends (Ward, 2017). Therefore, the inclusion of social media user tendencies and self-presentation is necessary in research about dating apps. Studying the connectedness of social media to Tinder changes the outlook on visual self-presentation and authenticity as displayed in the differences between dating websites and dating apps.

Chae (2017) found to perform an ideal form of self on social media, users will self-edit for their social media audience even if their ideal self only exists in the virtual world. The same can be said for Tinder users. The coerciveness of visual self-presentation on social media places pressure on the user to maintain positive approval of their appearance online in the form of matches, which are similar to likes on social media (Peng, 2020). Peng (2020) stated that gendered visual self-presentation in online dating environments supports further methodological reflections on the impositions of current photo altering smartphone technologies. Online daters, especially women, falsify their attributes in photos to embellish their physical appearance to make themselves seem more attractive (Peng, 2020).

To have dating success, users are constantly changing and reshaping their profiles, as they do their social media accounts, to maintain relevance and effective engagement (Ward, 2017). The participants in Hobbs et al. (2017) noted the swiping and CMC communications to be superficial in nature as online dating is so photograph based that only attractive people fully benefit from the potential of dating apps.

The swipe mechanism on Tinder creates a mysterious domain for users as no one can anticipate whose profile is going to show up next. Dating app users work to optimize their experience by being open to opportunities, yet only have open communication with people who express mutual interest (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). Further, the ways dating app users operate within the app reveals people are contributing to a process of optimization and acceleration in choosing potential dates as people want to avoid wasting time and disappointment (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020).

In previous studies, filtered photos have often been referred to as photos that are augmented, exaggerated, or digitally manipulated by the user to change their appearance (Chae, 2017; Peng, 2020; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015). Self-edited, augmented, or filtered photos are all interchangeable terms that are common visual self-presentation on social media and have been the subject of numerous scholarly publications (Rajanala et al., 2018; Steiner, 2017; Ward, 2017). Using profile photos as visual self-presentation means users can constantly change their photos when they want new representations of themselves (Rettberg, 2014). When a person uses a filter on a photo, the filter can have the allure of an optimal and refreshed persona in a virtual environment (Rettberg, 2014). Rettberg (2014) noted filters enhance our everyday lives and experiences, but the filtering process on social media is as repetitive as photo sharing, in turn, creating a defamiliarization effect for users. It is common for people to edit their appearance online, and people expect photos to be filtered as it is a common practice in pop culture.

Inconsistencies in how users self-present is brought on by changing levels of social acceptability, desirability, and attractiveness based on the satisfaction and admiration of likes and matches (Bell et al., 2018). The phenomena of self and online self-presentation is constructed by constant visibility and the desire to have an online self that is an ideal performance for viewers (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). Photo filters are a form of AR technology that scans a person's face using their smartphone camera, adds a filter over the person's actual face to augment their features until the desired aesthetic is acquired, then the optimized presentation of filtered physical self is uploaded as a visual self-presentation for users to view and like (Alamäki et al., 2021; Ramphul & Mejias, 2018). With the simplicity of a couple clicks and swipes, users can use

an array of face and body filters to adjust their image as desired (Ramphul & Mejias, 2018).

Shaping and changing one's visual self-presentation for successful dating matches is based on

the same form of desirability and attractive attributes assumed by societal and cultural norms

(Ward, 2017). This includes beauty standards and appearance.

Ramirez et al. (2015) investigated FtF first impressions using modality switching as the

component for appearance appraisal of the user's visual self-presentation versus how they appear

in person. There is an initial first impression with matches as their online personas or self, then

once modality switching occurs, there is a new impression once a match meets in person for the

first time. Modality switching is a key component to online dating, as it is the transition between

initially meeting online and growing the relationship through computer mediated communication

(CMC), then moving conversations offline for FtF interaction (Ramirez et al., 2015). Ramirez et

al. (2015) suggested online daters who take a long period of time before meeting FtF have higher

probabilities of disenchantment from the formation of idealized mental constructs about their

matches (Ramirez et al., 2015). So, the longer matches engage in CMC without meeting in

person, the more likely the offline impressions will not meet the mentally constructed high

standard by the dating app user.

This extensive research was the basis for my study, in which I explored the experiences

of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly

altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. In this study, I

acknowledged dating app experiences as contextual and unique according to the various

individuals that have experienced the phenomena. Their candor generated a qualitative

opportunity to share the challenges, affect, and psychological implications as explained by the experiences of the participants.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. I recorded the emotions and experiences of male Tinder users to show the power of their reflections. I used a generic qualitative research design to acknowledge the limited amount of research incorporating AR and filtering technologies with dating app research to facilitate conversations around this topic while keeping an openness for the phenomena to be fully presented.

In popular culture, the competition and high emersion of social platforms has prevalence and is often the subject of friendly conversation. What prompted this study was how people compare and evaluate each other's matches on dating apps as they do their likes on social media in casual conversation (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). The regularity of these communications on the internet and in everyday conversation extends across social groups and platforms. The phenomena and concepts of interest explored in this study involved Tinder, dating apps, AR technology on apps, filtered photographs, visual self-presentation, CMC, attraction, first impressions, and modality switching.

Problem Statement

Tinder users are meeting online but realizing their dates do not physically measure up to their photos once they have a FtF first date (Peng, 2020; Ward, 2017). Given the high

accessibility and expanding range of dating app usage by millions of users, AR and other technological advances need to be incorporated into visual self-presentation research on dating apps. The gap in actual self and idealized visual self-presentations is discussed as well as the influences of photograph filters from AR technology. Previous studies have admitted dating apps, like social media, have users using more attractive photos to gain admirers and seem more desirable (Peng, 2020; Ward, 2017). Yet, AR technology needs to be included in the empirical research to understand how people are changing their visual self-presentation in a way that creates appearance discrepancies that are noticed on first FtF Tinder dates.

This study addressed the need for current and continuous research incorporating technologies that alter visual self-presentation such as AR within studies on dating apps as they are currently connected in conversation and use, but not methodologically researched as such. As previously stated in the purpose of this study, the high number of non-academic experiences shared online and in casual conversation acknowledges appearance discrepancies in first FtF Tinder dates from increased use of AR filtering technology in their visual self-presentation (i.e., profile photos) to appear more attractive for matches. Therefore, qualitative studies are necessary to understand and compare experiences.

Researchers need to keep up with nuances in research to accurately interpret the depth of qualitative experiences and limit the creation of a research gap. This is a necessity in understanding experiences within the dating app phenomena as they are influenced by the intersection of technological advancements and online visual self-presentation that coincidentally creates appearance discrepancies between online self and actual (offline) self. Although Tinder

mimics dating websites in photograph usage on profiles, dating apps such as Tinder further reduce overall self-presentation cues (Ward, 2017). The cues are reduced as the amount of information users can provide on their dating app profile is extremely limited, therefore their profile photos serve as their main form of self-presentation. As a result, existing research has revealed visual self-presentation on dating apps is a heavily influential component to how people form opinions of each other, choose each other, and form modern day romantic connections (Blackwell et al., 2015; Casimiro, 2014; Miller, 2020; Ramirez et al., 2015) in addition to communicating, liking, and carefully constructing their visual self-presentation to attract potential partners (D'Angelo & Toma, 2017; David & Cambre, 2016).

The process of meeting on Tinder, then moving to FtF dates means users are faced with two different first impressions: online then offline (Toma & D'Angelo, 2017). Previous research shows socially and psychologically, choices around visual self-presentation is guided by the two tensions: the need for self-enhancement to seem more attractive and desired by others, and the need for authenticity to appear honest once modality switching occurs to meet in person (Guadagno et al., 2012; Toma & Hancock, 2010). Like social media, dating apps facilitate the idea that one's presentation of self can be carefully formed through the optimization of self in online platforms, creating a new standard of attractiveness that differs from a person's FtF physical attraction (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Senft & Baym, 2015).

Physical appearance discrepancies cause a rise in deception salience that increases the improbability of initial romantic attraction after modality switching has occurred (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Negative discrepancies in self-presented physical appearance are often the first

notable part of impression formation when meeting FtF for the first time (Zytko et al., 2020).

This is problematic as discrepancies have been previously linked to lack of authenticity and

manipulation (Cunningham et al., 1999; Guadagno et al., 2012; Toma & Hancock, 2010;

Zeelenberg, 2000).

Romantic and sexual attraction are pivotal in relationships making dating app users more

inclined to match with those who have the most attractive pictures; yet people also want to have

authentic connections if they intend to meet FtF (Busby et al., 2012; Sprecher et al., 2019).

Visually self-presenting with filtered photos in an online environment can create an ideal-reality

gap that cannot be fused if the difference is too drastic (Toma & Hancock, 2008; Iwamoto &

Kurihara, 2019). The formation of idealized, rather than real impressions of each other is likely

to lead to a decline in romantic attraction, indifference, disappointment, and/or rejection toward

the person who filtered their visual self-presentation (Cunningham et al., 1999; Ramirez et al.,

2015).

Research Question

RQ: What is the experience of male Tinder users when they engage in a first FtF date with a

woman who has heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation using AR technology?

Theoretical Framework

Self-presentation theory reveals impression management is affected by how a person

considers themselves, what they choose to be, and what they choose to withhold to increase

attractiveness (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Tseëlon, 1992). Most impression management

with online dating is done in an online environment to take advantage of positive impression

formation (Hogan, 2010; Ward, 2017). Positive impressions through carefully chosen visual self-presentation increased the likelihood of gaining matches through high desirability and attractiveness (Hogan, 2010; Ward, 2017). There are differing results as some online daters believe people exaggerate their profiles and photos to a believable, personal extent (Ellison et al., 2006) and others believe altering visual self-presentation to be a common and acceptable self-presenting practice (Peng, 2020).

Expectation disconfirmation theory has been used to measure satisfaction and dissatisfaction in areas of studies such as tourism, consumer contentment, and virtual learning environments. Expectation disconfirmation theory reveals higher expectations increase the chances of a negative disconfirmation outcome as negative disconfirmation ends in less satisfaction from the individual interviewed (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2017). If expectations are exceeded, then there will be experiences with higher satisfaction. In reference to dating, the larger the discrepancy in a Tinder user's visual self-presentation to their in-person self (i.e., from virtual to actual) will lead to disappointment by the male Tinder user seeking a connection due to the inconsistency of visual self-presentation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Zeelenberg et al., 2000). If there is an appearance disparity between a Tinder match as an imagined potential partner there will be less likelihood of further interactions (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

The goal for this study was to gain understanding of the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who has significantly altered their dating app

profile photos using AR filtering technology. To promote this goal, the concepts associated with the phenomena were identified, presented, and defined in stronger detail in chapter 2. The definition of online dating has evolved with growing technology to include website dating and dating apps (Finkel et al., 2012; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Dating apps are software applications designed to connect users applying geosocial networking capabilities to find romantic, sexual, or platonic connections within proximity to the user (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Tinder is an example of a dating app where singles join, create a profile, and swipe for matches. Tinder was launched in the United States in 2012 as the first heterosexually inclusive dating app in the world. Tinder uses geospatial networking to allow users to anonymously swipe left or right to like or dislike other users' self-selected profiles, which are generally composed of a short bio, their photos, and a list of their personal interests. Once two users have matched, they have a mutual attraction and can exchange messages through the app. Tinder was utilized for this study as the space where users form first impressions online, then eventually move offline to have a first FtF date impression.

One of the main concepts of this study was visual self-presentation. Visual self-presentation is often used interchangeably with photograph self-presentation as it's used as a method of communication through photographs (Zhao & Jiang, 2011). Photographs serve as the prime focus and self-representation on Tinder. Tinder users download the Tinder app, choose their profile photos, then begin assessing their potential matches' profiles (Ward, 2017). The reduced verbal and textual information available in profiles increases the depth of how carefully

chosen and controlled a user's visual self-selection is for their online presentation and impressions (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2018).

A main concept that sets this study apart from other studies on dating apps is the inclusion of augmented reality (AR) technology such as photo filtering. Filters are augmented, exaggerated photos, and/or digital appearance manipulation in previous studies (Chae, 2017; Peng, 2020; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015). Filtering your face is made possible through AR technology adopted by social media apps. AR scans a person's face once a photo is taken and allows the user to filter their physical appearance in the photo to alter skin tone, skin clarity, sliming, and changing the size of personal physical features. Therefore, filtering is a practice of attribute manipulation where a person can use a smartphone camera and downloaded apps for easy access for photo editing prior to social media uploading (Rettberg, 2014). Now, the frequency, lack of cost, and availability for image editing on a smartphone has created a digital culture shift where filtering photos to post online has become not only normalized but expected (Rettberg, 2014).

There is importance in clarifying and including the concepts of dating apps, AR filtering, and visual self-presentation within this study as their connectedness is what has created a unique phenomenon of study. The full experiences of participants come with a full understanding of these concepts and how they interact. Guided by previous research, literature, conversations of those experiencing the phenomena, a contextual lens holds the researcher accountable for their personal bias and assumptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

As this study was exploratory in nature, and the research instrumentation was constructed to give an openness to participants provided by me through open-ended interview questions (Hennink, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Keeping openness within the interview process was necessary to the instrumentation as interviewing is an ongoing process where I must consistently obstruct any personal assumption or bias making their way into the interview questioning and analysis. This creates little to no limitations on the participant's shared perspectives and authentic accounts (Weller et al., 2018). Each participant's experience of the phenomena of study were explored as unique and sincere as human experiences are in the eyes of the beholder (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Nature of Study

Individuals pursue an understanding of the world they live in, so research should have confidence in the participants' perspective on the phenomena and situations being studied (Camic et al., 2003). Eight heterosexual male Tinder users were selected through purposeful sampling to be the population for this study. Purposeful random sampling allowed me to set parameters for the participant recruitment in alignment with the goals of the study and the incorporation of those who have experienced the phenomena of study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Participants were recruited via Facebook sharing of a "Tinder Study" flyer on an online dating Facebook group who granted permission. Facebook is an effective recruitment platform for this study as the flyer was easily shared amongst numerous groups and friends.

The explorative nature of the study allowed themes to emerge from personal accounts and phenomenological reflection extracted from the in-depth interview data (Moustaskas, 1994).

The men chosen for the purposeful sample were male Tinder users who have engaged in a first FtF date with a woman who has heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation using AR technology. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted to ensure the participants' experiences and voices are heard in a respectful manner with minimal interruption.

Attraction is to be regarded as a multifaceted construct which should be the grounding of measures to ensure inclusion of subcomponents that arise in qualitative study (Huston, 2013; Pepping et al., 2017). The accuracy of photographs should provide a realistic resemblance to stay within the spectrum of genuine visual self-representation. The study focused on the observer's perspectives for the purpose of illustrating what is an accurate perception of the person.

Definition of Terms

Augmented Reality (AR): Augmented reality is the practice of augmenting direct and/or indirect views of the physical world with real-time virtual information (Carmigniani & Furht 2011). People experience the augmented reality of real-world objects, products, and people through digital screens such as smartphones and laptops to create a hybrid experience in everyday life.

Catfishing. Catfishing is a term often used in popular culture. Catfishing is the process of a user seducing someone by means of a fictional online persona. Catfishing involves someone pretending to be a completely different person online than who they are in real life.

Commuter-Mediated Communication (CMC): CMC encompasses numerous forms of human communication through mediums such as the smartphone or computer that sends messages through text, audio, or video messaging. The messaging component on dating apps is a

form of CMC as when two people 'match' they start a text conversation through the dating app as initial communication.

Date: A date is a first FtF meeting between matches, and scheduled meetings after if the matches choose to continue interacting in an intimate context. Examples date can be considered meeting for drinks, dinner, or a casual hook up.

Dating apps: Dating apps are software applications designed to connect users applying geosocial networking capabilities to find romantic, sexual, or platonic connections within proximity to the user (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Users create their own profiles and self-present with 6 photographs and a short biography for users to view and decide if they want to match and meet. See *Tinder* for the definition on Tinder.

Filters: Filters are often referred to 'augmented' or 'exaggerated' photos and 'digital appearance manipulation' in previous studies (Chae, 2017; Peng, 2020; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015). Filtering your face is a practice of 'attribute manipulation' where a person can use smartphone built-in AR technology and downloaded apps for easy access for photo editing prior to social media uploading. Now, the frequency, lack of cost, and availability for image editing on a smartphone has created a digital culture shift where "filtering" and taking a photo "to the lab" has become not only normalized but expected (Rettberg, 2014).

