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**ONLINE DATING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
PERSONA PROFILE**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES	6
LIST OF FIGURES	7
ABSTRACT	8
OPSOMMING	9
CHAPTER 1	10
1. Introduction.....	10
2. A description of online dating relationships.....	11
2.1 Background.....	11
2.2 Prevalence of online relationships.....	15
2.3 Nature of online relationships	16
2.4 Online relationship formation	17
2.4.1 <i>Theoretical perspectives</i>	17
2.4.2 <i>Motivation for online relationship formation</i>	20
2.4.3 <i>Relationship maintenance</i>	21
2.4.4 <i>Success of online relationships</i>	21
3. The online dating persona.....	23
3.1 Characteristics	24
3.1.1 <i>Anonymity</i>	24
3.1.2 <i>Self-disclosure</i>	25
3.1.3 <i>Attraction</i>	29
3.1.4 <i>Proximity</i>	30
3.2 Online dating persona profile.....	31
3.2.1 <i>Socio-demographic description</i>	32
3.2.2 <i>Personality description</i>	33
3.2.3 <i>Emotional intelligence</i>	36
3.2.4 <i>Life effectiveness</i>	38
4. Concluding remarks	40
CHAPTER 2	43



1. Introduction.....	43
2. Research objective.....	43
2.1 Research goals.....	43
3. Research design.....	44
4. Sampling.....	45
4.1 Selection criteria.....	45
4.2 Realised sample.....	45
5. Procedure.....	46
6. Instruments.....	46
6.1 A description of online dating relationships.....	47
6.2 Socio-demographical description.....	48
6.3 Saucier's 40 Mini-marker set.....	48
6.4 The 33-item emotional intelligence scale.....	49
6.5 The Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ).....	51
7. Statistical Analysis.....	52
CHAPTER 3.....	53
1. Introduction.....	53
2. A description of online dating relationships.....	53
3. Online dating persona profile.....	57
3.1 Socio-demographic description.....	58
3.2 Personality description.....	59
3.3 Emotional intelligence.....	63
3.4 Life effectiveness.....	68
CHAPTER 4.....	72
1. Introduction.....	72
2. Goals of this study.....	72
3. Methodology.....	72
4. Discussion.....	73
5. Conclusion.....	78
6. Future Research and limitations.....	79



REFERENCES	81
APPENDICES	92
Appendix i: Online dating questionnaire.....	92
Appendix ii: Informed consent from DatingBuzz	100
Appendix iii: Advertisement for research participation	104
Appendix iv: Electronic mail to participants.....	105

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Socio-demographic description of online dating participants
Table 2:	Big Five personality traits
Table 3:	Models pertaining to emotional intelligence
Table 4:	The models of psychological wellbeing and life effectiveness
Table 5:	Test items measuring level of attraction
Table 6:	Factors and items of Saucier's 40 Mini-marker set
Table 7:	Neill's LEQ-H 8 point Likert-type scale
Table 8:	Percentage of total sample reporting on each category of online relationships
Table 9:	Percentage of total sample reporting on motivation for online relationship formation
Table 10:	Number of participants agreeing with statement expressed as percentage for level of attraction
Table 11:	Statistical characteristics of descriptive items of level of attraction
Table 12:	Rotated factor structure of perceived level of attraction
Table 13:	Statistical characteristics of factors of perceived level of attraction
Table 14:	Differences in the perceived level of attraction
Table 15:	Number of participants reporting on demographic description expressed as percentage
Table 16:	Number of participants reporting traits as accurate or inaccurate expressed in percentage
Table 17:	Statistical characteristics of factors for 40 Mini-marker set
Table 18:	Intercorrelations between the dimensions of the 40 Mini-marker set
Table 19:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor I Extraversion
Table 20:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor II Agreeableness

Table 21:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor III Conscientiousness
Table 22:	Number of participants agreeing with the statement expressed in percentage for 33-item EIS measure
Table 23:	Statistical characteristics of factors from the 33-item EIS measure
Table 24:	Intercorrelations between the scales of the 33-item EIS measure
Table 25:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the appraisal of emotion from the 33-item EIS measure
Table 26:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the regulation of emotion from the 33-item EIS measure
Table 27:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the utilisation of emotion from the 33-item EIS measure
Table 28:	Number of participants agreeing with the statement expressed in percentage for the LEQ – H
Table 29:	Statistical characteristics of the LEQ – H factors
Table 30:	Intercorrelations between the factors of the LEQ – H
Table 31:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Social competence (LEQ – H)
Table 32:	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Social competence (LEQ – H)

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Perception of successful online relationships model (Gibbs et al., 2006)

ABSTRACT

Little is known about online dating relationships, or the online dating persona that intentionally forms and develops interpersonal relationships through online matchmaking services. Online dating relationships are becoming more prevalent, especially in South Africa. However, research studies focussing on online dating relationships seems to be lacking. Hence, a scientific psychological enquiry into online dating relationships, and more specifically the online dating persona, is indicated. Focussing on 100 online dating members from DatingBuzz, this comparative research study investigated online dating relationships and the online dating persona. More specifically, this study examined, first, online dating relationships specifically within the South African context compared to online dating relationships internationally; and second, the South African online dating persona. This was done by creating a profile focussing on (a) sociodemographic characteristics, (b) personality characteristics, (c) level of emotional intelligence and, (d) life effectiveness skills. A quasi-comparative research design was used with a non-probability, non-random sample of convenience. The realised sample for this research was 100 participants (N=100), with the total sample (n=100) reporting on online dating relationships and 67 participants (n=67) reporting on the online dating persona. The online matchmaking service, DatingBuzz, consented to post an advertisement for research participation. Using an Internet-based questionnaire with preset response categories in a Likert type format, data collection continued consecutively for six months in 2005. Instruments included (a) a set of self-constructed questions assessing online dating relationships and the sociodemographic characteristics of the online dating persona, (b) Sauciers' 40 Mini-marker Set to examine the Big Five personality traits, (c) the 33-item EIS scale to investigate emotional intelligence and, (d) the LEQ – H to examine life effectiveness skills. The data were statistically analysed using the SAS programme and included descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of gender, age, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type. Consistent with previous findings, this research study found comparisons between South African and international online dating relationships. Looking at the online dating persona profile, significant findings pertaining to sociodemographic traits, Big Five personality traits, level of emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills. These preliminary findings are discussed in relations to methodological and research issues.

OPSOMMING

Min is bekend oor aanlyn afsprake en verhoudinge, insluitend die aanlyn afspraak persona wat gebruik maak van aanlyn afspraak dienste om verhoudings te insieer. Ten spyte daarvan dat aanlyn verhoudinge al hoe meer voorkom, veral in Suid Afrika, is daar 'n tekort aan navorsing in die veld. Dus is 'n wetenskaplike ondersoek vannuit 'n sielkundige oogpunt aangedui. Die doel van die studie is om aanlyn afsprake en verhoudinge asook die aanlyn afspraak persona te beskryf deur die laasgenoemde te vergelyk met die internasionale aanlyn afspraak verhoudinge en persona, ten einde 'n profiel saam te stel. Die aanlyn persona profiel beskryf onder andere (a) sosio-demografiese eienskappe, (b) persoonlikheidseienskappe, (c) emosionele intelligensie en (d) lewens-effektiwiteit vaardighede. Hierdie vergelykende studie maak gebruik van 100 lede van die aanlynafspraakdiens DatingBuzz. Die navorsingsontwerp is kwasi-vergelykend van aard met 'n nie-waarskynlikheids steekproeftrekking en dus 'n nie-ewekansige steekproef. Van die totale steekproef van 100 deelnemers ($N = 100$), het die total steekproef oor aanlyn afspraak verhoudinge gerapporteer en 67 deelnemers ($n = 67$) oor die aanlyn afspraak persona. Die aanlynafspraakdiens DatingBuzz het 'n advertensie vir navorsingsdeelname op hul tuisblad geplaas. Inligting is oor ses maande in 2005 ingesamel deur middel van 'n aanlyn-vraelys met meestal vrae in 'n Likert formaat. Die saamgestelde vraelys bestaan uit vyf afdelings: (a) self-gekonstrueerde vrae oor die sosio-demografiese eienskappe van die aanlyn afspraak persona, (b) self-gekonstrueerde vrae aangaande aanlyn afspraak verhoudinge, (c) Sauciers' 40 Mini-marker Set wat die persoonlikheidseienskappe van die aanlyn afspraak persona ondersoek, (d) die 33-item EIS skaal wat emosionele intelligensie ondersoek, en (e) die LEQ – H wat lewenseffektiwiteit vaardighede van die aanlyn afspraak persona evalueer. Deur gebruik te maak van die SAS program is die ingesamelde inligting statisties geanaliseer. Hierdie analise het beskrywende statistiek ingesluit asook analise van variansie (ANOVA) in terme van veranderlikes soos geslag, ouderdom, aanlyn verhouding status en tipe, en geografiese ligging. Ooreenstemmend met vorige bevindinge het hierdie navorsingsstudie bevind dat Suid-Afrikaanse aanlyn afspraak verhoudinge vergelyk kan word met internasionale aanlyn afspraak verhoudinge. Verder is betekenisvolle bevindinge verkry met verwysing na die Suid-Afrikaanse aanlyn afspraak persona in terme van sosio-demografiese eienskappe, persoonlikheidseienskappe, vlak van emosionele intelligensie en laastens, lewenseffektiwiteit vaardighede. Hierdie voorlopige bevindinge word tesame met metodologiese en navorsings strydpuntebespreek.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

Since the launch of the Internet, communication, interaction and interpersonal relationships have undergone radical changes. Focussing on online dating, this research study aims to explore online dating relationships and the online dating persona profile. Chelune, Robison and Kommor (1984, p. 14) define an intimate relationship as the “relational process in which we come to know the innermost, subjective aspects of another, and are known in a like manner.” Looking at online dating relationships, the focus is on intentional, mediated interpersonal relationship development using computer-mediated communication. Psychological enquiries into a description of both online dating relationships and the online dating persona seem to be in short supply.