Hook up: Hooking up with someone is pop culture slang for being sexually intimate. The sexual intimacy of a hook up can range from kissing to sex.

Instagram (IG): Instagram is an American photo and video sharing social networking application. Instagram is also referred to as *IG* or *the Gram* in pop culture.

Match: Matching occurs when two users on dating apps such as Tinder and Bumble mutually like each other's profiles and wish to start a conversation. Only when individuals match with each other are they able to start a conversation (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Modality Switching: Modality switching is the term used to define the change from CMC to in-person communication with an individual or group. Switching from dating app communication and text to meeting someone in-person is an example of the online to offline communication.

Online dating: Online dating is an umbrella term that was originally defined as using dating sites on a computer to find potential partners, but with growing technology, the term has grown to include using dating apps to find a partner. (Finkel, et al., 2012; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Relationshopping: Relationshopping is a term used to describe the objectification of potential partners in online dating environments as the phenomenon compares to 'window shopping.' The swipe logic used on dating apps creates an environment for users to sell their self-disclosed 'best' attributes as self-promotional devices as if selling a product (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010; Whitmer, 2019).

Selfie: Selfies can be described as non-verbal and visual communication that can reflect the taker's thoughts, emotions, intentions, mood, and aesthetics portrayed by their facial expressions and body language in a photograph (Chae, 2019; Lavrence & Cambre, 2020). A selfie is an example of visual self-presentation.

Self-Presentation: Self-presentation explains how people present best or ideal selves during FtF meetings and recently the concept has translated into how people self-present both online and real life (Hogan, 2010; Pinch, 2010; Gil-Or et al., 2018).

Selective Self-Presentation (SSP): Selective Self-Presentation (SSP). requires people highlight their positive attributes while filtering out the unfavorable or unflattering characteristics about themselves (Ellison et al., 2011).

Snapchat (Snap): Snapchat is a multimedia messaging app. One of the principal features of Snapchat is that pictures and messages are usually only available for a short time before they become inaccessible to their recipients.

Swiping: Swiping is a slang term used in American pop culture to describe the acting of looking for a person to match with on a dating app.

TikTok: TikTok is an application that hosts a variety of short-form user videos, from genres like pranks, stunts, tricks, jokes, dance, and entertainment with durations from 15 seconds to three minutes.

Tinder: Tinder is a dating app launched in the United States in 2012. Tinder uses geospatial networking to allow users to anonymously swipe left or right to like or dislike other users' self-selected profiles, which are generally composed of a short bio, their photo, and a list of their personal interests. Once two users have "matched", they can exchange messages through the app.

Visual Self-Presentation: Visual self-presentation is often used interchangeably with photograph self-presentation. Employing photographs as the prime focus for dating apps reduces

cues which increases the depth of how carefully chosen and controlled a person's photograph self-selection is for their profile representation (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2018). A selfie is an example of visual self-presentation.

Assumptions

Although dating app experiences and AR technologies are interwoven into overall online dating experiences, they represent key concepts to the phenomena in this study. The overall experiences represent a uniqueness of each person's viewpoint of phenomena. The conceptual framework supported each person's recollections as they conceptualized it and represented their personal truths in their experiences. Therefore, this study accepted the assumption that recollections are each participant's personal truth and validity is impossible to empirically prove or disprove otherwise.

As the primary researcher of this generic qualitative study, I had a personal responsibility to utilize my committee members and dissertation chair to continuously evaluate and challenge any aspects of the research process where inaccurate interpretations and unintentional bias could have emerged. I tried to the best of my abilities to maintain objectivity throughout the research process to Moustakas (1994) standards. Also, all data was interpreted using the perceptual lens that results will or will not produce facts or truth.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative study was to understand the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who has significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. Focusing qualitatively on the emotions and experiences of

Tinder users regarding the realization their date(s) had deeply exaggerated their profile photos using filters were recorded through the power of reflection (Moustakas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). After consideration of each method, a generic qualitative approach was selected as the research design for interpreting lived experiences by the participants and what meaning they attributed to their experiences (Maxwell, 2008).

Delimitations are controlled components that confine the boundaries of a study (Lewis, 2009). Tinder is a geospatial app that uses proximity location to form matches, so all the participants can come from multiple geographic areas in the United States to increase diversity. In accordance with the prerequisites from Ward (2017) participants must had to have used a dating app for at least two years to ensure they have proficiency and deep experiences with online dating. This study has high transferability. Although Tinder is the dating app used specifically for this study, the methodology and frameworks can transfer across dating apps for future studies.

The study was also limited to eight male Tinder users who had previously gone on a date with a woman who filtered their visual self-presentation on their dating app profile. The generalizability of the study could be limited with so few participants, but Trotter II (2012) noted in-depth interviews for qualitative studies on a phenomenon can have as many as ten participants. Recruitment was continuous until data saturation was met.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study to be discussed. First, with only eight participants, the small population of this study could have negatively impacted the

generalizability of the study. In addition, there was not any demographic information collected over the course of the study, so there could be gender, cultural, or racial variations in results that were not captured with the eight male participants.

The parameters for participation served as a strict limitation of study. The parameter for participant recruitment and population was set for heterosexual male Tinder users. The exclusion of women and LGBTQIA provided a limitation with a lack of gender and sexual diversity, but this was done on purpose for future studies. The inclusion of sexual diversity would most likely alter contexts and results.

In addition, many people use more than one dating app. Many LGBTQIA use Grindr which is a dating app specifically for gay, bi, trans, and queer people (Anzani et al., 2018). Only using Tinder could have set a limitation based on the type of people that manly use Tinder verses other dating apps. For greater generalizability, the study should incorporate more than one dating app.

There is not a way to guarantee participants in this study provided accurate recollections when responding to the questions based on their dating experiences. Recordings make the inclusion of quality into studies possible through critical reflexivity, unbiased listening, and subjectivity (Kennedy, 2013). I identified limitations, assumptions, and contradictions by replaying the interview recordings to the best of their ability.

Secondly, I have personally used dating apps on and off for six years, I have insight into how Tinder is used and changed over the years. My experiences granted insider knowledge that helped with follow-up questions when necessary, during the interview process and creating

repour with the participants due to my personal comfortability with the phenomena. Subject matter and topics can be sensitive and invoke subjects' vulnerabilities, therefore limitations on studying sensitive subject matter can be met with distrust, contradictions, and hollow content (Camic et al., 2003). Researchers without this type of personal experience could have missed key details and nuances given by the participants. I had an awareness when discussing subject matter such as seeking intimate partners on dating apps and self-representation.

Significance

The depth of qualitative analysis, improving understanding on dating experiences, and other themes associated with filtered visual self-presentations posited significance as many of the studies conducted on online dating self-presentation have been quantitative. A qualitative study offered more in-depth insight into the experiences of those with exaggerated dating profile photographs, and the reactions to initial FtF romantic attraction than previous comparative studies. The focus of previous studies has been understanding motivations and impression management in relation to visual self-presentation on dating profiles (Toma, & Hancock, 2010) and motivations for using Tinder (Sumpter et al., 2017); but the emotional responses to filtered visual self-presentations had not been widely documented after first FtF dates. There is an abundance of research on "why" there is exaggerated attractiveness in photographs from filters, but the emotional responses to appearance discrepancies in dating situations was not clear.

How online daters can alter their visual self-presentation is rapidly growing with the availability and accessibility to smartphone technology, in turn so is the need for research to keep up with growing technological advances (Hong et al., 2020; Rajanala et al., 2018). Previously,

people had to rely on professional editors and photographers to alter their photographs. However, apps and smartphones have changed the way people self-present online to a degree that filtered self has become culturally normalized (Toma & Hancock, 2010; Ramirez et al., 2015; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018; Toma & D'Angelo, 2017; Chae 2017). The intensity in available filters has grown from simple colored filters to AR body and face alterations.

In addition, frequency of usage has created a growing degree of normalization for online filtering (Rettberg, 2014; Hong et al, 2020). Accessibility in technology to accommodate AR face and body filtering needs to be included into present research. The relationship between technology, accessibility, and filtered visual self-presentation is necessary to fully understand the changes in FtF dating dynamics, attraction, and experiences associated after modality switching on Tinder.

Being a generic qualitative study, the findings enriched the depth of understanding why filtering profile photographs create certain reactions from participants once they meet FtF after meeting on Tinder. Further, understanding the why and how of the phenomena revealed positive and negative aspects of the participant experiences (Zytko et al., 2020). In addition, there is opportunity for the study to be replicated.

Summary

The prominence of AR filters as being easily accessible and utilized by people for their visual self-presentation is a recent phenomenon (Gorichanaz, 2019; Lavrence & Cambre, 2020; Senft & Baym, 2015; Steiner, 2017). The background of the study was presented in this chapter. In addition, a discussion of the problem statement, purpose of the study, the central questions

that guided the research, the significance of the study were presented. Finally, there was an overview of the study's methodology, research design, key definitions, the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and the limitations of the study. In Chapter 2, the literature review findings are the foundation of the research, that included information on visual self-presentation, modality switching, AR technology, dating apps, and attraction. This study filled a gap in the literature by using interviews to explore the retrospective recollection of male Tinder users when they engage in a first FtF date with a woman who had heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. In Chapter 4 the results of the study are presented. In Chapter 5 the results of the study are discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Photographs are the foundation of visual self-presentation on dating apps. To gain understanding of the thoughts and emotions associated with the online dating phenomena, I

explored Tinder's mate selection and communication processes, Tinder's ties to social media as a platform for AR, visual self-presentation, and the affectual reactions by male Tinder users who experienced FtF dates with a woman whose photographs were filtered using AR technology to create a virtual/real world appearance discrepancy. Much of the publications and writing on related subjects are not scholarly in nature as the phenomenon of study was revealed on nonacademic platforms such as blogs and social media feeds. There is a noticeable absence of research methodology and scholarly writing to provide data-driven insights.

Hancock and Toma (2009, p. 370) asked the question, "How close do online self-presentations match real-world identities?" Since 2009, studies have been conducted with results to answer literature gaps and aspects pertaining of this question (see Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Chae, 2017; Ellison, et al., 2012; Gibbs et al., 2006; Hogan, 2010; Rettberg, 2014). As visual self-presentation is a continuously fundamental and convoluted process (Goffman, 1959); self-presentation needs to constantly be evaluated with a critical lens that incorporates the cultural and analytical functions of technological advances.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the following words for researching: *online dating, dating apps, Tinder, augmented reality, AR technology, smartphone technology, gendered self-presentation, idealized self, first date impressions, social media, filtered photographs, swipe logic, filtering, photograph augmentation, visual self-presentation, expectation disconfirmation theory, self-presentation theory, online self-presentation, online first impressions, face-to-face dates, online self, online authenticity, photograph discrepancy,* and *attraction.* I used ScienceDirect, PsycBOOKS,

PsycARTICLES, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and a Thoreau multidatabase search as the databases for this research. I used Proquest Dissertations aids for not content, style, and form.

Theoretical Framework

The theories used as the theoretical foundation for this study are Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and Oliver's (1997) expectation disconfirmation theory. Goffman's (1959) self-presentation and impression management posits individuals try to control their self-presentation and the impressions others form of them, which can influence the way they are perceived and evaluated by others (Pinch, 2010). I used expectation disconfirmation theory to understand the affectual responses to appearance discrepancies presented from online to offline appearance.

Self-Presentation Theory

Self-presentation is explained as, "the process by which we portray ourselves to others to make a desired impression" (Strimbu & O'Connell, 2019, p. 804). Several scholars have used Goffman's inferences to describe and explain digital interactions (see Blackwell et al., 2015; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Goffman's self-presentation theory reveals impression management is affected by how individuals consider themselves, who they choose to be, and what they choose to withhold to increase personal attractiveness (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Tseëlon, 1992). Most of the self-presentation and impression management in an online dating environment is to take advantage of positive pre-date impression formation (Blackwell et al., 2015).

Self-presentation and impression management are related yet distinct in definition. Self-presentation is an act or physical manifestation directed at displaying oneself in a particular manner that can be used to manage the impression management of oneself as impression management is how people control how they are perceived by others (Leary, 2019). Self-presentation and impression management correspond in the match selection process from the creation and maintenance of a dating profile to the FtF first date.

Goffman's theory on self-presentation and self-performance explains how people present best or ideal selves during FtF meetings and recently has translated into how people self-present online as well as real life by Hogan, 2010; Pinch, 2010; Gil-Or et al., 2018. Goffman (1959) used the metaphor that all the world is a stage while everyone works as acting players to seem attractive, impressive, and validated by others. The person articulating their constructed presentation of self is viewed by the person they are interacting with as a performance. They go from self-presenting on the metaphorical front stage, then move to the unattended backstage where the audience will not infringe (Goffman 1959; Nichols, 2020). Ellison et al. (2006) and Hancock and Toma (2010) concurred with Goffman (1959) by finding individuals engaged in front stage performances to project an idealized version of themselves for online dating.

Hogan (2010) took Goffman's theory on self-presentation and transferred the concept to online environments. Hogan (2010) concluded the actual self is behind the computer in the unattended backstage environment where they cannot be seen while controlling their self-presentation in the online environment as the controlled frontstage. There is an important distinction and update addressed by Hogan (2010) when studying online and FtF interactions.

There is an intended audience and a hidden audience on dating apps, so the person behind the computer becomes the curator of their visual self-presentation on their profile. Tinder users will consider both intended and hidden audiences and will transform their profiles to reflect desirability. There are people Tinder users have already viewed and swiped on, but also those yet to be swiped on. Therefore, Hogan's interpretation of Goffman's theory would explain the elevated weight of a carefully devised profile as profile's visual self-presentation is for multiple unknown audiences with the understanding their visual self-presentation must be consistently desirable if there is a goal of FtF interaction with a match (Ward, 2017).

In addition, Hogan (2010) used Tinder to understand the implications of filtering for the app audience through their profile's visual self-presentation and initial CMC on the app. Hogan (2010) used the modality switching of online to real world communication to distinguish the physical interaction of users those that wish to meet in person and not simply keep interactions in an online environment. The pre-match phase of self-presentation is where the performance starts as swiping in the Tinder app is occurring simultaneously with potential matches. The digital performance continues as there is a desire to maintain attention from their matches to meet offline (Hogan, 2010). Users can use this time to envision who they want to chat with and meet FtF while having the power to consistently modify their visual self-presentation to accommodate their changing desires and continuing to make matches.

People do not have a set identity or self-presentation but present themselves based on the various situations, environments, goals, and scenarios they experience. The multimodal affordances of social media and dating apps have users in continual shifts of self-presentation for

the idealized, imagined, and ideational affordances (Djonov, 2012). Therefore, the digital world always had the ability to be a creative space where photos, captions, texts, filters, and videos serve as multimodal representations of self. However, online images of self, especially if idealized, may not necessarily translate into the offline world once modality switching occurs from online to offline romantic pursuits (Djonov, 2012).

Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

Expectation disconfirmation theory is used to measure satisfaction and dissatisfaction in areas of studies such as consumer contentment, tourism, and virtual learning environments. The expectation disconfirmation theory concedes higher expectations increase instances of negative disconfirmation outcomes as negative disconfirmation results in lower satisfaction of products, people, and user experiences (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2017). When expectations are exceeded, then the result is higher satisfaction.

In relation to online dating, if the dating app is viewed as a marketplace, and the users are peer evaluated as products, users will experience higher levels of dissatisfaction if their matches appear as a knock-off version of their online visual self-representation once they meet FtF. Personal branding on social media and dating apps is unique the creation of a specific visual self-presentation with a desirable originality like advertising and marketing campaigns (Petruca, 2016). Tinder users are each operating their profiles as their personal brand marketing which makes verifying realistic and ideal expectations crucial for high satisfaction amongst daters (Petruca, 2016; Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2017).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

According to scholars, female online dating users have filtered their visual self-presentation in online dating profiles more than male online dating users (see Guadagno et al., 2012; Morrell, 2016, Peng, 2020; Toma & Hancock, 2010). Tinder users and other dating app

users are experiencing a gap in idealized self from actual self, producing appearance discrepancies and deception due to the way users are self-presenting online (Guadagno et al., 2012). These types of lived experiences need to be understood for dating app users to avoid misrepresenting themselves and for others to gain positive dating experiences by accurately portraying themselves online.

In popular culture, the competition and high emersion of social platforms has prevalence and is often the subject of friendly conversation. People compare and evaluate each other's matches on dating apps as they do their likes on social media in casual conversation (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). What prompted this study was how people compare and evaluate each other's matches on dating apps as they do their likes on social media in casual conversation (Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). The regularity of these communications on the internet and in everyday conversation extends across social groups and platforms. The phenomena and concepts of interest explored in this study involved Tinder, dating apps, AR technology on apps, filtered photographs, visual self-presentation, CMC, attraction, first impressions, and modality switching.

Dating Apps

People are routinely engaging in technology such as dating apps to facilitate encounters with others that can range from sexual, romantic, and platonic endeavors (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Wotipka, & High, 2016). The goal of all dating apps is for the user to take their connections offline and have personal goal success (i.e., sex, relationships, or intimacy; Duguay, 2017). Dating apps such as Tinder serve as a medium between potential partners and users to

present themselves on their profiles then initiate conversation that will eventually transition to meeting offline for FtF dates (Ramirez et al., 2015).

Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge are all examples of dating apps that have expanded usage to be global. Tinder was launched in 2012 as the first dating app to include multiple sexualities and gendered users (Smith, 2020). By 2020, Tinder had 50 million users, 20 billion matches (over 26 million per day), and over 100 million downloads (Smith, 2020). The components for marketability on dating apps are the self-made profiles linked to social media accounts, swipe logic, jurisdiction over choice, linkage to smartphones, and affordability of geographic location (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

The self-made profiles on dating apps grant users first impressions through a digital screen before deciding if a FtF first date is worthwhile. Photographs and short biographies are self-presented on dating profiles for users to share as potential matches view each other's profiles as they swipe (Blackwell et al., 2015). The allure of using dating apps is associated with quick decisions with the swipe of a finger, left for rejection and right for interest in that person (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Ward, 2017). Users can swipe on as many potential matches as they wish, but only match with someone when they mutually swipe right on each other. People can change their geographic location to only view potential matches within a district or neighborhood that is close to them. The availability and magnitude of the amount of Tinder users increases accessibility to people seeking a romantic connection through your smartphone without having to physically go out and approach someone you might want to date (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Dating apps create a dating environment with numerous possibilities to explore through profile comparison and the power of choice. Dating app users can be their own matchmaker. The extensive choices provided by profiles can prove overwhelming to some users and cause them not to engage in matches as the overabundant decisions can mentally exhaust them (David & Cambre, 2016; Hitsch et al., 2010). On the other hand, with such an extensive population of Tinder users operating as potential matches, some Tinder users find swiping exciting, with endless possibilities (David & Cambre, 2016; Hitsch et al., 2010).

Dating apps are stigmatized and notorious like social media for photos taking precedence in decision making (Ward, 2017). People are constantly judging, evaluating, scrutinizing the optimized profiles of others for matches (David & Cambre, 2016). There is an element on Tinder where users must share their profile and swipe, once a swipe has been made on a profile a choice has been made. If the swipe choice is left for rejection, then there may never be another opportunity to match with that specific user again in the future (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). There is no turning back once a swipe choice on a profile has been made. Therefore, the swipe logic creates a seemingly endless cycle of quick evaluation based on beauty and attractiveness (Timmermans & Courtois, 2018; Toma & D'Angelo, 2017; Toma & Hancock, 2010.)

Traditional dating involves potential partners meeting FtF then casually sharing experiences and various facts about themselves to get to know each other. Dating apps have changed how first impressions are formed with swiping and profile viewing (Hawkins, 2019). Self-presentation and disclosure on dating apps are performed on a visual medium (photographs)

then a textual medium (CMC) on dating apps. First impressions and reevaluation of attraction is an ongoing process as users can view a person's profile after they match as much as they want without their match knowing. After there is a match, the app allows CMC communication between matches to get to know each other via text before the initial FtF first date.

There is a growth of the embeddedness of technology in everyday life in terms of how people have integrated technology into their lives. People share intimacy and publicness in technological environments with a frequency that is becoming more commonplace (Whitmer, 2019; Hogan, 2010). Academically, there is prominence in studying CMC (Walther et al., 2001; Ramirez et al., 2015; Schrock, 2015) and note CMC has been argued to be a hyper-personal medium rather than an impersonal medium as people share their experiences and intimacies via CMC (Ramirez et al., 2015). Initial conversations occurring via CMC occur after a match are diverse from initial interpersonal communication as the CMC communication coincides with the first impressions based on the manipulated visual self-presentation rather than a FtF first impression.

Links Between Dating Apps and Social Media

Dating apps such as Tinder are free for users to download. Tinder users authenticate their identity by choosing to link their pre-existing social media accounts to create a dating profile. This keeps the information for their Tinder profile aggregated for an easy set up process to include minimal personal information (name, occupation, age, education) while verifying user identity and having the ability to easily upload photographs already posted on their personal Facebook and Instagram accounts (Ward, 2017).

The linkage to Facebook and Instagram allows users to continue their previous visual self-presentation on their personal dating app profile to create authenticity on the dating apps. An important differentiation to note is the purpose of Tinder using social media links for app profiles to prove users are not using fake photographs and are the identity they claim to be. In terms of self-presentation and impression, there were disparities in findings as Gil-Or, Levi-Belz and Turel (2015) concluded Facebook users made profiles with only moderate likeness and fairly correct impressions of self on their social media.

People are misrepresenting, or filtering their profile photographs on social media, and the exaggeration transfers when that social media platform becomes linked to the dating app. Gibbs et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the uncertainty online dating users encounter once there is a match. To curve feelings of uncertainty, users "google" (i.e., electronically search) their matches to verify identity and appearance. However, this process only verifies a person is who they claim to be. Many dating app users utilize their pre-existing photos on social media for their dating app profile, so any exaggeration in self-presentation could still go undetected until their first FtF date, or further social media searches.

For this study, there was not an incorporation in catfishing. Catfishing is a term often used in popular culture that has been the subject of previous studies and casual conversations (Smith et al., 2017). Catfishing is the process of a user seducing someone by means of a fictional online persona as online impersonation (Smith et al., 2017). Male Tinder users who have been catfished were not included. The distinction between the concepts of catfishing and filtered

visual self-presentation is important as this study only evaluated those who have confirmed identities through dating apps and confirmed by participants.

Online dating fosters new connections out of desire with those unknown in real life and wish to attract while social media connections can be composed of many offline pre-existing relationships (Heino et al., 2006; AnKee & Yazdanifard, 2015). Social media platforms are social platforms that allow people to accept friends or make friends online through sharing photographs and CMC (Ramirez et al., 2015; Hogan, 2010). Social photography emerged as millions of people started sharing, liking, and viewing images on social media. The same technology that allows photos to be shared online became available as the smartphone offered the same technology through apps you can carry in your pocket.

Lavrence and Cambre (2020) compared the emergence of social photography to the creation of photography. Photography changed the circumstances and ways people view time, space, intimacies, and events before the connection of the internet (Lavrence & Cambre, 2020). Social photography emerged as millions of people started sharing, liking, and viewing images on social media (Lavrence & Cambre, 2020). Social photography began online as a new way for people continue to use perception to alter their identity, environment, intimacies, and space. The smartphone revolutionized digital culture with the incorporation of the internet, front facing camera, and professional camera technology that has granted populations the ability to take and post professional looking pictures.

Many Tinder users use their social media photos for their profiles, but Tinder users have the option to upload more sexually appealing photos if they are not explicit or pornographic. A

key component to understanding profile formation is acknowledging how priorities alter visual

self-presentation and connections on dating apps to prioritize gaining desirable matches (Toma et

al., 2008; Whitty, 2008). Walther et al. (2001) concluded selective self-presentation extends past

text and messaging to photographs in online dating profiles. Hancock and Toma (2009) used the

results from Walther et al., (2001) to conduct a study on photograph accuracy in online dating

that revealed women have more inaccurate profile photos than men. In 2009, filtering and

airbrushing were gaining popularity and accessibility, but were not widely available during the

time of the study. Technological advancements in smartphones and apps did not have the level of

embeddedness in social media use during previous studies as it has today with regards to altering

digital images.

On social media, users self-present with photos and maintain impression management

based on the positive feedback and number of likes received on their posts (Kapidzic & Herring,

2015). Tinder users visually self-present with the same logic they use to self-present on social

media to gain likes. Gaining likes is akin to gaining matches. Further, users often gratify photos

to show parts of themselves they choose to show on Tinder as favorable to form a high level of

desirability in hopes of attracting matches (Ward, 2017).

One of the common user practices that takes Gibbs et al.'s (2011) research a step further

is the "friending" of your matches on Instagram. Tinder users link their Instagram to their

profiles, so people can browse through larger amounts of the users' self-selected photos. Users

can confirm a person's identity, confirm physical attractiveness, and observe their matches'

hobbies, interests, and daily lives.

The innovation of technologies is in a constant state of change, and congruently human behavior is changing to accommodate the increasing connectedness of technology to everyday life. People are posting photos for public usage at the highest rate in history thanks to the integration of smartphone accessibility with social photography (Lavrence & Cambre, 2020). The expansion in accessibility means the expansion in users' perceptions, social norms, and knowledge. In other words, how people evaluate others, themselves, and the world is a result of advancing social technologies.

Augmented Reality and Filters

Augmented Reality (AR) is a digital interactive interface where people can view and present their digital self in real-world contexts (Alamäki et al., 2021). The concepts of AR are evolving with technologies to characterize environments that mold the physical and the digital (Jurgenson, 2012). Viewing social media and dating apps as AR because of the augmented visual self-presentation is a nuanced pathway for research (Flavián et al., 2021).

Formerly, AR was a term solely used to describe interactive gaming but has expanded within the past decade to include social media and online dating as AR is the successful merging of persona, digital, and the physical through visual self-presentation. Social networking apps integrating AR technologies into their platforms have created a greater convenience and higher usage (Flavián et al., 2021). People can communicate and view physical worlds through digital photographs uploaded to social media. Now, smartphone users can filter their photographs to create a personalized visual self-presentation on social platforms they use like a personal avatar.

Filtering your face using AR is a practice of attribute manipulation where a person can use built-in smartphone technology and downloaded apps for easy access to photo editing prior to uploading photos to social media. An evolution in AR occurred with people using tools to whiten their teeth, airbrush their acne, brightening their hair and eyes, and to appear slimmer. Edits such as this had to previously be made using costly photoshop programs.

An example of the innovation of technology affordance and AR is the selfie. A selfie is a photograph a person takes of oneself using a smartphone camera. Selfies can be described as non-verbal and visual communication that can reflects the taker's thoughts, emotions, intentions, mood, and aesthetics portrayed by their facial expressions and body language in a photograph (Chae, 2019). The digital culture of the selfie now expands across countries and generations to function as the most popular form of visual self-presentation on social media (Bell et al., 2018; Chae, 2017; Dhir et al., 2016). The use of selfies in dating profiles are common and have been associated with forming lower quality relationships (Halpern et al., 2017).

Filters are common across social media apps as the societal beauty ideal that was previously unobtainable for the masses suddenly became reachable for social media users with the tap of the smartphone screen (Barker, 2020). The frequency, lack of cost, and availability for image editing on a smartphone has created a digital culture shift where "filtering" or taking a photo "to the lab" has become not only normalized but expected (Barker, 2020). Rettberg (2014) uses the example of Instagram influencers trying to mimic fashion models to explain how filtering is a conglomeration of the technological, cultural, and cognitive to seem societally desirable and attractive. The AR practice is no longer restricted to models and celebrities as

influencers can edit their own images before posting online with the same expertise as professionals. In turn, AR increases the richness and perfectionism in social media apps compared to those social media apps that do not offer AR technologies (Yoke et al., 2019).

The term *filter* has cultural and analytical implications as the term is inclusive of expectations and norms (Rettberg, 2014). People use filtering in commonplace references and speech to discuss their photos being exaggerated and their feed being refined. From an analytical standpoint, the culture of the filter has morphed into, "a pervasive metaphor for the ways in which technology can remove certain content and how it can alter or distort texts, images and data" (Rettberg, 2014, p. 22).

In 2008, Apple iPhone released its first commercialized built-in software development kit (SDK) that popularized photographic AR filtration (Chan, 2017). Since 2008, AR technology has gone simultaneously with selfie altering and production on social media. Apps such as Instragram, Snapchat, Facebook, Facetune (2), AirBrush and others all provide free filters for consumers to use prior to uploading their photos onto their platforms. The AR facial recognition software that smartphones employ has the competence to use interactive AR filters and digital effects that manipulate the user's real-time facial features (Chae, 2017).

Instagram and Snapchat are social media platforms based on sharing photographs. Like dating apps, these platforms are photograph forward and oblige the frontline of self-presentation to be the self-selected photographs that users post. Various AR filter options are available for users to experiment. Chae's (2017) results found manipulating one's personal appearance with filters is tempting for self-exploration, identity revelation, and play.

Snapchat's original filters were obvious filters (i.e., dog faces, flower crowns, rainbow tongues, eyeglass stickers). Obvious filters have a distinctive effect to online audiences compared to an AR filtered photo that does not have the clear distinction of being filtered (Rettberg, 2014). While the adoption of obvious filters on photographs is immediately evaluated as fake for its cartoon characteristics, but filters that give a natural look incentivize users to adhire to heteronormative beauty standards (Chae, 2017). Users consistently use natural filters to gain more likes through their virtual appearance being delicately morphed to look more attractive.

I excluded obvious filters from this study in favor of studying the AR filters that offer an ambiguity and wonderment of what is natural and unfiltered within a person's visual self-presentation and what is augmented. AR filtered visual self-presentations are engaged on social media, yet have been underexplored on dating apps, and posit opportunity for method driven research (Chae, 2017).

Chae (2017) conducted interviews to access the reasoning behind filtered self-presenters editing their photographs for social media and found participants edited their selfies to mimic their personal ideation of flawless or ideal self-appear as their natural self. Filters prompt users to employ negotiations of visual self-presentation and assess their photographs' affectual components by viewers' engagement and likes (Peng, 2020). Users self-reported feeling less attractive in their photos without filters to whiten their teeth, tan and smooth their skin, make their lips bigger, and/or noses smaller (Chae, 2017). Consequently, filter users also reported anxiety seeing people in real life as they must live up to their online filtered visual self-

presentation and high beauty standards (Chae, 2017). In addition, Rettberg (2014) indicated unfiltered photos and selfies can seem too be forthright and raw, so users change their appearance and coloring of the photo to create an invisible barrier between feeling seen verses exposed in online environments.

Visual Self-Representation

Visual self-presentation is often used as an interchangeable term with photograph self-presentation or representing oneself through photographs (Rajanala, 2018; Zhao & Jiang, 2011). Visual self-presentation can also refer to a person's appearance, or how they physically self-present in person. Like online dating, scholars have found social media visual self-presentation has inconsistencies between individuals online and offline (Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Hogue & Mills, 2019). The societal pressure of beauty standards, social comparison through photographs, and performance of ideal self are all components of visual self-presentation across platforms (i.e., social media and online dating) (Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Hogan, 2010; Hogue & Mills, 2019; Iwamoto & Kurihara, 2019).

Visual self-presentation made on dating apps extends past social media to have an online/offline dynamic where the authenticity of online self can be compared and assessed (Djonov, 2012; Guadagno et al., 2012). Employing photographs as the prime focus for dating apps increases the depth of how carefully curated and controlled a person's photograph self-selection is for their visual self-presentation (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2018). Visual self-presentation is also selective self-presentation due to the controlling and judicious nature of photograph selection for social media and dating app display of self.

There is traditional FtF self-presentation where people present themselves and make impressions in person. Online self-presentation and visual self-presentation occurs on social media and app platforms through curated online displays of self and environment. Only recently has identity, self-presentation, and attributes in online dating environments been investigated (Heino et al., 2010; Toma, & Hancock, 2010; Ranzini, & Lutz, 2017). Research on generalized online self-presentation can be found as far back as the 1990's (Walther et al., 2001) and again in the early 2000's as social network sites quickly evolved into what we now term "social media" (Ellison et al., 2007; Hogan, 2010), but links in research across technologies is lacking acknowledgement in the connectedness they display in everyday life. The nuance of the phenomena means only recently has identity, self-representation, and attributes in online dating environments been investigated (Heino et al., 2010; Toma, & Hancock, 2010; Ranzini, & Lutz, 2017).