The online dating persona profile delineates the collective characteristics of individuals choosing to develop online relationships, and includes sociodemographic, behavioural, affective and cognitive traits. Herein, one needs to consider the online dating persona’s foremost personality traits, level of emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills. The personality traits examined are the Big Five personality traits, namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. Knowledge of these traits may facilitate inferences and predictions about the behaviour of the online dating persona. Emotional intelligence refers to the synthesis of one’s emotional and intellectual functioning that allows people to live more effectively by using emotions to moderate the way they think, act, and analyse and solve problems. Finally, life effectiveness refers to acquired skills necessary to live a positive, content, efficient and successful life.

The focus of this chapter is on the literature pertaining to online relationships and the online dating persona profile. The discussion focuses first on a description of online dating relationships, and second on the online dating persona. In examining online dating relationships or online dating, an examination of the background, prevalence, and nature of online relationships is crucial. In investigating the online dating persona, sociodemographic, behavioural, affective and cognitive descriptions are relevant. Despite the lack of research pertaining to the online dating persona, this discussion cites and evaluates relevant research findings and theoretical suppositions.

2. A Description of Online Dating Relationships

Within the popular press and scholarly literature, online dating is referred to as cyber relationships (Joinson, 2003), online romantic relationships (Anderson, 2005; Bonebrake, 2002; Levine, 2000), digital dating (Merkle & Richardson, 2000) and Internet relationships (McCown, Fischer, Page & Homant, 2001). Other terms include computer-mediated relationships (Scharlott & Christ, 1995; Whitty & Gavin, 2001), Internet dating (Hardey, 2002), online personals and mixed mode relationships (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs, Ellison & Heino, 2006) and personal relationships online (Parks & Floyd, 1996). Looking at the myriad of terms referring to online dating or online relationships, it is fundamental to elucidate and define the latter. Traditional social psychological definitions and interpretations of relationships may contribute to the current understanding of online relationships. Schlenker (1984) believes that the existence of a relationship is a result of the interrelation of identities. More specifically, one develops a specific identity within each relationship with exclusive thought and behavioural patterns, which will, with relationship growth, lead to similarity and closeness.

Contemporary research pertaining to online relationships presents several interpretations of online dating. First, online matchmaking defines both online dating and online dating services (Houran, 2006). Second, online dating pertains to relationships of a romantic or friendship nature formed online by using online communication (Whitty & Gavin, 2002). Third, online relationships refer to relationships initiated and maintained online (Wright, 2004). Fourth, online relationships refer to mixed mode relationships, therefore online relationships develop and migrate to other environments such as the face-to-face environment (Ellison et al., 2006). Taken together, online dating pertains to an intentional, mediated search, meeting and relationship development with a preferred significant other using computer-mediated communication. Having defined online relationships, the focus of the following section is to consider the background of online dating.

2.1 Background

To understand online dating relationships, it is important to contextualise the online dating environment. Henceforth, the discussion will focus on Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The word Internet, also referred to as virtual space and digital space, derives from the words *International network*. It was developed in the 1960s by the United States Department of Defence (Joinson, 2003). Originally, the Internet formed a network of computers, which led to the almost immediate development of a network of people (Joinson, 2003). The significance and use of the Internet at that time was a method for communication confined to governmental organisations and academic institutions (Merkle & Richardson, 2000). Nonetheless, the Internet has showed remarkable technological advancement over the past few decades, distinguishing itself from

traditional communications media such as the radio, telephone, television, and newspapers. Interestingly, some research suggests that the Internet is only effective as a complement to traditional communication media, and is not so far developed as to replace such media (Barnes, 2001; Joinson, 2003; Yum & Hara, 2005), although alternative evidence suggests that this replacement is occurring (Hardey, 2004). This debate remains unresolved.

The Internet has distinctive qualities compared to traditional communication media. The Internet is an information platform and research tool, allows for interpersonal communication and mass media communication (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Barnes, 2001) and transcends the limitations of real life contexts regarding time and space, and cultural, linguistic or controlling boundaries. Furthermore, the Internet transforms social behaviour (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Birnie & Horvath, 2002; Christopherson, in press; Orr, 2004; Tyler, 2002) by permitting relationship formation without the barriers or gating features present in real life (Gibbs et al, 2006) which include physical appearance, shyness and social anxiety (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wallace, 1999). Finally, the Internet offers anyone connected infinite access to others (Gibbs et al., 2006).

Importantly, the online environment supports a social community. Traditionally, a social community refers to a group of people who share the same interests, language, culture and experiences with a common goal. Members interact by communicating mostly in a face-to-face setting where they exchange information and form relationships. Conversely, an online community pertains to the online environment in which members communicate, share experiences and exchange information by means of a mediator, which is developed and maintained to establish mutual trust and intimacy (Gattiker, Perlusz, Bohmann & Sorensen, 2001). As such, online communities are loosely structured online social networks supporting interpersonal relations (Memmi, 2006) and the experience and expression of emotions (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Chenault, 1998; Parks & Floyd, 1996). However, Driskell and Lyon (2002) challenge the legitimacy of an online community, citing the lack of local space, closeness, emotional involvement and psychological attachment. Despite such a claim, the investigations mentioned above have demonstrated the similarities and soundness of social online communities in relation to traditional social communities.

Central to this research is that the Internet supports online relationship formation. With the latest Internet applications, software and hardware such as Multimedia, interactivity, wireless communication and synchronicity, online dating relationship formation seems effortless. Newsgroups, bulletin boards, Internet relay chat, multiuser dungeons (MUDs)¹, and chat rooms (Mantovani, 2001; McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Scharlott & Christ, 1995), to name a few, are examples of the online environments where relationships are formed. These online environments are text-based, allowing Internet users to communicate and share

¹ Multi user dungeons were originally developed for game playing allowing multiple users access

information. To communicate people post messages online, for example in bulletin boards, or send electronic mail in multiuser dungeons, news groups, Internet relay chat and chat rooms.

The various online environments that foster relationship formation deserve closer inspection. One such online environment is the online matchmaking service. Online matchmaking services are mostly bulletin boards, which allow people to meet and communicate assisted by the electronic profile-matching programme. Match.com (<http://www.match.com>), Yahoo personals (<http://personals.yahoo.com/>) and DatingBuzz (www.datingbuzz.co.za) are examples of these online matchmaking services. Match.com and Yahoo personals are regarded as the most popular online dating websites globally (Hitwise, 2006), whilst DatingBuzz is the most popular in South Africa, followed by MSN Match (www.msn.co.za) (Thomas, 2004). To initiate online friendships or romances, people register by creating a unique online profile from a standard template provided. This profile is a textual and visual presentation of oneself. Textual information includes one's demographic attributes, personal information, recreational interests, hobbies, a short narrative of oneself, a complete physical and personality description of oneself and one's desired partner and other information. The individual's visual representation pertains to a photograph of oneself. Subsequently, the electronic profile-matching programme matches the person's profile with other similar profiles according to each one's requirements. Using computer-mediated communication or instant messaging facilities members can communicate with others, although access to these facilities is restricted, and communication is limited to pre-set phrases. Subscribers who pay a subscription fee to the online matchmaking service have unreserved access to communication with others.

In addition to the online dating environment, an understanding of computer-mediated communication (referred to here as online communication) is imperative to grasp online relationship formation. Online communication denotes the exchange of personal and interactive messages asynchronously from networked computers (Hian, Chuan, Trevor & Detenber, 2004). Because of the mediated nature of online relationship formation, one can expect an enquiry into the validity of online communication. For this reason it would be meaningful to examine online communication compared to face-to-face communication in terms of the linguistic and social qualities thereof. The linguistic quality of online communication compares to face-to-face communication (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004) because it is bidirectional, shared, written and takes place in a particular context (Barnes, 2001; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). In 1992 Walther developed the Social Information Processing theory (SIP) aimed at providing a comprehensive account of online communication in terms of online relationship formation (Walther, 1992). Essentially, this theory pertains to online relationship formation because of the exchange of repetitive messages over a period, allowing one to form distinctive impressions, and was thus termed extended time (Walther, 1992). This theory also sheds light on the effectiveness of online communication to promote online relationship formation.

Current research concerning online communication in terms of online relationship formation is encouraging. Online communication has been found to be more effective than traditional media because of visual cues available (Birnie & Horvath, 2002; Walther, 1995), and because it is interpersonal (Barnes, 2001; Birnie & Horvath, 2002; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Sherman, 2001; Walther, 1995) and rich in meaning (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). Furthermore, online communication supports the experience and expression of emotion (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Chenault & May, 1998; Parks & Floyd, 1996), promotes the presentation of the true self (Bargh et al., 2002; Gibbs et al., 2006; Turkle, 1995) and fosters close relationship formation (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Chenault, 1998; McCown et al., 2001; Walther, 1992, 1995).

In addition, online communication demonstrates social qualities (Walther, Anderson & Park, 1994), is task-orientated (Walther et al., 1994) and shares the level of trust, intimacy, closeness and depth reached in face-to-face relationships (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Walther, 1995; Yum & Hara, 2005). Finally, online communication provides men with a greater opportunity to communicate their thoughts and feelings and affords women the opportunity to seek support and agreement for their emotions (Adamse & Motta, 1996). A common thread in the abovementioned findings is the social value of online communication in online relationship formation.

Even though the majority of research findings endorse the comparison of online communication with face-to-face communication in terms of the linguistic features and social qualities, critical reviews are still apparent. Critiques label online communication as hyper-personal (Civin, 2000), and merely a tool used for communication and information gathering (Civin, 2000; Hills & Argyle, 2003; Utz, 2000). Online communication also cultivates traditional forms of victimisation, especially of women, such as intimidation, sexual harassment and stalking. Online victimisation includes such behaviours as obscene online communication and flaming (Jerin & Dolinsky, 2001). Lastly, men predominantly control the Internet, topics of discussion, communication "netiquette" and communication styles (Barnes, 2001; Morahan-Martin, 1998; Soukup, 1999).