Selective Self-Presentation (SSP) requires people highlight their positive attributes while filtering out the unfavorable or unflattering characteristics about themselves (Ellison et al., 2012). SSP is not a new phenomenon in the dating world as SSP is commonly enlisted for online dating (Ellison et al., 2006; Whitty, 2008). In turn, dating app users can increase their prospects by only forming positive impressions of themselves in their online environment through their profile persona for first impressions made online (Wotipka & High, 2016). Much of the literature previously researched includes misrepresentation or selective self-presentation from people using old photographs online to create a persona through their visual self-presentation (Ellison et al., 2012; Toma & Hancock, 2010). Ellison et al (2012) and Toma and Hancock (2010) found high

usage in old photographs by users showing their younger selves in personal peak physical shape while their current appearance did not champion their visual self-presentation. Wotipka & High (2016) found dating app users will accentuate physical characteristics of their best self-selected photograph.

Filtering photographs or using old photographs with high discrepancies between online and real-life appearances are misrepresentation of self-presentation. Individuals are using AR to convey idealized self that does not represent what they look like (Halpern et al., 2017; Peng, 2020). People put information about themselves online that are not true to their real-world appearance which creates the space between authentic self and actual self as a space of anxiety (Peng, 2020). The anxiety between the space of self-presentations exists alongside the same space that occupies the discrepancies in visual self-presentation.

Online Misrepresentation

Most online daters believe people exaggerate their profiles and photos to an appropriate extent (Ellison et al., 2006). Dating app users swipe to connect with a match's visual self-presentation, but what is not known is the extent that the use of AR filters has impacted notions of misrepresentation and authenticity. Prior to the emergence of AR technologies, numerous studies reveal when there is anticipation for FtF dates, daters will use more subtle filtering in their visual self-presentation avoid the risk of seeming deceptive to their matches (Ellison et al. 2012; Hitsch et al. 2010; Toma et al. 2008).

In short, when users create and control their profile's presentation, there should be a balancing act between positive visual self-presentation and genuine realism to avoid damaging

dating goals through misrepresenting themselves (Ellison et al., 2012). Casimiro (2014) takes the concept a bit further, as a lack of critique in the field of deception suggests minor degrees of dishonesty and deception are tolerated in dating environments and expected to an extent. When misrepresentation is discussed, the subject of authentic self and general authenticity comes into play and scholars have produced various outlooks.

When critically discussing performative identities, scholars consider a person's concept of self as more multifaceted and disunited in varying dynamic environments (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1979). Considering identity through a post-structuralist lens there is examination of whether an authentic self exists. The idea of full authenticity could prove to be baseless as identity and self-presentation are not always anchored and fixed (Dews, 1989; Foucault, 1979). Individuals have various identities and perform self-presentations chosen in accordance with their motives and environment.

Guadagno et al (2012) claimed in addition to amplifying visual self-presentation, reduced cues in an online dating environment tend to bolster deceptive self-presentation. The need for social acceptance, to seem more attractive, and changeable dating goals were all factors in deceptive self-presentation. The results concluded that purposeful misrepresentation occurs when dating app users are trying to seem desirable to woo an attractive match to achieve their dating goals (i.e., a date, sex, attention, and/or relationship) (Guadagno et al., 2012).

Offline Impressions and **Modality Switching**

Visual self-presentation and first impressions on dating apps are meant to attract matches, but there are dating app users that exploit dating apps for swipe entertainment and ego boosts

(David & Cambre, 2016). However, most users are using dating apps as a gateway for future FtF dates (Ellison et al., 2012; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Finding romantic and sexual connections on dating apps is a unique domain where users smoothly transition from online to offline communication, but also carry the weight of their visual self-presentation into reality. The space created for impression management is complicated as the FtF first date also operates as proof of authenticity, romantic attraction, and successful offline communication.

First in person dates can prove to be disappointing when reality does not match expectation (Dawson & de Meza, 2018). Antheunis et al., (2020) conducted a study based on modality switching and using video calls before dates to form connections after matching on a dating app. Their implications for future research recommended studies to be done using video calls to screen for physical unattractive qualities as they found physical attractiveness was not increased after video chatting and could be used as a screening tool for physical attractiveness before first FtF dates.

Physical Attraction

One of the main principles of Tinder and other dating apps is finding mutual attraction between users to create a match. Although mutual attraction is important, mutual attraction is not the only concept to ensure Tinder users' satisfaction (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). The role of physical attractiveness is worth considering when we examine the central role profile pictures as visual self-presentation play in dating apps (Hitsch et al., 2010) as people choose to pursue relationships with those who are attractive to them (Luo & Zhang, 2009). Empirical research linking physical and romantic attraction to online dating is not new. Prior to the inception of

dating apps, website dating users conceded to SSP by concealing negative traits and highly accentuating positive traits (Gibbs et al., 2006; Walther et al., 2001; Whitty, 2008).

Romantic attraction is the degree which someone positively assesses both physical and sexual attraction to view someone as a possible romantic partner which leads to further partnership development (Sprecher & Regan, 2002; Sprecher & Treger, 2019). The greater the evaluation a person gives another in terms of physical attractiveness after first interactions is found to be the main stimulant for romantic attraction (Byrne,1997). Sprecher and Regan (2002) evaluated romantic attraction in terms of physical and sexual attraction which Hancock and Toma (2010) expanded to reveal romantic partners are evaluated using physical characteristics online as visual information to form their impressions of others. Hancock and Toma (2010) highlight the importance of physical attraction on dating apps as less attractive daters engaged in more self enhancement of their physical shortcomings to achieve a desired visual self-presentation. In addition, attractive daters advertised their most attractive features more and self-promoted more photos than their less attractive counterparts (Hancock & Toma, 2010).

Obtaining an accurate measure of attraction can prove to be empirically challenging as attraction is objective, marked with personal preference, and culturally embedded, so most attraction studies are self-reported measures to get a realistic picture of the participants' experiences (Toma & Hancock, 2008; Hitsch et al., 2010). A study conducted by Hitsch and colleagues (2010) defined the extent to which strong physical attraction predicted initial contact through online dating. They examined 6,483 participants' responses to profiles and found the physical attractiveness of potential matches was the greatest predictor of initial contact by men

seeking women. The predictor for men was 1.3 times stronger for men choosing physical

attraction as their number one attribute when scrolling through women's profiles (Hitsch et al.,

2010). What men value most is the attractiveness of their potential matches through their visual

self-presentation and will contact women based on the scale of personal attraction. This also

confirms Alterovitz and Mendelsohn (2011) as men have a higher likelihood to seek women who

are physically attractive as their romantic partners throughout the span of their lives. As visual

dominance is true of dating apps (Chae, 2017), filter usage on profile photos is boosted as AR

filters increase attractiveness and the number of potential partners (Ward, 2017).

Relationshopping

Whitty and Carr (2006) explored how online profiles project an embodiment of self, as

dating profiles are a projection of self in an environment that is controlled, targeted, but also

flirtatious and objectifying for users to view. Heino et al. (2010) built off their previous research

to conceptualize how users study each other's photos and profile information as

relationshopping.

Relationshopping is a term used to describe the objectification of potential matches in

online dating environments as the phenomena compares to "window shopping." The swipe logic

used on dating apps creates an environment for users to sell their self-disclosed best attributes as

self-promotional devices as if selling a product (Heino et al., 2010; Whitmer, 2019). Gibbs et al.

(2006) described profiles as a catalogue where dating users are selling themselves as products to

potential matches, and to gain the most sought-after matches, many embellish to appear more

desirable. The logic of self-presentation and self-selection is similar to that of shopping for goods

and services as dating apps oblige and encourage users to browse all of their products (i.e. Tinder users) and swipe right on those they find enticing.

Dating App Outcomes

Finkle et al. (2012) investigated comparative dating outcomes amongst rival online dating sites. Where there is proof that online dating and dating apps have changed the landscape for dating potential, Finkle and colleagues (2012) determined while many dating sites have compelling claims, there is a lack of empirical evidence with scientific research and methodology on overall dating outcomes to be able to have scholarly support to dating success claims. Dating apps such as Tinder collect copious amounts of data from their platforms to be able to optimize user experiences. But scholarly research is necessary to assess and record offline outcomes once modality switching has occurred as users are no longer on Tinder or other apps to communicate.

Gibbs et al. (2006) compared self-presentation and strategic success by broadening the concept of success to include "self-presentation success" as a crucial component to dating app success. Self-presentation success is measured by personal dating goals (e.g., relationship, marriage, etc.). Gibbs and colleagues (2006) note that users can learn from their self-presentation success, or lack of success, as both are behavioral and cognitive. Users have the greatest success presenting themselves in a positive manner throughout the first impressions process but must do so in a truthful way (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

The cognitive element enables users to learn from their lack of dating success (e.g., not getting a second date, puzzled after a one-sided attraction, getting ghosted, etc.) and adapt their

self-presentation online and offline to gain confidence for dating success. Therefore, self-presentation success inter-connects the fine line between filtering photos to appear ideal and filtering photos to a point of incredulity. The key to self-presentation success is having the confidence to convey yourself (appearance, hobbies, goals etc.) on dating apps and to employ dating goal strategies that work (Gibbs et al., 2006; Halpern et al., 2017).

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed foundational and current literature around online dating, AR as photo editing technology, filtering, visual self-presentation, relationshopping, modality switching, misrepresentation, dating apps, Tinder, physical attraction, self-presentation theory, expectation disconfirmation theory, and dating outcomes. The researcher's review began with a brief description of the study's focus and the literature search strategy employed. The reasoning for the conceptual framework for the study examined the various forms of self-presentation. The researcher reviewed the history and prevalence of dating apps (i.e., Tinder) and how they are a mixture of technological advancement, accessibility, and convenience. There is more scholarly research needed in the field to keep up with growing technology and pop culture. Chapter 3 will restate the purpose of the study and examine the methodological choices for this study to best reach data saturation.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of male Tinder users who had gone on a first FtF date with a woman who has significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. I recorded the reflections of Tinder users regarding the recollection and realization of their Tinder date's online to offline appearance discrepancies. I adopted a generic qualitative approach to interpret the lived experiences by the participants and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.

In this chapter, I explain the role of the researcher, the rationale for the study, and the research design. I present the foundations of trustworthiness including ethical considerations, informed consent, confidentiality as well as strategies for credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I provide and explain the methods for questionnaire development, data collection, recruitment, software selection, and the data analysis plan. Lastly, I discuss the dissemination of the results before a summary of the information, and transition into Chapter 4.

Qualitative Research Design and Rationale

I chose a methodological design based on qualitative research after a careful review of existing literature to understand the phenomena of study. The quantitative studies conducted on dating apps fell short of providing the richness of narrative and detail of participants' reflections. Therefore, qualitative analysis was necessary to supplement the results of previous quantitative studies as well as frame new exploration into the exclusive phenomena of study. The few studies

that were qualitative did not provide the level of understanding and presented gaps for more qualitative research. I believe providing qualitative data after the study increased understanding and insight into the phenomena. Therefore, the research question for this study was: What is the experience of male Tinder users when they engage in a first FtF date with a woman who has heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation using AR technology?

Qualitative Research Designs

I was able to choose between numerous research designs due to the flexible structure and basis on interpretation when conducting a qualitative study (Turhan, 2019). There are several qualitative research designs to choose from: the phenomenological approach, which focuses on the personal experiences of participants; ethnography, in which the researchers observes and defines human behaviors and relationships in their natural environment; grounded theory, which is used to create new theories from available data; case studies, which focus on single cases at once for in-depth analysis; generic qualitative approach intentionally does not have a single established methodology and takes strength from multiple approaches; discourse analysis, in which researchers study language use and historical development; and a narrative or storytelling approach which researchers collect various stories in detail (Turhan, 2019).

I considered each method and chose a generic qualitative approach as the research design to focus on deeper knowledge through interpreting lived experiences by the participants, what meaning they attribute to their experiences, and how they have created their perceptions (see Merriam, 1998). Generic qualitative studies can have one or more methodologies to build a research design specific to the needs of the study as well as well-described depictions of the

phenomenon under investigation (Lim, 2011). Further, generic qualitative methodology is less restrictive and has a broadened research design that crosses disciplines and methodological boundaries should the research permit (Kahlke, 2014). I had the ability to create meaning through the participants' interviews which aligned with the research goals.

Defining Phenomena of the Study

I maintained focus through a clear set of goals throughout the qualitative study process (see Maxwell, 2008). Using the generic qualitative design, I gathered and discussed the different perspectives of the research participants regarding the growing dating app phenomena, highly altered profile photos from nuanced AR technology, and their experiences going on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. Rich descriptions and dynamic perspectives were shared through the interviews.

I used qualitative research methodology on dating apps to find the *what* of the phenomenon as elements attributed to the phenomenon are obtained through the subjectivity of the lifeworld context (see Wertz, 2005). The participants revealed the phenomenon through their reflections and unveiled multiple meanings through their personal descriptions (see Smith et al., 2012). I searched for relevant themes that emerged, but the additional reflections extracted from the in-depth interview data was an apt combination for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (see Moustaskas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

I desired to gather data around the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology to better understand this phenomena of study. I was alerted to the issue by social media and other platforms that publish opinion and experience on the subject rather than scientifically based writing. My role as the researcher was to provide dating app users with the opportunity to share their feelings and personal encounters to expand understanding on the intersections of filtered visual self-presentation, dating apps, and in-person dating experiences. Expanding understanding of these intersections gives daters more insight to consequences of filtered visual self-presentation in dating environments.

I was the only interviewer and data collector for the study. The use of a single interviewer kept uniformity to the interviewing process as it prevented the employment of inconsistent interview styles and data collection methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). My role was to interview each participant and use subquestions in addition to my main research question to delve into the participants' answers to open ended questions. I developed further interview questions to the main research question as a useful tool to further probe participants' experiences into more detailed responses.

Power Differentials

As someone who is not on dating apps, I did not have any personal, romantic, or professional relationship with the participants chosen for the study. Therefore, there was no chance of a power differential during the study. I did not have personal bias or interaction that

could have led to power imbalance or conflict during the research process with potential participants.

Incentives

No incentives were granted during this study other than communicating a deeper understanding of scientific knowledge after presenting the interview questions.

Managing Researcher Bias

Tufford and Newman (2012) stated bracketing was a technique to evade corrupting and/or negatively influencing the participants' accounts of the phenomena. During the data collection process, I recorded my impressions and thoughts as notes while audio recording the participants' interviews. This ensured I had awareness of my personal feelings and thoughts on the subject to discern from the participants' personal experiences. This way the meaning of the phenomena was given solely from the participants' accounts instead of my own as addressed by Smith et al (2012).

After the completion of data collection, I coded and interpreted the qualitative data. Researcher bias, such as leading questions, question order effect, confirmation bias, and interviewer bias, can negatively impact data collection and interpretation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I practiced reflexivity to prevent this from negatively impacting the study. Reflexivity is the awareness of beliefs, biases, and personal positions during the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I maintained this reflexivity throughout the process to ensure integrity throughout the methodology, data collection, and data analysis phases.

During and after the research process, I continuously reflected on my own biases, understandings, and frameworks in reference to the study's essence and motivating purpose of the research question (Cain et al., 2019). I considered the political, ideological, and psychological nature of the subject for openness in conversation. I McCaslin and Scott (2003) claimed engagement in reflexivity prior to the first interviews and during question formation will prevent bias. Taking on the role of the researcher and being someone who has personally experienced the phenomena, I reflected on bias before the interview process to specifically address any assumptions of commonality in favor of the participants' personal reflections and experiences rather than my own.

I initially set up an organizational system. Hébert (2015) claimed best practices for data collection, maintain ethical standards, and data management involves voluminous field notes, memos, contact lists, consent forms, and guides that can accumulate quickly once research and interviews have started. I was the sole data collector and interpreter, so I conducted all the research with an ethical responsibility to produce a fully comprehensive and quality final project.

Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

The population participating in this study were heterosexual male Tinder users over the age of 18. The participants had to have used the app for 2 years or longer. The rationale for establishing the selection criterion to include users have a minimum of 2 years on Tinder amplified the probability that each participant may have encountered more than one first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. Having multiple experiences with phenomena can deepen and diversify reflections

by the participants. During the participant selection process, there were not any participants who met the identified criteria who were excluded based on their age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, gender, ableism, or spiritual beliefs. Due to difficulties in gaining permission from Tinder to advertise and recruit on their app as required by the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB), I gained permission through Tinder Dating Facebook group administrators to access two different Tinder dating Facebook groups for advertisement and recruitment for this study.

Sampling Strategy

I used a purposeful random sampling strategy for this study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), purposeful random sampling sets parameters for the participant recruitment in alignment with the goals of the study and the incorporation of those who had experienced the phenomena of study. I selected the participants via random purposeful sampling using the Tinder Study flyer posted on the public online dating Facebook group's wall for sharing.

In addition to posting the recruitment flyer on the public online dating Facebook groups' pages, I shared the Tinder Study flyer on my personal Facebook to be shared by people I know to heighten the chance of gaining participants. After the participants followed the link provided on the Tinder Study flyer, they filled out the prescreen questions and were granted consent. Participants submitted their email with their SurveyMonkey results. I selected participants from their SurveyMonkey results in no specific order. The sampling method and recruitment strategy provided transparency. In addition, I chose the participant selections at random to decrease the possibility of bias.

Sample Size

I interviewed eight heterosexual men who had experienced the phenomena of a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. The generalizability of the study could be limited with so few participants, but Trotter II (2012) noted in-depth interviews for qualitative studies on phenomena have as many as ten participants. Data saturation was met after the sixth interview, but I conducted the additional two interviews as they had been previously scheduled and added to the data saturation.

Participant Recruitment Pathways

I recruited participants from Facebook groups for online dating via a digital flyer posted to their Facebook page. Members of the Facebook groups shared the Tinder Study flyer with their friends and other groups on Facebook to increase viewers and potential participants. I gained permission to post the flyer for recruitment from the group administrators of two Tinder dating groups for study recruitment in written correspondence via Facebook Messenger after they read a summary of the study. Once the potential participants initiated communication by clicking the hyperlink to SurveyMonkey, then eligibility questions were answered to audit participants for the research study. I reached the specific population for this study by using the prescreen questionnaire. I did not set parameters for study recruitment on age and race to incorporate the range of dating experiences to answer the overarching research question. In addition to those who are selected for the study, I created a standby list for other interviews in the event a participant backed out, or if the data saturation did not reach conclusive findings.

Participation Contact and Inclusion Suitability

I posted the research participation flyer (see Appendix A) Tinder dating Facebook groups' pages with a short description of the study to give potential participants access to the description of the study, ethical considerations, information on confidentiality, and a prescreen to ensure they have experienced the phenomena of study. Once consent was granted by a participant, the prescreen questions populated, and I contacted the potential participants that were a fit for the study. I made the parameters for the participants' age, age of the people they date, and gender clear on the consent form. I only allowed heterosexual male users who consented they are above the age of 18 and only engage in dating women over the age of 18 to participate in this study. I added this as a precaution for further ethical obligation to keep participants and those in their narratives above the legal age for consent in the United States.

Informed consent. I created the prescreen and consent form to be on the same SurveyMonkey for the convenience of potential participants. When a male Tinder user viewed the Tinder Study recruitment flyer, they clicked to follow a link to the SurveyMonkey to complete the online informed consent form for review and confirmed consent their consent (see Appendix B). After the Tinder users consented, I confirmed eligibility by reviewing the answers they provided to the prescreen questions provided on SurveyMonkey (see Appendix C). If a Tinder user passed the prescreen questions, I sent correspondence via email to schedule individual interviews around the participants' schedules.

Interview protocols. In line with Walden University protocol, I conducted all the interviews via videoconferencing on Zoom by computer to ensure physical safety, privacy, and

comfort. I afforded the participants the dimension of privacy as an extra level of comfortability as the interviews took place in a physical environment of their choosing. In addition, videoconferencing enabled a level of flexibility that respected the time constraints, travel constraints, and professional schedules of participants to make the interview process as effective as possible for all parties involved.

Digital recording. I used Zoom on my MacBook Pro to record each interview. Videoconferencing through Zoom as a communication technology granted the participants and I real-time synchronous conversational opportunities (Salmons, 2011). In comparison to methods such as email, instant messaging, or phone interviews, videoconferencing most closely resembles in-person interviewing while having the convenience of no travel and cost effectiveness (Irani, 2019; Tuttas, 2015). I clicked the record option on Zoom to record the audio sound during the interviews. This prevented any unnecessary clicking and typing during my conversations and confirmed attentiveness from the participants. In accordance with Cypress (2018), I was able to concentrate on the interview questions and the participant, reduce of bias and subjectivity insertions, limit technological distractions, and reduce the risk of inserting my subjectivity by using recordings.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation is key to internal validity in qualitative research design, so researchers must consistently use tools such as probing questions, interview questions, and follow-up questions to fully assist participants in sharing their full narratives (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I followed Mustakas (1994) as I developed appropriate interview questions contingent on focus of

the phenomena being explored and created a fulfilling opportunity for participants to answer questions with their lived experiences on the phenomena. After the interviews were conducted, I analyzed the interview data for common themes.

Instrument Development and Validity of the Interview Guide

A vital component to this research was the comprehensive interview guide and interview questions I created (see Appendix D) to gather quality data from the study. Interview guides can work throughout the coding, thematic results, and conclusion to answer the research question and address other questions that might appear (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The validity of the interview questions and guide I developed for this study were created through feedback by my committee member and chair to ensure the language and flow would be ethical, relevant, and suitable to address the research question.

Sufficiency of Instruments

I explored the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology with a single research question. During the interviews, participants described their experiences and emotions around romantic encounters, their challenges, perceptions of attraction and authenticity, social media influences, and levels of appearance discrepancy in their matches. I had a repetitive process with the inclusion of notes, memos, audio recordings, subscriptions, and summaries for consistent self-reflection to establish sufficiency of the instrument to answer the qualitative research question.

Saldaña (2021) claimed multiple rounds of coding are necessary to fully collect the diversity of perspectives and context to reflect the complexity of human experience. The interview questions and guide were developed to achieve data saturation which is possible through the semistructured interview composition to support data flow. Through the narratives, details of the phenomena of study became apparent as I used descriptive and pattern coding to find categories and themes that emerged from data analysis.

Debriefing Procedures

I thanked the participants for their time and candor after each interview. The participants were able to ask any questions and receive further clarity on the study throughout the research process via email, or call. Also, I asked the participants if they would like a summary of the research findings once the study has concluded. Once the study concluded, the dissertation was published on ProQuest, and there was a one-page summary with a hyperlink to the dissertation posted on the Facebook group used for the participant recruitment. This allows the Facebook group's members and the participants to freely access the study at their leisure.

Follow-Up Procedures

Should there be a necessity for further clarification to refine the content of an interview I gained permission from the participants after their interview to maintain further contact during the research process. Following-up with participants grants the opportunity for me to ensure correctness in interpretation and to gain accurate results. The participants have my contact information should they have further questions or concerns regarding the study and were granted access to the study results as detailed in the debriefing.

Data Analysis Plan

An inductive approach to the generic qualitative study provides data and thematic analysis driven to acquire codes solely from the interview data based on the participants' experiences (Arghode, 2012; Azungah, 2018). I gathered all the components to data acquirement and analysis from the interviews to answer the research question. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) recommend Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as an established set of guidelines that can be malleable by a researcher to for their research goals. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) said researchers should maintain flexibility when analyzing and interpreting data as guideline work to support organic conclusions from the data rather than molding the data to fit a technique that could constrict thematic outcomes and damage the process. The intention of IPA is to delve into the detail participants provide on how they relay their personal experiences as personal perception of the events in the phenomena of study (Smith et al., 2012).

I used the mixture of the exploratory and cyclical process to transform the interview data into structured and inclusive meanings to comprehensively answer the research question. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated during the beginning in the exploratory phase, codes are given as first impressions of the data. Then circumlocution and direct wording turn codes into the thematic analysis (Smith et al., 2012). The first impressions of the interviews and data allowed me begin understanding the diversity in experiences and the value of fairness in evaluation their diversity. The cyclical process worked in my favor as the themes and patterns surfaced as Azungah (2018) claimed they would through repetition and treating responses from participants with equality rather than personal favoritism for topics.

NVivo 12 software is designed for the organization of qualitative data for analysis. Per Moustaskas (1994), thematic analysis was applied to a set of interview transcripts to closely examine the texts for ideas, topics, and patterns of meaning that are frequently present. As previously stated, I used Zoom to record the interviews and saved the interviews as audio recordings. As a second instrument for accuracy, I used audiotape to record the interviews instead of Inqscribe on my MacBook as there was clicking and typing when trying to get Inqscribe to transcribe while Zoom was recording. Recordings give space for additional concentration on asking interview questions, limit technological distractions, and reduced the risk of inserting subjectivity (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

NVivo Transcription is an add on feature to NVivo 12. NVivo Transcription was used to turn the audio recordings into formatted transcripts, then I examined the data on a deeper level on NVivo 12 to begin the formulation of common themes. At the same time, I eliminated and reduced vague and repetitive commentary not closely related to the research question.

Ward (2017) found analysis should use the interview data as grounded to ensure the resulting explanations occur from participant reflections rather than solely relying on preexisting theoretical judgement. I confirmed the overarching themes related to the research question were as the repetitive nature of the data analysis showed clusters and patterns in the transcripts. After careful consideration of accuracy, context, relevance, and balance in representation, my final reevaluation corroborated the established themes from each unique participant explanations. Robinson (2014) confirmed the cyclical analysis process was finalized once data saturation was reached and no new information was obtained.

Treatment of Discrepant Cases

Intimacy, attraction, romantic relationships, and sexual encounters are seen as matters

individuals generally keep private; however, the transformation of intimate connection on digital

platforms such as dating apps has created a new playing field when regarding privatization and

publicity of mate seeking (Hobbs et al., 2017). Given the ambiguity with the incorporation of the

dating apps' public facing profiles and the intimacy of mate selection, I used a coding system for

participants' identities as the safe and comfortable way to share participants' experiences without

the assumption they wish to share their identities because they have a dating app profile that

shares their name and refined personal information.

My primary goal for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of first FtF dating

experiences with those who had heavily filtered their profile photos. I understand the necessity to

recognize the uniqueness associated with every person's emotional response and difference in

attractive preference within these phenomena without judging, labeling, or bias. All data and

interviews were viewed equally for themes to encourage the richness and diversity of experience

into the interview data, but also with the priority of answering the main research question.

<div align="center">Issues of Trustworthiness</div>

Trustworthiness was confirmed once dependability, credibility, and confirmability were

proven to be present and carried out in the methodological design of the study. Topic specificity

and inductive reasoning are definitive qualities to qualitative research as they prioritize meaning

formulation by the participants. To eliminate any reactivity I enacted all the elements of

trustworthiness as there are assumptions present in qualitative research that all participants are

articulate, truthful, and transparent in how they communicate their experiences. I made every effort to accurately present the findings with the contextual accounts from the collected qualitative data. Details of the study's procedures were provided to participants, and the results demonstrated the realistic experiences of the participants to the best of my knowledge. I considered transferability, dependability, and confirmability as essential in the process of this research to nullify challenges of credibility.

Credibility

Credibility is largely connected throughout the process of research as credibility refers to internal validity, which in turn, has connections to the data and instrumentation in qualitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Using the research question as instrumentation, I created a capacity to extract essential information while the data collection plan contributes to the validity of the research. Credibility is firmly related to dependability and confirmability as the study's data results were obtained from the participants' experiences rather than researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Further, the data and results fully represent the participants' points of view through correct interpretation after thoroughly reviewing the recordings and transcriptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Therefore, I built credibility through prolonging engagement and time investment as key strategies. I asked each of my participants if they would like to review their recordings for accuracy as member checking is a great technique to build credibility (Saldaña, 2021). The participants did not wish to partake in member checking, but I maintained transparency with participants from the pre-data to post-data collection. The construction of participant engagement within the context of the progressing research is pivotal for

trustworthiness and repour. I maintained contact with participants throughout the research process and openly answered any questions or clarifications needed in a timely and respectful manner. Strategies such as a familiarity with the context, lasting engagement, trust building, and persistent observation were all key factors for credibility.

Transferability

The research design offers structure for transferability in how measurements are used, the duration of the research, procedures, how participants are obtained, and how the data was analyzed. Through the thematic analysis of interviews, I confirmed common themes amongst interviews to generalize findings based on the richness of their descriptions of their dates and their shared affect associated with their experiences. To have thoughtful provocation based on the participants' descriptions of their experiences and behavior I had to ensure proper context. The external validity was proved through detailed interpretations and transcribed interviews as I coded and categorized the qualitative data into themes. The data translation could be repeated for transferability in future studies to assist in deepening the understanding of the context of this research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability plays a role in credibility and trustworthiness as there needs to be reasonable explanations and interpretation for the methodology of the study. Dependability represents the stability of results over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this case, phenomenology was the best approach as there is an allowance for the participants' accounts and impressions to be the primary source of data. Therefore, asking the participants questions about

their dating experiences and knowing they have experienced the phenomena grants insight to their thoughts and feelings. Having appropriate questions geared toward the phenomena of study means the data collected was persistent with the accounts and explanations for their dating experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The accuracy was confirmed by the multiple reviews of recordings and transcripts.

Confirmability

Confirmability requires consistent self-reflection as well as reflexive practices. Confirmability was fully accomplished once saturation in the data is achieved. Researcher bias was addressed and avoided through transparency with the participants through open communication (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Saldaña, 2021). A key strategy was transparently expressing the steps in the research with participants from start to finish as the recorded documentation served as evidence of the research path from development to results. This revealed the results are based on the data and not bias.

Ethical Considerations in Research

The American Psychological Association (APA) requires any student, or professional working in the field of psychology to follow ethical guidelines and take precautions when working with participants. I maintained informed consent and confidentiality to participants throughout the study to minimize any risk, ensure statements were accurately analyzed, and establish a rapport between researcher and participant (American Psychological Association, 2020). Obtaining approval from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was confirmed

before contact any participants for the study was made to certify I incorporated all the necessary ethical procedures.

Ethical Concerns Regarding Recruitment

I utilized a randomized sampling strategy to increase the likelihood of unbiased participant recruitment. The recruitment flyer was created with unbiased language in alignment with the blueprint for ethically appropriate language required by the APA Publication Manual (American Psychological Association, 2020). There were no vulnerability concerns for the recruitment process as the participant qualifications did not fall under the IRB classification as a vulnerable population (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2012).

Informed consent. Each participant agreed to the informed consent form on the SurveyMonkey before completing the prescreen questions. Participant rights and all the detailed information associated with the study such as goals, data collection techniques, time allotted for interviews, confidentiality statements, and how to opt out of the study were shared during the consent to ensure transparency of the research process. The informed consent form included COVID-19 protocol as reasoning for the lack of in-person conversation. The informed consent form was available through the SurveyMonkey link on the Facebook group recruitment flyer. The informed consent form provided a brief description of the study and participant rights. Once the participants completed the consent form and the prescreen questions they were contacted via the email they provided on the SurveyMonkey. Their interview was scheduled based on their availability should they meet the requirements for study.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality means only authorized individuals have access to protected participant information and data (Surmiak, 2018). Therefore, I was the only person who had access to the participants was my dissertation committee and I to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality of experiences and identity for the study. I assured confidentiality through using code names such as P1 or P2 granted the participants anonymity to share their thoughts and feelings freely without fear of judgement during publication of the research findings (Lahman et al., 2015). As the sole researcher, only I have their names and contact information stored to safeguard their confidentiality. All the information and data collected is protected on a password protected laptop and cloud.

Ethical Concerns During Data Collection Processes

Recordings make the inclusion of quality into studies possible through critical reflexivity, unbiased listening, and subjectivity (Kennedy, 2013). I identified limitations, assumptions, and contradictions by replaying the interview recordings. With qualitative interviews, there must be an acknowledgment the answers being provided by the participants are their perspectives and personal experiences. Subject matter and topics can be sensitive and invoke subjects' vulnerabilities, therefore limitations on studying sensitive subject matter can be met with distrust, contradictions, and hollow content (Camic et al., 2003).