Given such criticism, it seems necessary to consider the challenges of online communication regarding online relationship formation. Challenges include the lack of visual and auditory cues (Barnes, 2001; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Sherman, 2001). Also, online messaging takes up to four times longer (Walther, 1995) and is asynchronous (Parks & Floyd, 1996). However, to compensate for these challenges, emoticons and self-photographs are used to express oneself visually (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2006; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther & Bunz, 2005). Furthermore, to ensure online relationship development, migration from the online environment to the face-to-face environment is needed (Parks & Floyd, 1996). More suggested compensation strategies are to increase the regularity and consistency of online communication (Barnes, 2001; Walther, 1992) to at least once a day (Gwinnell, 1998; Walther & Bunz, 2005), to acknowledge the receipt of communication, to accept the responsibility of corresponding promptly,

and straightforwardness (Walther & Bunz, 2005). Evidently, there are a number of compensation strategies available to conquer the challenges of online communication.

It seems clear from the above discussion that the online dating environment presents several possibilities for online relationship formation. Evidently, the online dating environment is similar to the face-to-face environment in terms of space and communication. Although there are challenges to online relationship formation, these challenges can be overcome. Therefore, one can assume an increasing interest in online relationship formation because of the changing lifestyles and technological advances in everyday life, even more so in South Africa as a developing country.

Despite the considerable body of knowledge pertaining to the Internet and online communication, the dearth of psychological and behavioural studies is apparent. Only now, the focus of scientific enquiries is shifting towards an understanding of the psychological and social impact of the Internet (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Wallace, 1999). For instance, the online dating persona is still largely unknown, especially in South Africa. This underscores Wells Brignall III and Van Valey's (2005) appeal to researchers to investigate the demographic description and profile of the Internet user ahead of mass saturation. Prior to an investigation of the online dating persona profile, it is necessary to consider the prevalence and nature of online relationships.

2.2 Prevalence of Online Relationships

From the preceding section, it is clear that online relationship formation is a relative recent addition to the study of relationship formation because of technological advances in the past few decades. The lack of research and knowledge on the prevalence of online dating, especially in South Africa, may result in misconceptions pertaining to online dating. It is therefore of interest from both a social psychological and research standpoint to ascertain the complete magnitude of online relationships.

Misconceptions about online relationships seem to be that online dating is a rare and unfamiliar phenomenon, and that people who form online relationships are less likely to form face-to-face relationships, are shy and socially anxious. Anderson (2005) attributes these misconceptions to the general fear of the unfamiliar and predicts that increased Internet usage will increase the support and acceptance thereof. Nonetheless, a few investigations shed light on these misconceptions. Contrary to popular belief, online dating numbers are increasing (Anderson, 2005; Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996). It is estimated that more than one billion people (1,086,250,903 Internet users) are now using the Internet worldwide, with more than five million (5,100,000) Internet users in South Africa (Christopherson, in press; Internet world stats, 2006).

Thomas (2004) predicts that the numbers of online dating participants in South Africa will grow from 401, 848 in 2006 to 714,818 by the year 2009. Concerning the impact of online dating,

contemporary research shows that those with significant online dating relations are likely to have significant relationships in face-to-face settings as well (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Birnie & Horvath, 2002). Moreover, Ben-Ze'ev (2004) predicts that with the expanding popularity of the Internet, one can expect an inevitable change in social norms and values. Overall, the results of these studies suggest that online dating numbers are rising globally, although it is not destroying traditional social groups, but rather provides equal opportunities for those with lesser social contact.

2.3 Nature of Online Relationships

As noted earlier, conclusions about online relationships in the popular press and scholarly literature are ambiguous. As such, one can expect the same ambiguity pertaining to the nature of online relationships. This section provides a brief outline of the nature of online relationships rather than a comprehensive discussion.

Researchers, theorists and academics are still pondering the nature of online dating. Two opposing schools of thought seem to have emerged: those deeming online relations as superficial, distant, unemotional and unsocial, and others classifying online relations as personal, unconventional, and a new alternative (Parks & Floyd, 1996). For example, online dating has been referred to as an audition for a real date (Barnes, 2001) and a relevant platform for relationship formation, although insubstantial for online relations (Civin, 2000; Hardey, 2002; Hills & Argyle, 2003; Utz, 2000). It is clear that the significance of online relationships is queried rather than the formation of online relationships. Evidence supporting such claims seems marginal. Opposing such claims, some researchers regard online relationships as interpersonal (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Sherman, 2001; Walther, 1995), more significant (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wallace, 1999; Yum & Hara, 2005), exciting (Gwinnell, 1998) and real (Houran, 2006; Houran & Lange, 2004; Yum & Hara, 2005). Furthermore, online relationships are described as solid (Sherman, 2001) in which trust and commitment are commonly shared (Anderson & Emmer-Sommer, 2006; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). Subsequently, one can assume that interpersonal online relationships are interactive and personal relations between two individuals.

Research suggests that online relationships are mostly heterogeneous with a romantic or friendship-like nature (Hardey, 2004; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Whitty & Gavin, 2002; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2002; Yum & Hara, 2005). Furthermore, online relationships typically progress to other environments such as telephone and face-to-face contact (McKenna et al., 2002; Parks et al., 1996; Sveningsson, 2002). More recently, Wright (2004) identified two types of online relationships, namely primarily Internet-based relationships, that is relationships that are initiated in a face-to-face setting and maintained online, and exclusively Internet-based relationships, referring to relationships initiated and maintained entirely online. Online relationships may migrate to other

environments or remain and develop online. This may be an important consideration in investigating the online persona.

Ben-Ze'ev (2004) explains the nature of online relations as contradictory, firstly because of the geographical distance between those involved versus the immediacy of online communication. Secondly, online communication is rich in meaning because of the high level of self-disclosure, but impoverished in terms of a lack of visual cues. Thirdly, despite the higher level of self-disclosure, participants stay anonymous. Fourthly, online relations are emotionally continuous and discontinuous because communication takes place with intervals at any time. Lastly, the intellectual and emotional input by far surpasses the physical effort. In summary, the broad characteristics of online relations include, but are not necessarily limited to, anonymity, self-disclosure and attraction, which include proximity and similarity. An understanding of these characteristics is needed to comprehend the online persona, which follows later.

Because two people disclose and share personal information, build trust and interdependence, and develop emotional closeness prior to physical attraction, these online relationships seem interpersonal. Therefore, in uncovering the online dating persona it is important to consider online relationships, specifically their formation, maintenance and success. Subsequently, the discussion turns its focus to online relationship formation.

2.4 Online Relationship Formation

Ahead of online relationship formation, Adelman and Ahuvia (1991) suggest the completion of three consecutive functions. Firstly, searching entails gathering information about possible matches. Secondly, matching occurs when one determines the compatibility of the possible matches. Thirdly, one initiates communication, thus starting the online relationship (Adelman & Ahuvia, 1991). These three steps outline the process of online relationship initiation and form the basis for its formation. For the purpose of this research, online relationship formation simply implies the process whereby people get to know each another within the online dating environment. The following section entails a review of theoretical perspectives focussing on relationship formation and relevant research findings. Subsequently, the focus of this discussion turns to the motivation for, maintenance and success of online relationship formation. In so doing, a clear framework towards an understanding of the online dating persona may be established.

2.4.1 Theoretical perspectives

Face-to-face relationship formation has received a great deal of attention from theorists and researchers. In contrast, online relationship formation lacks empirical enquiry, with investigations into this field being very new and recent. This section reviews traditional and

contemporary theories pertaining specifically to the formation of interpersonal relationships. In addition, this section examines contemporary research findings pertaining to online relationship formation compared to face-to-face relationships.

To conceptualise the formation of close interpersonal relationships within a face-to-face environment, the approach of Chelune, Robison and Kommor (1984) seems comprehensive. This traditional approach regards close interpersonal relationship formation as a mutual process of development. First, this approach assumes that the increased disclosure of personal information facilitates learning about a significant other. Second, continued interaction permits the mutual sharing of personal information, resulting in an enhanced sense of familiarity between those interacting. Third, the reciprocal interrelation of dependence, support and understanding builds a structure of future dependency. Fourth, with the acceptance and anticipation of the indefinite continuation of the relationship, this structure allows for behaviour alterations and develops to include mutual care, affection and trust (Chelune et al., 1984). This approach assumes the stages of face-to-face relationship formation to be self-disclosure, followed by familiarity, interdependence and closeness. These stages mirror those in the formation of online relationships; however, the developmental sequence differs.

The relational theory of development (Parks, 1997) is relevant in examining the formation of online relationships. Based on traditional social psychological theories pertaining to social relationships such as the social exchange theory and uncertainty reduction theory, Parks (1997) developed the relational theory of development. This theory specifically addresses online relationship formation with the premise that online relationships either grow or deteriorate on a continuum ranging from impersonal to personal dimensions (Parks & Floyd, 1996). Below is a description of each dimension along this continuum (Parks & Floyd, 1996):

- (a) Dimension 1: Interdependence pertains to the mutual influence that increases with relationship growth, thus building a relationship embedded in mutual trust;
- (b) Dimension 2: Breadth explicates the increasing frequency of communication and social interaction;
- (c) Dimension 3: Depth refers to the increasing level of self-disclosure that facilitates familiarity and closeness;
- (d) Dimension 4: Commitment concerns the future predictions regarding the success or failure of the online relationship in accordance with the individuals' goals and attitude;
- (e) Dimension 5: Predictability and understanding pertains to the mutual agreement and understanding of a unique set of rules of preferred, acceptable and desired behaviour and interaction.

- (f) Dimension 6: Code change pertains to the development of a unique set of cultural and linguistic codes, referring to how the individuals express themselves and communicate, for example, with the use of emoticons.
- (g) Dimension 7: Online network convergence refers to the snowball effect of the social circle, whereby the relationship continuously expands to significant others and migrates to other communication channels such as telephonic communication.

Evidently, this theory captures the core features of online relational formation as a progressive process from the initial meeting, to maintenance and termination or migration to other contexts. Several studies findings support the relational theory of development (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Gibbs et al., 2006; Soukup, 1999; Whitty & Gavin, 2001; Wolak et al., 2002; Wright, 2004). The study conducted by Van Rensburg (2001) within the South African context is relevant here. Van Rensburg (2001) investigated online dating with reference to the development level of relationships initiated and maintained online. The surveyed sample involved online dating respondents (N=102), of which 61 were male (n=61) and 41 were female (n=41). Results reveal higher levels of relational formation online as opposed to face-to-face relationships. These findings further support the relational theory of development in that close interpersonal relations do form online.

Chelune et al.'s (1984) traditional conceptualisation of face-to-face interpersonal relationship formation and the relational theory of the development of online relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996) provide an overview that necessitates a more in-depth literature review. Contemporary research findings further explore the distinctive nature of online relationship formation versus face-to-face relationship formation.

Probably the most notable difference between online and face-to-face relationship formation is the developmental order. Online relationships typically develop from a virtual context to a telephonic context, and then possibly a face-to-face context. Face-to-face relationships develop and remain within this context; although the use of communication media such as the telephone and online communication assist in maintaining these relationships (Merkle & Richardson, 2000; Sveningsson, 2002). Secondly, online relationships take longer to develop than face-to-face relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wallace, 1999), possibly because of the mediated nature of online relationships. Research findings further demonstrate that in online relationships, social cues are embedded in text rather than in body language and physical appearance (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Whitty & Gavin, 2001), and therefore gating features such as social anxiety, physical appearance and shyness are less apparent (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; McKenna et al., 2002; Charlott & Christ, 1995). Thirdly, individuals involved in online relationships remain to a certain extent anonymous (Bargh et al., 2002; Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Barnes, 2001; Bonebrake, 2002; McCown et al., 2001; McKenna et al., 2002; Charlott & Christ, 1995; Sveningsson, 2002). Fourthly, self-disclosure precedes attraction in online relational development (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Joinson, 2003; Merkle & Richardson, 2000), unlike in face-to-face relational development. Lastly,

intimacy in face-to-face relationships develops more rapidly and earlier than emotional closeness, whilst online relational formation fosters emotional closeness earlier (Gwinnell, 1998; McKenna et al., 2002; Sveningsson, 2002).

In summary, the relationship formation process in the face-to-face environment and the online environment differs in a number of respects. In face-to-face relationship formation, physical attraction and appearance is important and precedes closeness. Conversely, during the formation of online relationships, self-presentation and online communication forms the basis of attraction and self-disclosure precedes attraction. Even more, emotional closeness seem to develop earlier. Despite these differences, the motives behind the choice to form an online relationship require investigation. An understanding of the motivation for an online relationship formation may contribute to an understanding of the online dating persona. A discussion of the motivations for forming online relationships follows.

2.4.2 Motivation to form an online relationship

An issue that frequently emerges in discussions of online relationships is the individual's motivation to form an online relationship. Documented in the literature are numerous motives for Forming online relationships. This is not surprising given that each individual is unique. It is important that the motive for relationship formation is a voluntary, conscious and realistic decision (Barnes, 2001), rather than idealistic (Houran & Lange, 2004). This discussion differentiates between motives of an interpersonal and intrapersonal nature.

Interpersonal motives for forming online relationships refer to the perceptions and expectations of those dating online. These motives include future expectation of online relationship migration to traditional environments, for example, the face-to-face environment (Ellison et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2006; Walther, 1995). Additional motives include perceived control over the online relationship, the sense of excitement, romantic desire and lack of commitment (Lawson & Leck, 2006). Lastly, Utz (2000) believes that not everyone who communicates online does so with the intent to form online relationships. Instead, she proposes that those who are motivated and hold a positive attitude towards online communication and online relationships will form online relations.

Intrapersonal motives for online relationship formation include the relative anonymity people experience within online relationships (Barnes, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Scharlott & Christ, 1995). Other intrapersonal motives include the growing absence of romantic interpersonal relations formed in the work place, the increasing number and mobility of single individuals, changing lifestyles in terms longer hours spent in the workplace (Brym & Lenton, 2001), the safety that the Internet offers (McKenna & Bargh, 2000) and the lesser degree of stereotype roles present (Lawson & Leck, 2006).

Despite the myriad of motivations mentioned above, central motives that continuously re-emerge are a person's future expectations and the relative anonymity of online relationships. However, both the interpersonal and intrapersonal motives for online relationship formation should be considered because both appear to have a significant effect on the maintenance and success of the online relationship. Thus, one can assume that positive and honest perceptions and expectations may foster successful online relationships whilst negative attitudes and intentions are more likely to result in their failure. The discussion to follow pertains to the maintenance and success of online relationships.

2.4.3 Relationship maintenance

Online relationship maintenance pertains to one's efforts to ensure the continuance of the online relationship. A review of the literature reveals one study that specifically evaluated online relational maintenance (Wright, 2004). Wright states that relationship maintenance strategies generally used in face-to-face and online contexts include a positive orientation and openness. Significantly, in face-to-face environments, people are more likely to use avoidance relationship maintenance strategies whilst in online environments these strategies may cause uncertainty (Wright, 2004). A possible reason for this uncertainty may be the lack of social cues available online. Subsequently, it is likely that frequent communication and open and honest intentions are important in maintaining online relationships.

This is in line with Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's (2006) contention that a satisfactory degree of intimacy, trust and frequent online communication will result in successful maintenance of online relationships. Accordingly, the variables influencing the maintenance of online relationships are honest intentions, a positive attitude, closeness, mutual trust and frequent online communication (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Wright, 2004). It is clear that frequent online communication, positive attitudes and openness are crucial in forming and maintaining online relationships, and seem to predetermine their success or failure. This necessitates an investigation into the determinants of successful online relationships.

2.4.4 Success of online relationships

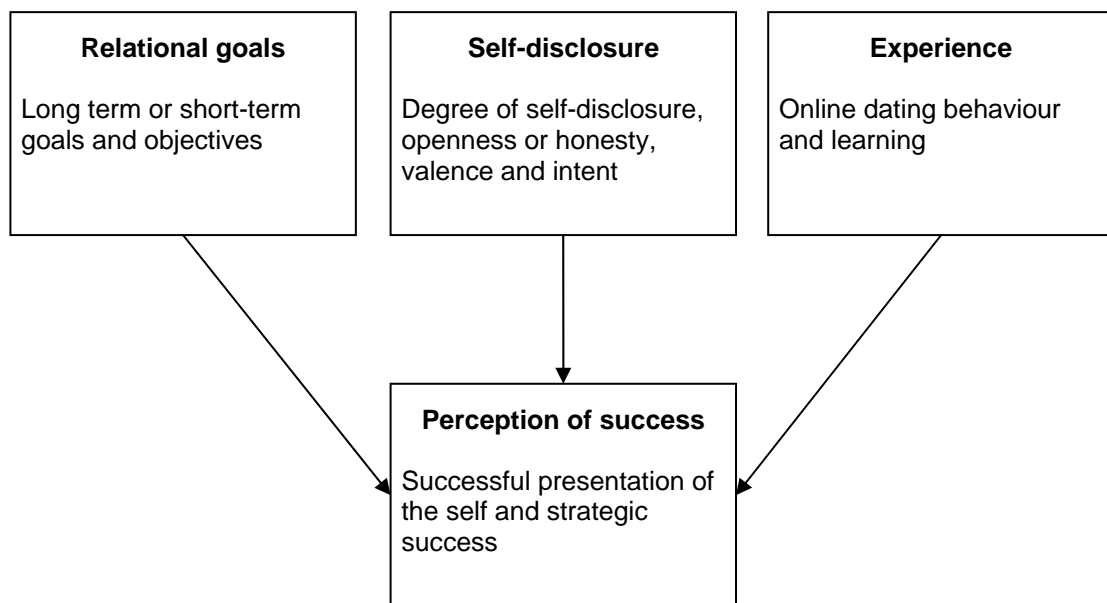
Central to this discussion is the perceived success of interpersonal relationships initiated online. Much debate exists over the long-term success of online relationships, presumably because of the mediated environment of such relationships. Hence, this section aims to encapsulate both traditional and contemporary theoretical models pertaining to the success of relationships, and research findings concerning the success of online relationships.

Erber and Tesser (1994) apply the self-evaluation and maintenance model (SEM) towards an understanding of the initiation, maintenance and termination of face-to-face relationships. This model hypothesises that people continuously evaluate themselves within self-other relationships

through the processes of comparison and reflection. People compare themselves with the exceptional presentation or behaviour of a close person, causing their self-evaluation to decrease and resulting in positive or negative emotions. Reflection enhances people’s self-evaluation, resulting in positive emotions. Subsequently, when people perceive a close person’s exceptional presentation as complementary, the future of the close relationship is secure. If they perceive it as threatening or similar, the future of the close relationship is in jeopardy (Erber & Tesser, 1994). From a social psychological perspective, this model emphasises the self and the nature of the individual’s perceptions of significant others. Evidently, if one’s self-presentation reflects that of a significant other and is perceived to be complementary, the relationship will be successful. However, this model focuses on the face-to-face environment; it is likely that the situation in an online environment will differ

Focussing on people’s expectations and self-presentation, Gibbs et al. (2006) propose a model of perceived success of online relationships in their investigation of online dating relationships that migrate to face-to-face contexts (figure 1 illustrates this model).

Figure 1: Perception of successful online relationships model (Gibbs et al., 2006).



This model proposes that the perceived success of online relationships depends on the successful use of certain self-presentation strategies online. Three interacting processes contribute to the success of an online relationship:

- (a) relationship goals – these goals include growth and relationship migration
- (b) self-disclosure – pertains to the quantity, the positive or negative nature thereof, future intention and honesty in revealing personal information

(c) online dating experience – describes online dating behaviour in terms of the magnitude of relationships initiated online and learning ability (namely, a person's ability to learn from previous experiences and then draw on this information in future online relations)

Thus, successful online relationships that migrate to a face-to-face context may be achieved by fostering long-term goals, deliberately disclosing positive and additional personal information, and learning from previous online dating experiences (Gibbs et al., 2006).

In summary, it is evident that successful relationships form online. Nonetheless, self-presentation and self-evaluation are important aspects to consider when looking at online relationships. However, the mediated nature of online relationships, more specifically the relative anonymity thereof, may obstruct or delay self-presentation and self-other evaluation. In light of this, the model of perceived success seems more comprehensive because this model addresses self-disclosure, perceptions and experiences, and relationship goals. Since the latter aspects are of personal nature, they in turn warrant an investigation into the online dating persona profile.