I had an awareness when discussing vulnerable subject matter such as seeking intimate partners and self-presentation. In addition, I conducted interviews with the upmost respect and inclusion to create a space for those who might be physically, or mentally disabled. Using Zoom eliminated any physical barriers participants could have.

I assessed privacy risks and included potential privacy risks into the consent form and with the study flyer for potential participants to read. I provided privacy by conducting the interviews in a closed and private space over Zoom with no else present in the apartment to limit the interviews being overheard or observed. The participants were encouraged to complete the consent form and prescreen in a private environment to mitigate privacy risks and maintain confidentiality prior to the study. In addition, participants were encouraged to have their Zoom interviews in a private setting to avoid any invasions of privacy during the data collection process.

I created pseudonyms as an alternative to participants' names to maintain identity protection and confidentiality. Pseudonyms maintain anonymity and confidentiality while allowing participants to share their personal experiences (Lahman et al., 2015). Participants were given simple pseudonyms such as P1 for participant 1, with each following participant given a number chronologically based on when their interview falls in relation to the other participants (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Using the small number of eight participants kept the interviews significant in their meaning and consistent in design to have a successful qualitative study (Bryman, 2012; Hennink et al., 2020).

Treatment of Data

To further proceed with the ethical standards for research conduct, all the data gathered during the research process was safe guarded (APA, 2020). I have a 2020 MacBook Pro with a fingerprint scanner for log in protection as well as the new Apple M1 chip that adds data protection, data encryption, and system integrity to keep out any malware that could diminish the

MacBook Pro's integrity. I downloaded NVivo Transcription and NVivo 12 onto my laptop to collect all the transcribed interviews, memos, notes, and reflective journal entries which are critical to the phenomenological approach.

The digital recordings were saved as MP4 files in a secure folder on the MacBook Pro laptop. The Mac OS X only allows updates and other downloads authorized by Apple to enter the MacBook Pro, offering extra protection against malware and viruses. In addition, the digital recordings of every interview are saved onto an external hard drive specifically for the data in this study. The hard drive, notes, consent forms, and supplementary documents are stored in a locked fireproof safe in my home. The data will be destroyed after the required five-year period. The data is saved into an encrypted file in the Apple cloud which I purchased 2GB extra storage space for. The cloud and computer files will be destroyed after five years as well.

Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on a first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. In Chapter 3, I defined the concepts of study and details pertaining to the phenomena. I reviewed the research questions and the rationale for the study has been given. My role as the researcher included considerations of bias and avenues to resist any biases making their way into the study. The methodology has been reviewed to include details on participant selection, instrumentation, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations throughout the process. I addressed issues of trustworthiness and credibility to reduce potential forms of biases and researcher influence that could have negatively

impact the data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 will be the detailed analysis of all the data collected during the study. Evidence of trustworthiness, the setting, participant demographics, and findings are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to find a better understanding of the experiences of male Tinder users who have gone on first FtF dates with women who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. I structured the interview questions to gather information on the participants' first impressions and personal experiences on first FtF dates after connecting through Tinder; feelings associated with deception; first FtF date affect; types of appearance discrepancies from filters; links between dating apps and social media; commonality filters; and prescreening strategies to avoid matches with filtered photos.

The emotions and experiences of male Tinder users were recorded during the interviews to show the power of their reflections (Moustakas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The source of the data was the semistructured interviews with eight male Tinder users which addressed the primary research question. The participants I chose for the study met the parameters provided in the prescreen survey and were explained the ethics and protocol of the study when they gave their consent to participate. The interviews with male Tinder users who had first FtF dating with women who had heavily filtered their online visual self-presentation were recorded over the period of December 2021 to February 2022.

Research Question

I used the thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews to develop in-depth insights of first FtF dates with women who had heavily filtered their online appearance through the

narratives and lived experiences of male Tinder users. I asked participants to describe their lived

experiences and reflections on their Tinder first FtF dates with women who had discrepancies in

online to offline appearance caused by AR photograph filter usage. I guided the data collection

and analysis based on the singular research question and nine interview questions: What is the

experience of male Tinder users when they engage in a first FtF date with a woman who has

heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation using AR technology?

Chapter 4 had emergent categories and themes associated with influences and uses of

social media with that of dating apps, Tinder users question the authenticity of people's self-

presentation on dating apps, and having interpersonal chemistry is the highest contributing factor

to continuing a date and pursuing dates further than the first date. Category 1 was the association

of social media and dating apps with the commonality of filter usage on visual self-presentation,

how competitiveness amongst users creates pressure by users to appear desirable, and how

Tinder users adopt screening methods such as video chat or Facetime to avoid FtF dates with

matches that have appearance discrepancies and prove authenticity. The second category was

interpersonal chemistry. Interpersonal chemistry is the instant connection that appears when

meeting a person for the first time (Campbell et al., 2018). The interpersonal chemistry category

shows how participants value attraction and experience attraction as well as how they value

authenticity in visual self-presentation and the affectual reactions to the emergence of a lack of

authenticity on a first FtF date when there is a realization of appearance discrepancies were all

considered. The last category was authenticity and a need for authenticity in dating. Feelings of

disappointment and deception in addition to participants avoiding wanting to have their time

wasted by going on a first FtF date with someone who heavily filtered their visual self-presentation with AR technologies and appears unattractive in person was revealed by the participants.

There were three categories and six themes of this study. In Chapter 4 I provide information regarding the management of researcher bias, demographics, data collection procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of the study. The end of Chapter 4 is a summary of the data, conclusion, and transition into the results provided in Chapter 5.

Setting

As mentioned in Chapter 3, negative bias is a byproduct of experiences and personal perceptions of a subject. Qualitative methodology in the study provides a guide for a collaborative relationship between researcher and participant to construct appropriate meaning and comprehension of the phenomena of study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Weller et al., 2018). I had to remain objective and aware of potential biases that could negatively impact the study. I have some biases toward the usage of AR filtering technologies and appearance discrepancies in dating environments that required constant acknowledgement for effective management of negative bias during the study.

I was previously on dating apps and possess insider knowledge that aided me in the research process. I had previously experienced the phenomena of study and was consciously aware of my bias during the research process. I asked probing questions during the interviews for clarification of words and context. I transcribed all the interviews verbatim to ensure my voice would not be present in the data. Acknowledging potential biases minimized bias influence by

refraining my opinions on the subject during the interview as well as the analytic processes. I proactively engaged in reflexivity by taking notes and adhering to the data analysis plan to keep a structured interview and data process throughout the study.

I adhered to the dissertation committee and IRB approved interview questions and probing questions. The data and results collected from the study reflected the realities and experiences of the participants with high ethical qualitative standards in accordance with those approved specifications. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place virtually over Zoom. The semistructured interview protocol was designed to engage each participant during the interview to have a space to freely share their experiences and views on their first FtF dates without any interruptions. There were no organizational or personal conditions that influenced the participants or their experience during the duration of the study which could have influenced the interpretation of the results of this study.

Demographics

I interviewed eight heterosexual men who had experienced the phenomena of at least one first FtF date with a woman who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. The consent form and prescreen clearly stated participants must be at least 18 years of age and only engaged in dating women above the age of 18. This was specified to limit the demographic age of the study to only allow heterosexual male users above the age of 18 to participate and include experiences about women over the age of 18. I did not collect demographic data on race and ethnicity for this study.

Data Collection

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on December 13, 2021. The IRB approval number is approval number is #12-13-21-0600592. The recruitment for this study started on December 14, 2021, I completed all the interviews by February 2, 2022. I completed the data collection by using the participants' responses to the qualitative interview questions and plan detailed in Chapter 3.

I purposely selected eight male Tinder users to participate in qualitative one-on-one interviews regarding their perceptions and experiences. The informed consent and prescreen survey process was completed through SurveyMonkey to determine participant eligibility for the study. Participants consented to the study by reading the consent form and clicking the "Agree" button on the SurveyMonkey to move forward to the prescreen questions. All the participants in the study completed the prescreen questions to confirm having previously experienced the phenomena of study.

Data Collection Description

I conducted and recorded each interview using Zoom in a private environment to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Before and after the interviews, I provided participants with the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and verbalize any concerns about participating in the study process. I communicated with participants about having open communication during the study, and asked permission to contact them individually if they should want to review their transcripts. All the participants vocally affirmed they did not wish to review their transcripts, so

member checking did not take place as anticipated. There were no unusual circumstances during the data collection process.

I told the participants the study results would be available on the Tinder Facebook groups where the participation flyer was posted. I analyzed each transcript from the eight participant interviews for potential themes as each transcription was completed after each interview. My goal was to describe detailed, rich, and complex qualitative data involving participants' perspectives, ideas, and experiences that were communicated. The interview transcripts served as the primary data source as reflections of the participants' recollections of experiences, emotions, personal stories, and behaviors while experiencing first FtF dates with women who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology.

I gathered qualitative data using semistructured and open-ended interview questions for participants' recollections of their first FtF dating experiences. Before the beginning of each virtual interview, I explained to each participant how the interview was voluntary, they could exit the study at any time, assured their confidentiality, allowed them to ask questions, and reviewed the procedures. Each participant had one interview, and each interview lasted about 15 to 20 minutes.

Data Collection Tracking Research Log and Reflective Journal

I categorized and used the results from the transcripts to create themes which became the basis for the transcribed data and notes. As a tool for questioning, observing, and critiquing, my researcher's log contained meeting dates and notes. I transferred all the research to my laptop that is password, fingerprint, and malware protected. I stored the external hard drive with the

data, research logs, journal, and other research documents in a fire-resistant lockbox at my house. I will destroy the external hard drive 5 years after the study's approval.

Data Analysis

I interviewed the participants to capture the phenomena of study and identify relevance, understanding, and meaning from their lived experiences on first FtF dates with women who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technology. Data immersion occurred naturally during the interview process, as the data only consisted of lived experiences as defined by the participants and was boosted by probing questions. The participants' files do not contain personal identifiers. I redacted any statements made by the participants that could be used to identify any of the individual participants to reaffirm confidentiality.

I analyzed data based on the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method outlined by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) then finished with thematic analysis using NVivo 12. I used a qualitative-idiographic approach to analyze each interview for its uniqueness before comparing transcripts for common themes across interviews (see Noon, 2018). All the participants experienced the phenomena of study, but I realized all the experiences expressed in the interviews were unique. I took research notes in my research journal during the interviews to record and eliminate any bias that emerged, observation, and other perceptions. After each interview, I relistened to the recordings and reflected to add more notes for each session as a continuous process.

The use of NVivo Transcription was an added-on but necessary feature with the purchase of NVivo 12 for thematic analysis. I originally had planned to use Microsoft Word dictate during the interviews to start the transcriptions; however, the feature stopped working in the middle of the first interview, so I opted to use NVivo Transcription to generate the interview transcripts. The mp4 Zoom audio recordings were uploaded one-by-one after each interview to NVivo Transcription to be formatted and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. I reviewed the interview transcripts for accuracy by following along with the audio recordings. I omitted filler words such as "um" and "like" from the original transcripts as they were not necessary and made the transcripts more coherent. For accuracy, I listened to the audio Zoom recordings to match the words and timing with each of the transcripts.

Data saturation was achieved when the information provided by the participants became redundant without new information emerging (Nigar, 2020). I met data saturation by the sixth participant. However, I had scheduled the last two interviews by the time data saturation was reached, so the last two interviews served as further confirmation of data saturation. While I read through the transcripts, the coding helped to organize the information for themes once all the interviews were transcribed. I also added any journal notes from the interview into the notes section of NVivo 12 to refer to during coding and thematic analysis. I repeated this process multiple times with each transcription and audio recording to accurately understand the participants' meanings for phenomenological inquiry.

Generating Codes and Themes

The codes within a study operate as the hermeneutic aspect of the participant's narratives and meanings (Nigar, 2020). I assigned each transcript with initial codes and organized the codes in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on NVivo 12. I chose thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns with the data generated from the qualitative interviews in accordance to Saldaña (2015), then themes emerged from the groupings of the transcript codes for categorization.

I listened to each audio recording and carefully read through each transcript three times. There were thematic categories and specific codes from each interview derived from the research commentary and qualitative data. The codes generated the categories as the recurring patterns served as a method of thematic analysis through the familiarization with the qualitative data, initial codes, inquiring and reviewing themes, and defining themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I organized and processed the collected data using the 6-stage Saldaña coding process. Then, I started determining which codes were relevant to the research question that could be potential themes. The themes were categorized together in accordance with their conceptual correspondence (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

I addressed the research question through the categories of social media, interpersonal chemistry, and authenticity which were present in all the participants' interviews. The codes' redundancy across the interview transcripts generated the themes across the study. I broadened initial codes that were similar in meaning into categories such as social media influences as the participants reflected, "everyone filters," "some people are just trying to get followers," "filtering

out the filters." In addition, participants mentioned social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok and their relationship to the digital connectedness of everyday life.

The interpersonal chemistry category was the initial attraction and personality qualities that create romantic chemistry and grow attraction that impacts first impressions on first dates. Comments such as, "it depends on if they seem like they have a good personality and how bad of a discrepancy there is," "what makes it successful and you have good chemistry," "it's not really something they can explain or quantify, it's just a visceral reaction that you get when you see that person."

Authenticity was a common category as, "It's hard to find authentic right off the bat these days," "they're taking the parts of themselves that they don't like and changing it to look better online yet showing up in person and being completely different and not expecting you to notice?" These categories were built off the participants' experiences in response to the interview questions and in the nature of the data. Brief Description of Themes

Filter Out the Filters

This theme refers to the prescreening techniques associated with participants trying to discern the level of filtering a date's photos are before a FtF date. This is used as a tactic to avoid dates that are unattractive or have filtered their photos to create a large appearance discrepancy.

Filtering is Expected

Social media apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook have options where users can alter their photos using AR filtering technologies before uploading online. Given the easy

access to filters, users engage in filtering most if not all their photos before uploading to social media. These filtered photos are also used for dating app profile photos such as Tinder.

Online Competition and Social Pressure

The competition to appear desirable is on dating apps and social media. The pressure to appear attractive and desirable leads to matches by Tinder users swiping right, but also leads to likes on photos posted on social media.

Multiple Types of Deception in Online Photos

Filters are not the only form of photograph manipulation. Carefully angled photos are articulated to show only the most attractive physical attributes of dating app users. In addition to users manipulating their photograph angles, users upload older photos from when they feel they looked most attractive.

Negative Affect with First Impressions

Feelings of disappointment is linked to being let down by a person's physical appearance when meeting for the first time in person. This is due to the discrepancies from online to offline and a waste of time.

Chemistry and Attraction are Important

The participants remarked that you can still find someone attractive despite having appearance discrepancies from filters. The attraction can be immediate or grow through redeeming qualities of values and personality.

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases recorded in this study. Discrepant cases are accepted as outliers within a study as they are understood to be collected data that is not congruent with the study's themes (Landrum & Garza, 2015). As data saturation occurred by the sixth participant with no outlier data. Therefore, the study did not present discrepant cases.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To adhere with the criteria mentioned in Chapter 3, there was strict compliance and checkups on the research data. The evidence of trustworthiness involved credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I used methods to ensure trustworthiness such as reflexivity, truthful interpretations, comprehensive data analysis, insightful observation, participant quotations, and comprehensive interviewing.

Credibility

Credibility is firmly related to dependability and confirmability as the study's results should be the data obtained from the participants' experiences rather than researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). To build credibility, prolonging engagement and time investment proved to be good strategies. I analyzed the research as I went through the research process. Strategies such as a familiarity with the context, lasting engagement, trust building, and persistent observation are all key factors for credibility.

Transferability

Eight participants formed the research sample to create the participant research pool. Although the sample size seemed small, data saturation was reached by participant six which

coincides with Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) claim that interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) data saturation can reached with three to six participants and is necessary for transferability. To attain transferability in the study, I ensured the data gathered from the interviews was based on the participants behavior and comprehensive experiences, and not my own. These data came in the form of the participants' dating experiences, perceptions, stories, and examples, which confirmed the generalization necessary for data to be collected and analyzed. I made sure each narrated theme was supported with an authentic account from participants and followed the data collection and analysis plans from Chapter 3 to maintain replicable structure for future studies.