In conclusion, a comparison of online relationships and dating and face-to-face relationships may not do justice to either of these unique relationship contexts. A more productive route may be to investigate each kind of relationship separately. It seems that the Internet, and particularly online matchmaking services in the form of bulletin boards, are appropriate environments for the development of interpersonal relationships. However, the online dating environment does pose several challenges, such as communicating online, the lack of social cues and the re-presentation of the self. Online dating is not a rare phenomenon, with almost half-a-million South Africans dating online. With the increasing prevalence of online dating, especially in South Africa, theoretical models are necessary to understand the nature of online dating. Current theoretical models generally address online relationship formation in comparison to face-to-face relationships. In addition, there seems to be a lack of research and theory pertaining to the online dating persona. The myriad interpersonal and intrapersonal motives for pursuing online relationships, together with the influence of individuals' interpersonal behaviour on the success of online dating, underscore the need for exploring the online dating persona to promote theoretical advances in our understanding of the phenomenon of online dating.

3. The online Dating Persona

Whilst the preceding discussion focussed on online dating, this section explores the online dating persona, specifically within the South African context. The online dating persona is defined by the sociodemographic, behavioural, affective and cognitive characteristics of individuals choosing to develop online relationships. As mentioned earlier, there is a dearth of literature pertaining to online dating. There is even less information on the online dating persona.

Subsequently, this discussion will focus on the key characteristics of the online dating persona, towards the construction of a profile of the online dating persona.

3.1 Characteristics

This discussion focuses specifically on those sections of the literature that emphasise the characteristics of the online dating persona, such as anonymity, self-disclosure, attraction and proximity. Because of the mediated online environment, the online persona remains relatively anonymous. The online persona is re-presented online and develops a particular online identity, to which others respond. Attraction is a prerequisite for the formation of interpersonal relationships, which includes ample liking, closeness and similarity. Closeness online is achieved through a higher level of self-disclosure.

3.1.1 *Anonymity*

Anonymity refers to the mutual inability of the self and others to identify others or be identified (Christopherson, in press). In addition to the emphasis on self and others, Christopherson (in press) differentiates between technical and social anonymity. Technical anonymity pertains to the removal of any identifying information when communicating with others online, whilst social anonymity concerns the lack of cues in the online environment, which leads to the perception that the self and others are unidentifiable. Theoretically speaking, the social identity model of de-individuation effects theory (SIDE) addresses the way that anonymity online mediates behaviour (the cognitive element), as well as the intentional use of anonymity (the strategic element) (Cheng, Chan & Tong, 2006; Christopherson, in press).

This theory proposes that anonymity online permits neither positive nor negative behaviour; instead, people behave according to the set of rules laid out in the online environment rather than their own personal set of norms and codes (Cheng et al., 2006; Christopherson, in press). This behavioural change may in due course determine the success or failure of the online relationship (Gwinnell, 1998). An issue that frequently emerges in the discussions of anonymity online are the positive and negative effects in terms of behaviour. If people intend to initiate and maintain successful relationships online, then it seems likely that people's behaviour will support their intent. Likewise, a negative intention is likely to evoke negative behaviour. If the expectation is to meet a significant other online, with the goal of possibly establishing a romantic relationship, people are more likely to represent themselves accurately and honestly (Ellison et al., 2006).

Hence, the positive effects of anonymity online are increased self-disclosure (Bargh & McKenna, 2004); the provision of the starting point for developing trust (Hardey, 2002); to enhance

closeness and intimacy (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; McKenna et al., 2002); and to promote openness (Barnes, 2001; Bonebrake, 2002; Sveningsson, 2002; Teich, 2006). Furthermore, anonymity provides a safe context for relationship initiation (Bargh et al., 2002; Barnes, 2001; Bonebrake, 2002; McCown et al., 2001; Scharlott & Christ, 1995; Sveningsson, 2002), and a supportive context without predetermined ideas and expectations (Barnes, 2001; Sveningsson, 2002). Finally, it may provide the motivation for initiating relationships (Barnes, 2001; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Scharlott & Christ, 1995).

In contrast, the negative effects of anonymity are the possibility of deceit, unfaithfulness and misrepresentation. Research studies indicate that multiple dating and infidelity does not evade the online context (Orr, 2004; Teich, 2006). Online infidelity signifies an emotional affair rather than the sexual affairs that occur in face-to-face relationships (Teich, 2006). Misrepresentation refers to untruths about personal information, whether personal or demographic. Researchers agree that misrepresentation mostly includes deceit in terms of demographic characteristics (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Joinson, 2003) and physical attributes (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Several researchers believe that the online context increases the risk of deceit and manipulation (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Joinson, 2003; Reid, 1998; Yum & Hara, 2005).

Although online anonymity is a potential pitfall in online relationships, it may also be liberating. Wallace (1999) maintains that people are generally poor judges of deception, whether it be online or face-to-face. Looking at the online persona, anonymity allows for a feeling of safety and support, enhances closeness and may motivate the formation of online relationships. Conversely, people can easily misrepresent the online persona. This might be tempting in the case of people for whom anonymity is attractive because they are shy, socially anxious or physically unattractive, and can therefore use the online environment to represent themselves differently. This brings the discussion to the next point, self-disclosure.

3.1.2 Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is one of the positive effects of online anonymity. A noticeable distinction between face-to-face relationships and online relationships becomes apparent when one looks at self-disclosure. Derlega's (1984) traditional theoretical perspective delineate self-disclosure in face-to-face relationships as being the mutual learning process between the self and significant other, which progresses with relationship development. More specifically, self-disclosure refers to the intentional decision-making process of disclosing personal information to a selected significant other, including feelings, thoughts and experiences, the extent to which this information is disclosed, and the motivation for doing so (Kleinke, 1986; Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992; Mantovani, 2001).

Self-disclosure in online relationships refers to sharing personal information of the relatively anonymous self with a significant other, using online communication. A noticeable focus of contemporary research findings concerning self-disclosure in online relationships is that the

magnitude and rate of self-disclosure increases in online relationships (Bargh et al., 2002; Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 2002). Besides anonymity, the significance of greater self-disclosure in online relations is also attributed to the asynchronous nature of online communication, the irrelevance of physical appearance and lack of social communication cues present in face-to-face relationships (Ellison et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 2002).

Self-disclosure encompasses four components, which include relational goals, intent, positive or negative orientation, and the degree of openness, thus honesty (Gibbs et al., 2006). Investigations have demonstrated that the deliberate disclosure of positive and additional personal information promotes successful relationships, whilst honesty has no effect (Gibbs et al., 2006). Gibbs et al. (2006) attribute the lack of effect of honesty to the personal qualities perceived to promote online dating success, termed selective self-disclosure. At the same time, the anticipation of a successful close interpersonal relationship results in more honest and open self-disclosure (Ellison et al., 2006). Besides self-disclosure contributing to the success of an online relationship, these components can also lead to the failure of relationships. Risks in self-disclosure include the fear of rejection (Derlega, 1984; Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992; McKenna et al., 2002), a disparity in one's goals and motivations, differing self-concepts and the betrayal of trust as a result of shared information being unequal (Derlega, 1984).

In terms of gender and cultural differences in self-disclosure, Hatfield (1984) argues that men and women share similar levels of self-disclosure, although men disclose less personal information about themselves in informal and social situations. In addition, both men and women are less likely to disclose personal information about themselves to men (Hatfield, 1984). In 2005, a study of 361 American, South Korean and Japanese college students revealed that self-disclosure might enhance trust and reduce uncertainty amongst American college students as opposed to distrust apparent in South Korean and Japanese college students (Yum & Hara, 2005). Yum and Hara (2005) ascribe these findings to the perceived differences in the duration, quality and level of relationship development along with cultural specific definitions and interpretations of self-disclosure.

Overall, the results of the studies mentioned above suggest that online self-disclosure is firstly, an intentional decision; secondly, relative to the anticipated success of online relationships and finally, imperative to the development of intimacy and closeness. Considering the latter, the success of online dating relationships may be predicted by looking at the online persona's positive orientation, intentions, goals and honesty within the online relationship. However, there seem to be a close relationship between self-disclosure, self-presentation and identity development. The latter two concepts are therefore discussed below.

3.1.2.1 Self-presentation

Traditional conceptualisations of self-presentation include the Impression Management Theory developed by Goffman in 1959. Contemporary theoretical views considered in this research are the Social Information Processing Theory developed by Walther in 1992. Prior to discussing self-presentation, it is important to consider traditional and current theories.

Impression formation and management denote the process whereby people make an intentional or an unintentional effort (depending on the particular opportunity) to control how others perceive them (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) describes this process as a person's strategic behaviour aimed at (a) intentionally communicating a certain impression of oneself to another, and (b) unintentionally communicating information about oneself to others. Although this approach provides substantial insight into self-presentation in face-to-face contexts, it would appear to be incomplete with regard to self-presentation in a computer-mediated context. This is because this approach assumes premeditated and unplanned communication specifically in face-to-face relations. Self-presentation in a mediated context occurs through written communication without the visual cues present in face-to-face contexts.

More recently, Walther (1992) explains self-presentation specifically within the online environment, using the Social Information Processing Theory. This approach assumes that because of limited cues online, which are readily available in face-to-face environments, people will make use of any available cue online to form impressions of others (Walther, 1992; Walther & Tidwell, 1995). These limited cues available online include physical appearance and body language (Barnes, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Sherman, 2001; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). The available cues online include the length of time communicators take respond to received communication, how much information is being communicated and the style in which they communicate (Walther, 1992; Walther & Tidwell, 1995). There seems to be support for this approach (Ellison et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2006; Utz, 2000), although it has been posited that the empirical evidence to support this approach to online communication processes is insubstantial (Utz, 2000).

Online self-presentation has only recently caught the attention of scholars, theorists and researchers (Bargh et al., 2002; Ellison et al., 2006; Joinson, 2003; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Utz, 2000; Walther, 1992; Walther & Tidwell, 1995). A noticeable focus of online self-presentation is that a selection of typed words and lifeless photographs creates a presentation of one person to another, and is the exclusive base on which impressions of another person are formed. Online, people form and manage impressions of themselves and others with self-descriptions (Wallace, 1999). These self-descriptions are personal profiles created by individuals in communicating their characteristics, which may include a fictitious name, a photograph, demographic and physical description, and a demographic and physical description of a prospective partner, recreational interests, relationships, lifestyle and future aspirations. As expected, online impression formation is a lengthier process than impression formation in face-to-face contexts (Wallace, 1999).

However, an issue that frequently arises is that of the accuracy of self-presentation online. Research findings pertaining to online misrepresentation specify the foremost characteristics as being demographic characteristics (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Joinson, 2003) and physical attributes (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Conversely, Ellison et al. (2006) argue that self-presentation is mostly accurate and attribute misrepresentation to unintentional changes made to personal profiles because of technical difficulties or inadequate realisation of oneself. There seems to be no universal explanation available for online misrepresentation, although this discrepancy might be due to the mediated nature of online dating.

Finally, online self-presentation seems considerably different from the face-to-face context in terms of the cues and subsequent perceptions formed. Based on the theoretical explanations of Goffman, Walther's model seems to present a significant conceptualisation of self-presentation online. Even though Walther's model originates from the communications paradigm, psychological advances may stem from this model. This model assumes that the depth and breadth of online communication will determine the success of the online relationship. Indeed, rich and extensive online communication may enhance self-presentation and self-disclosure.

The online dating persona's self-presentation denotes the conscious and unconscious disclosure of personal information through online communication and self-photographs. Important here is the perception of the self-presentation. However, the mediated environment of online dating may compromise self-presentation and the perception of another's self-presentation. This also closely ties in with the online persona's intentions and goals of relationship development. Besides online self-presentation, an examination of identity development is needed to comprehend the online dating persona.

3.1.2.2 Identity development

Within the online dating environment, and more specifically within an online dating relationship, the online persona develops and presents a unique identity. The work of Schlenker (1984) sheds light on the complex process of identity development. However, current enquiries into identity development online are in short supply. Nonetheless, this discussion will emphasise research pertaining to the identity development of the online dating persona.

According to Schlenker (1984), the schemata mostly referred to as identity, denote the systematic structure describing a person's unique characteristics, thoughts, feelings and experiences, which are continuously viewed, compared and evaluated in a different way by oneself in comparison to another, and by others in general. People attach a unique meaning to their own schemata and those of another, based on their perceptions and beliefs (Schlenker, 1984).

This approach assumes identity development as an interrelated subconscious process in relation with others, which include people's aspiration towards the acceptance and liking of others, and people's motivation, rooted in their unique characteristics, feelings, perceptions, experiences

and behaviour (Schlenker, 1984). Despite this approach specifically pertaining to face-to-face contexts, it is relevant to theory and research on the online dating context.

Contemporary research findings believe that online relationships facilitate recurrent identity creation and re-creation, resulting in an individual possibly having multiple identities (Joinson, 2003; Reid, 1998; Turkle, 1996), similar to face-to-face contexts (Reid, 1998). This has resulted in a continuing debate concerning the expression of the true self or ideal self. Several research findings suggest that the mediated nature of online dating permits a greater expression of the true self (Bargh et al., 2002; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2006; Joinson, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002; Turkle, 1995).

Despite such empirical research findings, others assume the mediated nature of online dating to distort self-presentation and impression formation (Sherman, 2001), facilitate the development of fantasy selves and limit people's perceptions of one another (Houran, 2006). Nonetheless, the challenge in uncovering the online dating persona does not concern the mediated nature of online dating but rather the presentation of the true self (Ellison et al., 2006). It would seem from traditional conceptualisations that people's identity development is grounded within their motives and liking for another person. It seems that the online dating persona develops a unique identity within each online dating relationship, encouraging the development of multiple identities. Apparently, the online dating persona is an expression and presentation of the real self. Against this backdrop, the discussion will now turn towards attraction.

3.1.3 Attraction

Attraction pertains to the person's desire to approach a significant other with the goal of approval or association (Levine, 2000; Schlenker, 1984). In choosing such a significant other, exceptional qualities such as wealth, physical attractiveness and higher intellectual capabilities are advantageous (Kleinke, 1986; Schlenker, 1984; Wallace, 1999). Traditionally, physical attractiveness was more important, especially for males, in choosing a significant other (Leon, Rotunda, Sutton, & Schlossman, 2003). However, physical appearance is not a determining factor in online relationships (Bonebrake, 2002; Levine, 2000; Mantovani, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Rouse & Haas, 2003; Scharlott & Christ, 1995; Sveningsson, 2002).

Attraction online seems to be determined by people's level of self-disclosure (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Joinson, 2003), the degree of idealisation and expectations (Joinson, 2003; Levine, 2000), perceived visual presentation (Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell, 2001), similarity (Levine, 2000; Utz, 2000), mutual liking, the frequency of communication, and proximity (Levine, 2000). Seemingly, a successful online relationship may develop with the experience of the above-mentioned features of attraction in equilibrium. To elaborate, the mutual establishment of trust and liking are prerequisites for self-disclosure online (McKenna et al., 2002), which in turn determine the level of closeness and intimacy reached within online relationships (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992; McKenna et al., 2002).

However, the emphasis on liking increases online essentially because of the absence of physical appearance cues (McKenna & Bargh, 2000) and the mediated nature of online relationships. Therefore, the desire to be associated with or befriend another is grounded in text and the use of emoticons (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Mantovani, 2001) rather than physical appearance. There is evidence that people are attracted to others that share similar ways of thinking, behaving and interests (Bonebrake, 2002; Levine, 2000; Mantovani, 2001; McKenna et al., 2002; Utz, 2000). Additionally, McKenna and Bargh (2000) believe that it may be easier to find significant others with similar interests, opinions and behaviours online.

In summary, the online persona's level of attraction to another person is defined by their positive aspiration towards the other, the frequent exchange of personal information, the perception that the other is similar to oneself, and the future expectation of a successful online relationship. Finally, the establishment of mutual liking, similarity and trust enhances self-disclosure, which is a prerequisite for developing feelings of closeness. Hence, the focus of the next discussion is closeness or proximity.

3.1.4 Proximity

It is important to consider independently the ambiguous nature of closeness or proximity in online relationships. This is because proximity between those involved in online relationships may signify the physical distance. The physical or spatial distance between those involved in online relationships is greater in comparison with the distance in face-to-face relationships (Sveningsson, 2002). Alternatively, proximity in online relationships may signify the bond or closeness between the individuals involved. Closeness pertains to the manner in which people perceive each other (Erber & Tesser, 1994).

Wallace (1999) considers closeness in online relationships in terms of intersection frequency, purporting that online closeness corroborates with the increasing frequency of online communication. This results in familiarity between online dating participants. Online communication is therefore a strategic process of seductive temptation whereby online dating participants assess and define the online environment to set their goals of achieving a close online relationship (Mantovani, 2001).

Intimacy, sufficiently in equilibrium with passion and commitment, are essential for the development of close romantic relationships (Gwinnell, 1998). Research indicates that intimacy may be the leading component promoting online relationships (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gwinnell, 1998; Hian et al., 2004; Teich, 2006). Intimacy develops earlier in online relationships (Gwinnell, 1998; McKenna et al., 2002; Sveningsson, 2002). Consequently, online relationships are emotionally more intense (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gwinnell, 1998; Teich, 2006). The emotional nature of intimacy, along with the increasing frequency of online communication, facilitates the disclosure of personal information (Gwinnell, 1998).

Despite the intensity of online intimacy, online relationships lack commitment (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Gwinnell, 1998) and passion. This lack may lead to the termination of the relationship (Gwinnell, 1998). The level of commitment within online relationships is determined by the future anticipation of continuation of the relationship, personal accountability, and eagerness to support, dedication and level of identification within the relationship (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992). Finally, proximity pertains to the increasing familiarity within online relationships. This process necessitates a balance of mutual commitment, closeness and passion. Such a balance will result in the migration of the online relationship to other environments, and the pursuit of a successful romantic relationship. As expected, an imbalance of commitment, closeness and passion can result in the failure of the online dating relationship.

In conclusion, it is clear that the characteristics of online dating pertaining to the online persona are progressive and interrelated, which presents a challenge to the creation of an online persona profile. An individual's intent and goals pertaining to that specific online relationship will determine the level of self-disclosure. By choosing to remain relatively anonymous, the development of trust and closeness within the online relationship seems impossible, and dishonesty and deceit pertaining to self-disclosure may jeopardise the success of the relationship. Conversely, openness and a positive outlook cause self-disclosure to increase and relative anonymity to diminish. Additionally, the self-presentation and identity development of the online dating persona should be considered. Self-presentation pertains to the subliminal disclosure of personal information through online communication and self-photographs.

Important to successful self-presentation are the person's intentions and goals for relationship growth. Similarly, identity development requires an examination of the online dating persona's motives and liking of another person. Besides this, the online dating persona is a true expression and presentation of the self. Furthermore, a balance of mutual commitment, closeness and passion influences the level of attraction towards another. Sufficient attraction leads to closeness, and sufficient closeness leads to the development of a potentially successful romantic relationship. Essentially, the progressive interrelation between relative anonymity, self-disclosure, attraction and closeness online, are dependent on the motivation, behaviour, personality and affect of the online dating persona. Hence, the discussion will turn its focus towards the profile of the online dating persona.

3.2 Online Dating Persona Profile

Having achieved an understanding of the online dating persona, this section reviews theoretical perspectives and relevant research findings concerning the sociodemographic description, personality, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness of those participating in online dating.

3.2.1 Sociodemographic description

The data presented in table 1 below reflect the sociodemographic findings of studies on online relation formation. In addition, the table presents a comparison between international findings and those pertaining to the South African context. It would appear that most of the international findings corroborate with those from the South African context. However, there are a few differences in terms of the age, gender, relationship status, and relationship type and relationship sexual orientation of online dating participants. Whilst Parks and Floyd (1996) found that the average age of people dating online are 32 years of age, findings specifically pertaining to South Africa show an average 22 years of age.