Dependability

During the interviews, I took notes to in my research journal to record immediate thoughts, participant distractions such as their phone, and other observations. I enhanced the dependability by listening to the audio recordings three times to continue adding to my insights from each interview. The interview data was stored as a universal serial bus (USB) drive in a lockbox which included the interview transcripts, audio recordings, and reflexive journal notes.

Confirmability

The process to ensure confirmability required me to avoid any bias and maintaining neutrality through reflexivity (Patton, 2015). Any preconceived ideas about the experiences and behaviors associated with the phenomena and participants were avoided. Having an open mind during interviews allowed the researcher to listen, comprehend, and learn from the participants' interviews. I asked probing questions to participants to further examine details from the

participants to make sure the interview questions are answered thoroughly with understanding. The researcher notes provided insights and clarity to findings in my reflexive journal. I provided confirmability by offering quotations from the interviews, explanations, and descriptions in the data analysis. The further descriptions and explanations provided more relevancy and sufficiency for the data analysis stage.

Results

The qualitative phenomenological design supported advancing a deeper understanding of male Tinder users lived experiences. Through the data collection and analysis of this design, I listened to the interviews where participants discussed their first impressions on first dates, social media influences on dating app visual self-presentation, interpersonal chemistry and its importance when building a connection, presenting yourself in an authentic way, and affectual impact of misrepresentation. One overarching research question was aligned with the research problem and nine open-ended interview questions were used in the interview protocol to create the study's data. The research question was: What is the experience of male Tinder users when they engage in a first FtF date with a woman who has heavily filtered her online visual self-presentation using AR technology?

The participants answered the nine open-ended interview questions in alignment with the interview protocol to include the follow-up questions. This qualitative phenomenological study revealed the lived narratives and perspectives regarding first FtF dates with women who had significantly altered their Tinder profile photos using AR filtering technology. This revelation

was discerned through data analysis where categories, themes, and patterns emerged from the raw data collected in semistructured Zoom interviews.

The open coding in qualitative analysis can be inductive in the early stages when contemplating possible patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2015). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method is using a set of data to find repeated patterns for meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There were three categories and six themes that surfaced in this study, and these themes were analyzed in accordance with the overarching research question.

Themes from Collected Data

The themes that emerged during the data analysis in accordance with the research questions are presented below. These themes were substantiated with quotes from the participants that were collected during the interview process. The themes of this study emerged from codes, phrases, and words that were common across interviews. There were six themes that emerged.

(1) Filtering out the filters. This theme refers to the prescreening techniques associated with participants trying to discern the level of filtering a matches' photos have before a FtF date. This is used as a tactic to avoid dates that are unattractive or have filtered their photos to create a large appearance discrepancy. In addition, the screening tactics happen across social media platforms. The participants mentioned using multiple social media platforms and video chat to not only observe more photos than their matches' Tinder profile provides, but also see what kind of person their matches are before they decide to go on a first FtF date.

Participant 5 mentioned friending matches on social media to filter out their photos and who they are as a person as,

> I'll stalk their social media, especially if they have their social media listed on their dating app profile just to try and see the type of people they hang out with, their hobbies, how they spend their free time, etcetera.

Participant 3 stated

> It's a sad thing, dating now, because you literally have to feel like you're in the FBI looking at this person because it's hard to see. I started looking people up on various social media sites that I'm supposed to go on a date with because I was getting so many people who had filtered their pictures. But that doesn't even really help that much because they are filtered on social media too.

(2) Filtering is expected. All the participants discussed how filtering is expected. The participants added they recognize their date's profile photos will be filtered, and there will usually be a difference in appearance, but the degree to which their dates used filters to change their physical appearance is unknown until they meet in person. The ties that dating apps have to social media is through the formation of their profile. When Participant 2 was asked about the frequency of Tinder dates using filters he stated, "All of them. Pretty much all of them have a filter, but, you know, sometimes they don't look worse, necessarily in person, they just don't look like that monotone is kind of form of beauty." The profile photos are often transitioned from their social media account to form their Tinder profile, so the same filtered photos on social media are common and are expected to transition in the profile photos.

Participant 6 claimed

> For a first date, if you kind of have to search for them in the crowd, it can be a little awkward. It's not because they were completely different, but they look like a better version of themselves online.

(3) Online competition and social pressure. The competition to appear desirable is on dating apps and social media. The participants commented about the competition aspect of dating apps in conjunction with the literature review in Chapter 2. Participant 5 stated that, "I don't think it's just filtering your actual image. It's filtering your whole life."

The competition to appear attractive on social media is extremely high and AR has been known to increase the societal perfectionism that was already present (Yoke et al., 2019). Participant 1 claimed, "There's a lot of gamesmanship to it." The pressure to appear attractive and desirable leads to matches through Tinder users swiping right, but also leads to misrepresentation if users filter too heavily to appear more attractive and desirable (Hitsch et al. 2010). The social pressure and the competition to appear attractive, desirable, and an optimal version of yourself online can be seen as a driver for filter usage. Participant 8 stated, "It's just a look that isn't usually attainable in real life, but you're forced to compare instead of just seeing someone who looks fire in real life to begin with."

Participant 2 mentioned the competition on social media and dating apps and further explained

> Yeah, I mean, there's so many people who think this way and there are a lot of really attractive people on dating apps and you're all trying to get each other's attention, so it gets really competitive. Yeah, so it's like, you know, with your photos, you want to be

your most attractive self that you can. So, I guess that's why people are using the filters

more.

(4) Multiple types of deception in online photos. Filters aren't the only form of photograph

manipulation. Users also use photograph angles to appear thinner or show only their attractive

attributes. People also use older photos to appear younger and more attractive.

Participant 1 stated

But I have gone out and either someone used older pictures, or some filters and they were

a little I mean, it was obviously the same person, but it was them maybe 30, 40, 50

pounds ago or something different, or they're just look slightly different because the

filters can hide quite a bit.

(5) Negative affect of first impressions. Participant 4 commented, "It's hard to find authentic

right off the bat these days." Feelings of disappointment is linked to being let down by a person's

physical appearance when meeting for the first time in person. This is due to the discrepancies

from online to offline and a waste of time. Participant 7 stated, "When a person filters too much

then my first impression of them is changes and it's hard to be redeemed in a positive way."

Participant 5 stated

A lot of times I won't even waste my time on the first date, let alone asking them on the

second date because I'll explain to them, they didn't represent themselves correctly, and it's

bothersome, and I don't really care to get to know them. And that might seem too direct for some

people, and I have had women get offended by it.

(6) Chemistry and attraction are important. Participant 6 commented, "I would like to find someone who looks like they do in their photos and then also has a good personality." Participants commented on how attraction is extremely important when on a first date. Some of the participants found personality to be redeeming in when their dates had appearance discrepancies and that attraction is part of chemistry, but there needs to be a mixture of attraction and personality to make a date successful. Participant 3 stated

"And it's really important to me when I first meet somebody on a date and we're making those first impressions that I do look at them and feel that spark from an initial attraction."

Participant 4 stated

> The girls that are going to get the second and the third dates are going to be the ones that are hot and look like themselves and represent themselves online in a way that makes you attracted to them.
>
> Data collection was accomplished by using the interview protocol as semistructured

questions were grounded in the conceptual framework of this study. There were no discrepant cases and nonconfirming data in this study. The interview protocol for this study was used to gain rich, deeper, and detailed understanding of male Tinder users first FtF date women who had heavily filtered their profile pictures using AR technology.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the recruitment, demographic information, data collection procedures, details of how the study was conducted, which included how the presentation of the research question, managing researcher biases, the demographics of participants, the categories

and themes, the theoretical framework, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary. My goal for pursuing this research was attained through semistructured interviews with eight participants. I interpreted the data using open coding analysis which showed three categories and six themes that were generalized from the participants' insights. The categories are (1) Social media influences (2) Authenticity (3) Interpersonal chemistry. The six themes that emerged are (1) Filtering out the filters (2) Filtering is expected (3) Online competition and social pressure (4) Multiple types of deception in online photos (5) Negative affect on first impressions (6) Chemistry and attraction are important. The discussion, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of male Tinder users who went on first face-to-face dates with women who had heavily filtered their online visual self-presentation using AR smartphone technology. The experiences of the eight participants described how photograph filters relate to appearance discrepancies and the participants' affectual responses to the realization their Tinder date's appearance has discrepancies on first FtF dates. Current and future Tinder users need to manage their visual self-presentations as reflections of their actual self and FtF encounters to avoid deceptive behaviors and self-sabotage, to try methods to prescreen dates through videoconferencing or social media, and to gain positive dating outcomes and relationship building through authentic connections. I accomplished the completion of this study by developing an understanding of how male Tinder users perceive their experiences, how these experiences affected their dating perceptions, and their first impressions on FtF dates.

For the remainder of Chapter 5, I will discuss the study's findings to support the material provided in Chapter 2, recommendations for further research, limitations of the study, implications for social change, and the conclusion of the study. The results of this research study show six themes: filtering out the filters, filtering is expected, online competition and social pressure, multiple types of deception in online photos, negative affect of first impressions, and chemistry and attraction are important.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I will explain the ways my findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend existing knowledge by comparing the findings of this study with the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. I conducted a literature review to have contextual information for better understanding of first impressions on first FtF Tinder dates when their date had heavily filtered their visual self-presentation in profile photos. The gap in the literature prompted the inclusion of AR filtering methods to have nuanced research that keeps up with growing photo smartphone technologies. The findings of this study illustrate male Tinder users reported adverse reactions on first FtF dates with women who had heavily filtered their profile photos.

Filtering Out the Filters

Gibbs et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the uncertainty online dating users encounter once there they match. To curve feelings of uncertainty, users *google* (i.e., electronically search) their matches to verify identity and appearance. However, this process only verifies a person is who they claim to be. Many dating app users use their pre-existing photos on social media for their dating app profile, so any exaggeration in self-presentation could still go undetected until their first FtF date, or if they prescreen their matches.

Antheunis et al. (2020) recommended video chatting (e.g., FaceTime, videoconferencing) as beneficial in developing a more realistic perception and expectation of matches before meeting FtF. Without using a screening tool such as videoconferencing, the modality switch from online to offline entails the first FtF date as the only initial attractiveness and desirability assessment outside of the dating app.

In accordance with Antheunis et al. (2020), five of the participants in this study commented that friending matches on other social media platforms and/or videoconferencing enabled them to gain a better assessment of their matches' authenticity of visual self-presentation. Using videoconferencing as a screening tool to assess physical and social attraction in potential dates before meeting FtF can be a helpful strategy for avoiding first dates with someone misrepresenting themselves online.

As discussed in Chapter 2, expectation disconfirmation theory in relation to online dating posits users will experience higher levels of dissatisfaction if their matches do not appear in person as a reflection of their online visual self-representation once they meet. The prescreen process Tinder daters use to filter through their dates' filtered social media and dating app content is to avoid disappointment and women with appearance discrepancies. Participant 3 stated "You kind of learn to filter out the filtering."

Participant 8 commented

> Some people do surprise you, but those are diamonds. Usually, it's like a knock off version, so it's either a little disappointing, or you keep your expectations so low that you're happy if they resemble their gram (Instagram) pics enough to be enticing.

Given the commonality of filter usage, videoconferencing and using social platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram (e.g., the gram, IG), and TikTok, has become a way of verifying realistic and ideal expectations of matches. This could potentially play a vital role as a filtering screening tool before first FtF dates (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2017). Videoconferencing can prevent the disappointment felt on first FtF dates by being an additional

process to verify a match's attractiveness, likeness to their online self-presentation, photos, and chemistry.

Filters are Expected

The frequency, lack of cost, and availability for image editing on a smartphone has created a digital culture shift where filtering or taking a photo to the so-called lab has become not only normalized but expected (Barker, 2020). Rettberg (2014) noted filters as enhancing everyday lives and experiences, but the filtering process on social media is as repetitive as photo sharing, creating a commonality in American society where filtering photos on social media is expected. Self-edited, augmented, or filtered photos are all interchangeable terms that are common visual self-presentation on social media (Rajanala et al., 2018; Steiner, 2017; Ward, 2017). This study confirms the filtered visual self-presentation transfers to dating apps based on the participants' experiences.

In accordance with Chapter 2, scholars have published on the expectation of filtered online photos, but filtering technologies are consistently evolving and so should the literature to include augmented reality technology. The physical manipulations specifically from AR technology was mentioned by all the participants. People are not simply changing the colors on their photos, but they are filtering facial attributes using built-in smartphone technology and downloaded apps for easy access to photo editing prior to uploading photos to social media. Participant 4 referring to social media and dating profiles, stated that

When I see some girl online, every single girl has got at least one or two filters on her

pictures, whether it's to change the lighting or you change your face. Everybody my age,

> everybody knows that you present yourself online in your best way that you possibly
>
> can…

Impression management and self-presentation follow Goffman's self-presentation theory that people present themselves in the most attractive way possible (Blackwell et al., 2015; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The participants acknowledged the commonality of filter usage and prescreening as a preventative measure taken to avoid first FtF dates with women who heavily filter their online self-presentations. Specifically, participants commented on the commonality of deceptive and inaccurate visual self-presentations.

Participant 8 commented on the difference between meeting someone in person for the first time versus on a dating app

> All of their faces are smooth with perfect make up on social and when you meet up their
>
> faces aren't the same. The filters make them thinner and better looking. It's just a look
>
> that isn't usually attainable in real life, but you're forced to compare instead of just seeing
>
> someone who looks beautiful in real life to begin with.

Filtering technology on smartphones created a reachable beauty standard that was previously only available to celebrities and professionals and is now available to any smartphone user (Barker, 2020). On social media, people have control over their self-presentations and form impressions based on how they want others to view them which means manipulation is a useful tool on social media as well as dating apps (Ward, 2017). Filters have become expected as the standard of attractiveness in online environments has increased from people deleting their flaws and increasing their desirable assets (Barker, 2020).

Hogan (2010) said dating app users continue their digital performances after matching to keep engagement via CMC, then move to meet in person. Users utilize the time between matching and meeting in person to envision who they want to chat with and meet FtF while having the power to consistently modify their visual self-presentation to accommodate their changing desires and matches. The fluidity of self-identity and online self-presentation affords people the ability to constantly change how they look and want to be perceived. The combination of the promotion of idealized, imagined, and ideational projections of self through photos through the simple availability of AR filtering technology has made people in online environments compete for likes and attention that is now normalized (Djonov, 2012). Chae (2017) conducted interviews to access the reasoning behind filtered self-presenters editing their photographs for social media and found participants edited their selfies to mimic their personal ideation of flawless or ideal self-appear as their natural self. This study found similar findings on dating apps through the participant interviews and found AR filtering technology is specifically expected online.

Online Competition and Social Pressure

Filters that look natural or look as though a user is not using a filter incentivize users who consistently use filters to look closer to heteronormative beauty standards, supporting Rettberg's (2014) example (Chae, 2017). The AR facial recognition software on smartphones has the competence to use interactive AR filters and digital effects that manipulate the user's real-time facial features (Chae, 2017). In turn, AR has been known to increase the richness and perfectionism in social media apps compared to those social media apps that do not offer AR

technology (Yoke et al., 2019). The expectation and commonality of AR filter usage on both social media and dating apps has increased the social pressure and competition to appear attractive online by increasing perfectionism in visual self-presentation.

Six of the participants remarked on the competitive nature on dating apps to appear attractive and desirable. What men value most is the attractiveness of their potential dating app matches through their profile photos and will contact women based on the scale of what they find personally attractive (Hitsch et al., 2010). This finding coincides with some of the initial findings in Chapter 2, that within popular culture, user competition has prevalence on both social media and dating apps. On social media, users visually self-present with photos and maintain impression management based on the positive feedback and number of likes received (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). When a person finds a photo on social media to have positive attributes through beauty, humor, or empathy, then they click the heart icon to like the photo. Likes serve as positive feedback and approval across social media platforms (Bell et al., 2018). Tinder users visually self-present on the dating app with the same logic they self-present with on social media and to gain matches as a form of evaluation. Further, users post photos to show parts of themselves they choose to expose to other users as favorable to form a high level of desirability in hopes of attracting matches (Ward, 2017).

The competition this creates amongst people transfers into social media and dating apps users. How people evaluate others, themselves, and the world is a result of advancing social technologies such as social media and dating apps. Rettberg (2014) uses the example of Instagram influencers trying to mimic fashion models in their self-presentation to explain how

filtering is a conglomeration of the technological, cultural and/or cognitive abilities to seem societally desirable.

Relationshopping described profiles as a catalogue where dating users are selling themselves as products to potential matches, to gain the most sought-after matches, and enhance their appearance so to appear as their most marketable self in a competitive environment. The users are encouraged to browse all their Tinder matches and choose those they find most enticing for FtF dates. Despite the large number of users on Tinder, the competition is high. Thus, it is not surprising that online daters show their most attractive image(s) of themselves as strategically controlling their profile representation as their most desirable and idealized selves, or they will get fewer matches, resulting in fewer dates.

Tinder and other dating app users are experiencing a gap in idealized self from actual self, producing appearance discrepancies, and deception due to the manner which users are self-presenting online (Guadagno et al., 2012). Dating app users create and change their profile photos to the point their profiles become disingenuous and not fully authentic (Peng, 2020; Toma and Hancock, 2010). The higher the competition in a specific environment, the more the competitive environment makes people engage in deceptive self-presentation (Dawson & de Meza, 2018). The self-presentation deception is apparent with first FtF dates when the projection of idealized physical self does not match a Tinder user's offline appearance.

Multiple Types of Deception in Online Photos

The participant interviews reflected the desire to attract potential matches can make a Tinder user actively engage in manipulative strategies from the competition to appear more

attractive (Peng, 2020). Kolesnyk et al (2021) found there are higher deceptive self-presentations online than in person self-presentation and behavior. In addition, Guadagno et al (2012) claimed the amplified photos and reduced cues on Tinder bolster deception which can support the participants' comments about deceptive strategies to appear more attractive.

People using online dating apps adopt manipulation strategies with their visual self-presentation to appear more attractive (Peng, 2020). The participants did not care whether the deception in appearance was intentional, unintentional, or calculated; but what did matter were the affectual responses of the participants as appearance discrepancies altered their first impressions and initial attraction regardless of whether their dates' appearance was unattractive or simply different than expected.

The participants commented that filtering is expected across dating apps and social media, but they added many Tinder and social media users include outdated photographs where they appeared as a younger and more athletic version of themselves. In addition, many manipulated camera angles to appear thinner or focus only on their most attractive features. I found AR filtered profile photos were usually accompanied by other deceptive tactics such as these examples given by the participants.

Before filtering and AR technologies were created, Ellison et al (2012) and Toma and Hancock (2010) found high usage in old photographs by users showing their younger selves in personal peak physical shape, while their current appearance did not coincide with their visual self-presentation. Therefore, people still use previous photo manipulation tactics to appear more attractive as well as utilizing nuanced technologies for their selective self-presentation or

misrepresentation (Ellison et al., 2012; Toma & Hancock, 2010). The interviews confirmed Tinder users accentuated and deceived physical characteristics for their top self-selected profile photographs (Wotipka & High, 2016).

Guadagno et al (2012) claimed in addition to amplifying visual self-presentation, reduced cues in an online dating environment tend to bolster deceptive self-presentation. The need for social acceptance, to seem more attractive, and changeable dating goals (i.e., a date, sex, attention, and/or relationship) were all factors in deceptive self-presentation. The results concluded that purposeful misrepresentation occurs when dating app users are trying to seem desirable to woo an attractive match to achieve their dating goals (Guadagno et al., 2012)

Negative Affect of First Impressions

Most of the self-presentation and impression management in an online dating environment is to take advantage of positive pre-date impression formation (Blackwell et al., 2015). The process of meeting on Tinder, then moving to FtF dates means users are faced with two different first impressions: online then offline (Toma & D'Angelo, 2017). Negative appearance discrepancies are often the first notable part of impression formation when meeting FtF for the first time (Zytko et al., 2020). This is problematic as appearance discrepancies have been previously linked to lack of authenticity and manipulation (Cunningham et al., 1999; Guadagno et al., 2012; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Zeelenberg, 2000).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of self-presentation success matters when evaluating or being evaluated by a date (Gibbs et al., 2006). Self-presentation success is measured by personal dating goals (e.g., relationship, marriage, etc.). The results of Peng (2020)

coincide with the participants' experiences in this study that attractiveness and desirability are more important than authenticity. Disappointment and feeling their time was wasted were the two most common emotional reactions participants revealed about their first impressions on FtF Tinder dates.

The participants who mentioned they were seeking relationships were the participants who were more considerate toward their dates who filtered their visual self-presentation. They mentioned feelings of disappointment when seeing their date's features were not as expected, but if the women were still attractive, despite looking different than their photos, then they would continue the date if her demeanor seemed likeable.

The participants who were seeking casual relationships or hook ups tended to be harsher in their first FtF date evaluation of attractiveness. More than half of the participants commented if their Tinder match showed up to their first FtF date and was unattractive, then the date was a waste of time. Some participants mentioned leaving the date if the appearance discrepancy was too severe and the person was not someone, they found attractive. If their Tinder date did not appear the same as their Tinder profile photos, the negative contradiction in appearance resulted in a negative first impression and lowered initial attraction on the first FtF date, but attractive women were given the benefit of the doubt.

Chemistry and Attraction are Important

Mutual, sexual, and physical attraction were discussed in Chapter 2, but they all connect to interpersonal chemistry. The unanimous point all the participants raised was the importance of feeling physical attraction on their dates as people choose to pursue relationships with those, they

find attractive (Luo & Zhang, 2009). Mutual attraction is the main component of the dating app swipe logic. Two people must chose each other to match. Sometimes attraction can be instant, but for others attraction grows with time.

Attraction and chemistry go hand in hand while dating. Eastwick et al (2011) said attractiveness can prove to be a more essential factor than education, personality, and intelligence. Ranzini and Lutz (2017) wrote the ideology of mutual attraction is the capabilities to find romantic, sexual, or platonic connections on Tinder which coincides with the concept of having interpersonal chemistry as a category for this study. Chemistry and attraction are important and interpersonal chemistry incorporates multiple types of attraction and chemistry to have an openness in concepts of attraction.

In accordance with previous research, all the participants believed that attraction is important in first in person impressions and dating. However, many the participants mentioned there must be a mixture of physical attraction and personality malleability with their own romantic preferences to pursue a date further. Luo and Zhang (2009) claimed people chose to pursue relationships with those that are most attractive to them as physical appearance dominates mating and dating decisions. However, heavily filtering profile photos did not equate to Tinder dates being deemed unattractive despite not looking the same online versus in person.

Participant 1 stated

If there's a discrepancy, but like I said, they're still really attractive. You know, I might talk to them about that, tease them about them a little bit in the profile. But like in the conversations going well, it's certain to continue things.

Participant 2 stated

I guess a successful date, is when I find them really attractive and I just want to, you

know, see more of them. And if anything, it is somebody who's chill, and would be fun

to hang out with more…

Individuals evaluate prospective partners using additional characteristics in alignment

with their evaluations which include qualities such as physical and sexual attraction and

personality (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Interpersonal chemistry requires attraction and

personality. Because filtering is expected, interpersonal chemistry works in the date's favor who

filtered their photos if they have a good personality and are still attractive without the filters.

Limitations of the Study

Given the phenomenological and qualitative nature of the study, I believe this study

appeared to provide genuine experiences. But self-reported data can affect the accuracy of the

results with issues such as bias. While the phenomenological, qualitative approach produced

nuanced and rich narratives, I relied solely on self-report as the main form of data collection. The

participants' experiences and input on their Tinder dates are fully subjective as the levels of

attractiveness, discrepancy, and desirability were all subjective in accordance with the

participants' reflections.

I had only eight participants. The small population of the study could negatively impact

the generalizability of the study. In addition, I did not collect any demographic information over

the course of the study, so there could be gender, cultural, or racial variations in results.

The parameters I created served as a strict limitation of study. I set the parameter for participant recruitment and population for heterosexual male Tinder users. The exclusion of women and LGBTQIA provided a limitation with a lack of gender and sexual diversity, but I did this on purpose for future studies. The inclusion of sexual diversity would most likely alter contexts and results of this study. In addition, many people use more than one dating app. Many LGBTQIA use Grindr which is a dating app specifically for gay, bi, trans, and queer people (Anzani et al., 2018). I created a limitation by only using Tinder in this study. Based on the type of people that manly use Tinder verses other dating apps, for greater generalizability, the study should incorporate more than one dating app.

I handled the issue of transferability by detailing the procedural account of this study to safeguard those grounded decisions concluded from the results of this study. I provided detailed accounts of the recruitment process, consent, prescreening, participants, interviews, data transcriptions, all data recording procedures, and data analysis as further mitigating efforts. Future researchers will be able to use this same methodology in different dating app settings from the methodology and detailed procedures I followed.

Recommendations for Future Research

My first recommendation is to rectify the limitation of study based on the exclusion of women and LGBTQIA. I purposely set the parameters to only include heterosexual men to conduct future studies on the gender and sexuality differences with going on first FtF dates with dating app users who had heavily filtered their profile photos using AR technology. One study

should be replicated with only heterosexual women, then another for LGBTQIA. I would compare the results to find differing motivations, conceptualizations, and affectual responses.

The second recommendation is that I encourage future researchers to replicate this study using a quantitative research approach in a similar context. I believe the quantitative methodology would allow hypotheses to be tested within a numerical, correlational, and experimental study. The quantitative methodology would have a larger participant pool and demographic data.

My third recommendation is for future research to fully explore the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on dating. Over half of the participants commented on the COVID-19 pandemic impacting how they dated, isolation, and being responsible for their shift into online dating. Future research could provide more insight into this dating environment during the severest portion of the pandemic, the year 2020, - and how the dating landscape had been impacted.

Lastly, future research on AR filtering technologies and visual self-presentation across social platforms would be beneficial in evaluating why people filter and the growth of the technology. Flavián et al., (2021) recommended viewing social media and dating apps as AR because of the augmented visual self-presentation is a nuanced pathway for research. Kolesnyk et al., (2021) noted future research implications as the full prevalence of filters and cause are largely unknown across social media platforms. Future research on this topic could fill gaps in knowledge and maintain nuance within empirical research by keeping up with technological advancements such as AR technology on smartphones and how society is impacted.

Implications for Social Change

I found in this study, a failure to accurately visually self-present creates negative first impressions and emotions on first FtF dates. The potential to help current and future Tinder users recognize and manage their visual self-presentations as reflections of their actual self and FtF encounters would help them avoid deceptive behaviors and self-sabotage to gain positive dating experiences. Toma and Hancock (2010) found dating app users have the greatest success presenting themselves in a positive manner throughout the first impressions process but must do so in a truthful way. Learning to balance the need to appear desirable and the need to be authentic would promote positive relationship building and dating outcomes by acknowledging and limiting filtered profile photos.

The findings of this research study provide meaningful information to women over filtering their photos, misrepresenting themselves on dating apps, and having little success on first dates from online to offline appearance discrepancy. Women who use dating apps can better understand the experiences of male Tinder users and may implement more authentic visual self-presentation techniques on dating apps to avoid negative dating consequences. This study is significant for social change because having better understanding of the dating experiences of men and implementation of authentic visual self-presentation, female Tinder users can use the findings of this research study to accurately present themselves how they appear in real life to create better dating success on in person dates and ultimately advance relationship building with someone they have interpersonal chemistry with.

Conclusion

The challenges AR filtering technologies have caused with online visual self-presentation have plagued dating apps and social media with a lack of authenticity and misrepresentation. Despite users engaging in prescreening strategies before first FtF dates, people are still showing up to dates and having appearance discrepancies from over filtering their photos, using old photos, and distorting camera angles for photos.

This research study went to the heart of the nuanced AR filtering technology phenomena in dating environments. The findings of this research show there are still challenges with visual self-presentation, authenticity, online competition and social pressure, technologies creating deception and negative affect, and the commonality of filtering technologies being used to alter online photos. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of male Tinder users who had gone on first FtF dates with women who had significantly altered their dating app profile photos using AR filtering technologies to provide information to Tinder users to improve their self-presentations and dating outcomes.

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Appendix A: Tinder Study Flyer for Facebook Recruitment
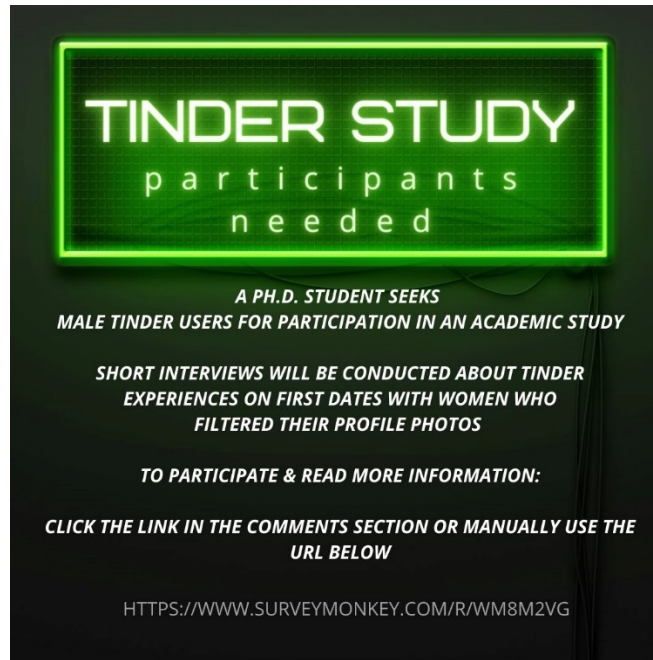
Accompanied post below the flyer for the Facebook post:

Click Here to Access the Study's Consent Form & Prescreen

This is a confidential study. To limit privacy risks, please complete the consent form and prescreen questions in an environment where your information will not be observed by other parties while completing the survey. All experiences and names in the study will be kept confidential.

This study as the potential to help current and future Tinder users recognize and manage their profile photos as reflections of their actual self and real-life appearance to avoid deceptive behaviors and self-sabotage. This information will hopefully work to gain more positive dating experiences and relationship building.

Please feel free to share this post.

Appendix B: Participant Prescreen on Survey Monkey

PRESCREEN QUESTIONS

This study is looking at the experiences of male Tinder users when they engage in a first face-to-face encounter with a woman who has heavily filtered her profile photos. This study will only be using participants who have experienced dates with women who are the same person as they appear online but have heavily altered their appearance using smartphone filters. This study hopes to help current and future Tinder users to gain positive dating experiences and relationship building by recognizing and managing their profile photos to be befitting their actual self and real-life appearance. This will help to avoid deceptive behaviors and self-sabotage by over filtering photos on dating apps. *Catfishing* will not be included in the study (see the definition below).

1. Have you been on one or more dates with a woman you met on Tinder that appeared different in-person than online?

2. Was this facial appearance discrepancy caused by using filtering, altering, and/or augmenting profile photos (i.e., Snapchat filters, Facetune, or other facial filtering technologies)?
3. Was the female Tinder date more attractive in their online self-presentation (profile photos)?

DEFINITIONS

Catfishing. Catfishing is a term often used in popular culture. Catfishing is the process of a user seducing someone by means of a fictional online persona. Catfishing involves someone pretending to be a completely different person online than who they are in real life.

Filtering. For this study, we define filtering as altering, and/or augmenting Tinder profile photos using smartphone technologies such as Snapchat, Instagram, VSCO lenses, TikTok, and Facetune filters that distort natural features. We are excluding filters that add unnatural physical features to a user's face (i.e., dog ears, flower crowns, devil horns, etc.).

Appendix C: Interview Questions

A) Prior to your Tinder dates, what are the expectations?
B) What are you looking to achieve with dating on apps?
C) What discrepancies did you notice in your dates' appearance(s)? (e.g., altered facial features)
D) What is the frequency that a Tinder date has exaggerated/filtered photographs?
E) Does discrepancy in appearance lead to change in how you view your date?
F) What is regarded as a successful dating app (Tinder) date?
G) At what point does the filtering become deception?
H) How large of a discrepancy in appearance makes you not pursue a second date?
I) Did you Facetime before your date?