Table 1: Sociodemographic description of online dating participants

Variable	Description	International research studies	South African research studies
Age	18 - 24 years	(Parks & Roberts, 1998)	(Van Rensburg, 2001)
	25 - 32 years		(Thomas, 2004)
	32 years	(Parks & Floyd, 1996)	
	30 - 39 years	(Brym & Lenton, 2001)	
Gender	Male	(Brym & Lenton, 2001)	(Van Rensburg, 2001)
	Female	(McKenna et al., 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wolak et al., 2002)	(Thomas, 2004)
Race	Caucasian	(Brym & Lenton, 2001; Parks & Floyd, 1996)	(Thomas, 2004)
Education level	Higher education qualification	(Brym & Lenton, 2001)	(Thomas, 2004)
Geographical location	Urban city	(Brym & Lenton, 2001)	(Thomas, 2004)
Relationship status	Single	(Brym & Lenton, 2001; Parks & Roberts, 1998)	(Thomas, 2004)
	Involved		(Van Rensburg, 2001)
Relationship type	Close relationship	(Parks & Roberts, 1998; Wolak et al., 2002; Yum & Hara, 2005)	(Van Rensburg, 2001)
	Romantic	(Parks & Roberts, 1998; Wolak et al., 2002; Yum & Hara, 2005)	
Relationship sexual orientation	Same sex relationship	(Yum & Hara, 2005)	
	Opposite sex relationship	(Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998)	(Thomas, 2004; Van Rensburg, 2001)

Findings pertaining to gender seem to be contradictory, both nationally and internationally. For example, Brym & Lenton (2001) shows that most people involved in online dating are single; however Van Rensburg (2001) reports that most of the participants involved in online dating were involved in an outside relationship, including marriage. Additionally, evidence shows that married participants (Parks & Roberts, 1998) and divorcees (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Thomas, 2004) constitute a secondary group of online dating participants. It is noteworthy that Parks and Floyd

(1996) found no significant difference between age and marital status. International research shows that the type of relationships formed online include both close and romantic, whilst close relationships take precedence in South African samples (Van Rensburg, 2001). The sexual orientation of online dating participants (Yum & Hara, 2005) found evidence for same sex relationships amongst Koreans, although the sample included Americans, Koreans and Japanese participants.

International and national findings show that those dating online possess post-school qualifications, typically formal education or training, that they are located mostly in urbanised areas, and that they are Caucasian (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Parks & Roberts, 1996; Thomas, 2004). In short, it appears that the typical online dating persona is a formally educated young adult living in an urbanised setting. The next question pertains to the personality characteristics of such a persona.

3.2.2 Personality description

A uniquely established cognitive, behavioural and affective blueprint constitutes one's personality. This blueprint consists of multiple personality traits, generally assumed to influence behaviour that appears to be stable over time (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003). With online dating being a relatively new phenomenon, it is important to understand the reasons for changing behavioural patterns. Moreover, the limited available research findings pertaining to the online dating persona profile necessitate an investigation into the personality characteristics of people who date online. Prior to discussing the relevance hereof to the online dating persona, is a brief review of the opposing theoretical perspectives on personality traits.

One of the most influential researchers in the earlier study of personality traits, Raymond Cattell, identified and measured twenty-three primary personality factors, whereof sixteen factors are still recognised (Matthews et al., 2003). Based on these findings, Eysenck proposed the Three Factor Model of personality, which focuses on higher order personality traits, namely (a) Introversion – Extraversion, (b) Neuroticism and (c) Psychoticism (Matthews et al., 2003). Contemporary research into personality traits acknowledges and accepts the existence of five basic personality traits (see table 2 on the next page), although the nature of personality is currently being disputed.

Two schools of thought have emerged: Goldberg's perspective based on the lexical approach, which focuses on individual differences across languages (John & Srivastava, 1999; Rolland, 2002); and Costa and McCrae's approach, which focuses on the role of genetic influences across cultures (Allik & McCrae, 2002; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Table 2: Big Five personality traits

Big Five personality traits (Rolland, 2002)
Neuroticism (N): This pertains to one's tendency to experience negative emotions, therefore considering the world as challenging and intimidating.
Extraversion (E): (versus Introversion): This concerns social self-other relations. Individuals are described as enthusiastic, confident, with a positive outlook and stimulated by the external environment.
Agreeableness (A): This pertains to one's interpersonal relationships, focussing on the individual.
Conscientiousness (C): This concerns one's behaviour management to be converse and consistent.
Openness (O): This pertains to one's openness and flexibility to new experiences.

Following Eysenck, Goldberg identified and proposed the Big Five traits, namely Agreeableness, Surgency (called Extraversion), Intellect (called Openness or Culture), Conscientiousness and Emotional stability or Neuroticism (Goldberg, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999; Matthews et al., 2003). Goldberg's Big Five model of personality, founded in the lexical approach, attempts to describe rather than explain the language of personality by observing external or surface attributes (phenotypes) rather than causal traits or genotypes (Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). Thus, when the phenotype attribute is responsible for a foremost individual personality difference, the importance thereof will be greater and have additional matching words in a particular language, similar to other languages (Saucier & Goldberg, 1996).

Building on the Big Five model of Goldberg, Costa and McCrae developed the Five Factor Model of personality (John & Srivastava, 1999; Rolland, 2002). This model focuses on explaining basic personality traits that stay stable over time in and across cultures (Allik & McCrae, 2002; John & Srivastava, 1999). In an attempt to further our understanding of personality traits, Costa and McCrae introduced a systematic framework, namely, the Five Factor theory (Allik & McCrae, 2002; John & Srivastava, 1999). This theory is based on the premise that personality traits are abstract constructs (basic tendencies) deeply embedded in one's biological system (biological base), which are influenced by cultural and environmental elements (external influences) to form psychological constructions such as attitudes, norms and abilities (characteristic adaptations) that steer behaviour (Allik & McCrae, 2002). The abovementioned schools of thought generally agree to the five basic personality traits, although there is no universal definition or description thereof. Although the nature of personality arguably has genetic or linguistic underpinnings, establishing theoretical grounds may broaden our understanding of the nature of personality.

Amichai-Hamburger (2002) argues that an understanding of online behaviour requires the focal point of enquiry to include personality, and specifically merits research into Internet addiction, online friendship or love, the type of online services mostly used, and the kinds of people that avoid using the Internet. The Big Five personality traits can provide considerable insight into the study of

social behaviour. More specifically, Matthews et al. (2003) cite that the Extraversion, Agreeableness and Openness personality traits may provide considerable insight into social behaviour. The remainder of this discussion addresses research findings concerning the online perception of personality.

Research into online relationships shows a correlation between online dating and some of the Big Five personality traits, such as Introversion, Antagonism and Un-directedness (Landers & Lounsbury, 2006), Extraversion and Openness (Cronje, 2000). Interestingly, White, Hendrick and Hendrick (2004) found a positive correlation between Extraversion and satisfaction and intimacy in close relationships. Personality research focussing on the online persona has produced conflicting results, necessitating a closer examination of the personality labels placed upon those dating online.

Several studies in online behaviour labelled participants as lonely (Bonebrake, 2002; McKenna et al., 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Parks & Floyd, 1996), socially anxious (Barnes, 2001; Joinson, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003), dysfunctional (Bonebrake, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996), withdrawn (Civin, 2000; Joinson, 2003) and shy (Barnes, 2001; Joinson, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002; Scharlott & Christ, 1995). Conversely, it has also been found that people who communicate and relate online are socially skilled, verbally skilled, empathic (McCown et al., 2001) and similar to their face-to-face counterparts (Bonebrake, 2002; Ward & Tracey, 2004).

It may be that the characteristics and personality labels mentioned above are assumed because of the mediated nature of online dating, and more specifically, because the online environment facilitates the presentation of the true self (Bargh et al., 2002; Gibbs et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 2002; Turkle, 1995) and has less gating features in relationship formation (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; McKenna et al., 2002; Scharlott & Christ, 1995). Rouse and Haas (2003) question the accuracy of online personality observation and perception because of the mediated nature of online relations. Disputing this, Gwinnell (1998) purports that online communication supports the accurate perception of personality characteristics. Adamse and Motta (1996) observed and identified six broad online personality types: (1) socialites are the leaders, (2) lurkers describe the inactive participants, (3) narcissists are self-obsessed, dominating and attention seeking, (4) dependants are idealistic and emotionally vulnerable, (5) flammers tend to be insensitive and offensive towards others, and (6) sociopaths are deceptive and self-righteous. However, the empirical evidence for such personality types seems limited.

Having reviewed the literature pertaining to the personality description of social behaviour online, it is possible to rationalise social behaviour online as functioning as a substitute for those unequipped to cope in face-to-face environments. The increasing popularity of the online environment, along with additional empirical research investigations, may support an accurate online dating persona profile. Further investigation into the persona profile necessitates a discussion of emotional intelligence.

3.2.3 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence may be a fundamental predictor of antisocial behaviour, career success and successful close relations with others (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). In this light, emotional intelligence seems relevant to comprehending the online dating persona. Generally, emotional intelligence pertains to one's emotional rather than intellectual ability or skills, and is fundamental to achieving success in life. Traditionally, emotional intelligence was conceptualised as abilities other than intellectual abilities responsible for wellbeing and success in life (Wechsler, 1939). For half a century, this concept received little attention. Later, this concept resurfaced when Gardner (1983) brought to mind the possibility of multiple intelligences. Contemporary research findings however, show a more structured approach in delineating emotional intelligence. Authors such as Goleman (1995), Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Bar-on (Stein & Book, 2001) contributed largely to the body of literature on of emotional intelligence.

Based upon traditional conceptualisations of possessing abilities other than intellectual abilities, Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed and defined the term emotional intelligence. According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence pertains to skills and abilities related to self-other emotions, more specifically skills relating to recognising and communicating underlying thought processes; and understanding, regulating and analysing people's own emotions in ways that reinforce their affective and cognitive development. Based on the work of Salovey and Mayer, Daniel Goleman brought the term emotional intelligence into the popular psychology literature in 1995, focussing specifically on its application in the workplace (Zeng & Miller, 2003). Goleman prefers the term emotional competence, referring to learning and enhancing a hierarchy of expressed skills concerning self-other relations which initiates success, well-being and effectiveness in life (Boyatzis, Goleman & Rhee, 2000; Goleman, 1995). Conversely, in his conceptualisation of this phenomenon, Reuven Bar-on focuses on identifying individual attributes that can be developed and enhanced to achieve a higher emotional quotient (Stein & Book, 2001).

Some of the perspectives on emotional intelligence include the four-branch ability model of emotional intelligence developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), Goleman's model of emotional competencies (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 1998) and Bar-on's model of emotional quotient (Stein & Book, 2001). These four models are represented in table 3 (see next page). The terms emotional intelligence, emotional competence and emotional quotient used by the different authors all refer to an individual's affective abilities. Salovey and Mayer's model assumes that emotional abilities pertaining to the self-other relationship are stable (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In contrast, Goleman focuses on learned abilities concerning the self within social relations with others, whilst Bar-On mostly focuses on the self. Although these models seem to overlap and support each other, the relevance of each is largely determined by its application and is therefore unclear.

Table 3: Models pertaining to emotional intelligence

Mayer & Salovey's four branch ability model of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Goleman's model of emotional competence (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 1998)	Bar-on's domains of emotional quotient (Stein & Book, 2001)
Perceiving emotions: recognition and communication of nonverbal emotions	Self-awareness: recognition, identification and definition of emotions	Intrapersonal (self-abilities): self-realisation, confident expression and awareness of emotions
Using emotions: active efforts in thinking about perceived emotions	Self-motivation: choosing and entering an emotional state	Adaptability: self-other openness, practicality, problem solving and pragmatism
Understanding emotions: grasping, interpreting and rationalising information received	Empathy: ones awareness, understanding and sensitivity to other's emotions	Interpersonal (self-other abilities): recognition of and responsibility for other, relationship formation and maintenance
Managing emotions: regulation of self-other emotions	Self-regulation: managing and controlling ones emotions	Stress management: control of emotions and subsequent behaviour
	Social skills: one is embracing of all of the above-mentioned skills in forming and maintaining self-other relations	Overall frame of mind: cultivating a positive attitude and satisfaction with self, others and life

Several studies have investigated the correlation between emotional intelligence and personality traits and psychological wellbeing (e.g., Austin, Saklofske & Egan, 2005; Coetzee, Martins, Basson, & Muller, 2006; De Raad, 2005; Donaldso-Feilder & Bond, 2004; Furnham & Buchanan, 2005; Salovey & Grewal, 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003). Findings show correlations with the Big Five personality factors Extraversion (Zeng & Miller, 2003; Salovey & Grewal, 2005), Agreeableness (De Raad, 2005; Salovey & Grewal, 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003), Neuroticism (De Raad, 2005; Salovey & Grewal, 2005) and Conscientiousness (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). The disparities in the interpretation of these results are important. Mostly, researchers recognise and support emotional intelligence as a domain measuring abilities other than those specifically pertaining to personality characteristics (Salovey & Grewal, 2005; Schneider, Lyons & Williams, 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003). Additionally, Salovey and Grewal (2005) indicate that self-report measures of emotional intelligence seemingly relate to Neuroticism and Extraversion, whilst ability measures show a relationship with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

Within the South Africa context, Coetzee et al. (2006) recently investigated the correlation between emotional intelligence and personality traits and self-esteem. The sample included 107 employees in managerial positions within the industrial manufacturing field. Participants were surveyed using the 360° Emotional Competency profiler, the Meyer Briggs Type Indicator and the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory for Adults. The results indicate that the perception of introverted personality types is that they are more emotionally competent, whilst extraverted personality types demonstrate higher levels of confidence in their emotional intelligence abilities. The study

concluded that self-esteem seems more accurate than personality types in determining emotional intelligence (Coetzee et al., 2006).

De Raad (2005) contests the validity of emotional intelligence as a separate domain from the Big Five personality traits. However, Salovey and Grewal (2005) point out that although emotional intelligence corresponds to some of the Big Five personality traits, the focus is on emotional abilities rather than predicted behaviour. Lopes, Salovey and Straus (2003) propose that by simultaneously using self-report measures of psychological well-being, ability measures of emotional intelligence and measures of the Big Five personality traits, researchers may minimise the overlap and gain an understanding into people's social and emotional adaptation. Petrides and Furnham (2000b) investigated gender differences in emotional intelligence, and found that both genders have some knowledge of their level of emotional intelligence. More recently, Furnham and Buchanan (2005) established that males tend to predict their own level of emotional intelligence as being higher than females do. In establishing individuals' level of emotional intelligence, the ways in which it is measured become relevant. If the focus shifts to ability measurement rather than behaviour explanation, establishing emotional intelligence as a valid research entity apart from personality traits might be possible.

Focussing on the cognitive dimension, one's perception of one's own emotions and that of others seem to be the fundamental in uncovering the nature of emotional intelligence and achieving accuracy in measuring it (De Raad, 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003). However, the regulation of emotions is questioned by Donaldson and Bond (2004), who contests the conscious regulation of emotion proposed by authors such as Coetzee et al. (2006), and Spence, Oades and Caputi (2004). In general, researchers seem to disagree about the role of control over and knowledge of one's own emotions in predicting psychological wellbeing and positive affect. There is greater consensus, however, that emotional intelligence seems related to life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing rather than to personality traits (Austin et al., 2005).

Essentially, the dispute surrounding emotional intelligence seems to entail its position within the cognitive domain, affective domain and personality; as well as how to measure it. Although not documented, references to the online dating persona may provide considerable insight into individuals' emotional ability to form online relationships. Having reviewed personality traits and the affective-cognitive domain of emotional intelligence, the next area of enquiry concerns an understanding of people's life effectiveness.

3.2.4 Life effectiveness

The traditional literature emphasises psychological well-being as a position in which a person has achieved equilibrium of satisfaction with life, quality of life, happiness, goals and life purpose (Ryff, 1989). This definition of psychological wellbeing originates from a collective interpretation of the work of pioneer theorists such as Maslow, Allport, Rogers, Jung and Erikson

(Vleioras & Bosma, 2005). Later, Carol Ryff developed a model of psychological wellbeing. This model suggests that psychological wellbeing implies growth to self-fulfilment and the establishment of close relationships (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002). This model focuses on one's abilities and aspiration towards a positive and emotionally intelligent self-concept, positive self-other relations in terms of a social self, and a process of dynamic growth, including decision-making and motivation. These skills and abilities are acquired through the aspiration towards effectiveness in life (Ryff, 1989; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005). To distinguish between psychological wellbeing and subjective wellbeing, Keyes et al. (2002) define subjective wellbeing as one's satisfaction with life, quality of life and happiness.

Neill, Marsh and Richards (1997) define life effectiveness as the skills in life that are responsible for an individual's efficiency and success in all areas of life and self-other relations. This encompasses an array of behavioural and psychological features. To comprehend, empirically explain and measure how we strive towards living positive lives, Carol Ryff's (1989) model, consisting of six dimensions pertaining psychological wellbeing, is helpful, together with Neill et al.'s (1997) model of life effectiveness describing eight domains of life effectiveness. These models are presented in table 4, which indicates that both these models are concerned with the ability to be successful and satisfied in all areas of life, and encompass both an affective and behavioural component. Although psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction are not necessarily a dominant area of concern in psychology, an amalgamation of knowledge pertaining to an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviour, together with predictions of a person's life effectiveness and success, might assist in establishing a profile of the online dating persona. Literature specifically pertaining to the life effectiveness of the online dating persona seems to be in short supply. Nonetheless, the theoretical underpinnings mentioned above may prove to be valuable for the purpose of this research.

Table 4: Models of psychological wellbeing and life effectiveness

Ryff's dimensions of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005)	Neill's domains of life effectiveness (Neill et al., 1997)
Self-acceptance: self-realisation including ones weaknesses and strengths	Emotional control: managing own emotions in challenging situations
Positive self-other relations: striving towards close interpersonal relationships	Active initiative: gaining independence in managing one's life; openness
Environmental mastery: effectively using, choosing, and managing one's environment	Intellectual flexibility: openness and flexibility to new ideas and behaviour
Purpose in life: balance of positive goals and beliefs to understand and add meaning to life	Achievement motivation: inspiration and enthusiasm leading to accomplishments
Autonomy: internal regulation of thoughts and behaviour to gain independence	Self-confidence: self-belief of being successful in all areas of life

Personal growth: effective realisation and utilisation of one's potential

Social competence: successful self-other relations and interpersonal ability in social situations

Time management: effective management of time

Task leadership: effective leadership abilities shown in challenging situations

4. Concluding Remarks

The literature review shows that the online dating persona remains unknown. Given the paucity of research in this area, a description of online relationships seems necessary prior to ascertaining a profile of the online dating persona. Most conceptual models define online dating as the mediated initiation of interpersonal relationships facilitated by online matchmaking services. Subsequently, the online dating persona profile comprises the sociodemographic, behavioural, affective and cognitive characteristics of individuals who initiate interpersonal relationships online.

The investigation into the background of online relationships revealed that the Internet is a satisfactory environment for the development of interpersonal relationships. In comparison with traditional communication media such as the telephone, the Internet transcends the limitations of time and space, connects more people, makes information more readily available, and brings personal and impersonal communication to the masses. Online communication, that is personal computer-mediated communication, seem to endorse online relationship formation, in spite of challenges such as the lack of social cues.

With just over 400 000 South Africans dating online in 2006, the prevalence of online dating is undeniable. Taken together, the studies presented in this chapter show that relationships initiated online are interpersonal and meaningful, mostly heterogeneous with a romantic or friendship-like nature. Furthermore, the process of relationship formation seems fundamental in constructing a profile of the online dating persona, although theoretical models offer contradictory views on this. It seems, however, that online relationships are initiated in a context of mutual trust, which develops with frequent communication and self-disclosure. Subsequently, attraction and closeness promotes the expectation that the relationship will be successful and migrate to other environments.

Although not researched extensively, people's motivation for online relationship formation are noteworthy. This research differentiates between interpersonal motives such as future expectations, and intrapersonal motives, for example, the relative anonymity experienced within online relationships. Research further suggests that frequent online communication, positive

attitudes and openness promote the maintenance of online relationships. In addition, it is a safe assumption that positive and honest perceptions and expectations are more likely to foster successful online relationships while negative attitudes and intentions are likely to contribute to their failure. In addition, increasing self-disclosure, positive perceptions and experiences, and relationship goals (e.g., migration to other environments) promote the success of online relationships.

While the vast majority of research has focussed on the description of online relationships, some research findings support the growing emphasis on identifying an online dating persona. In constructing an online dating persona profile, the individual's characteristics, sociodemographic and personality description, level of emotional intelligence and life effectiveness should be determined. It appears that the characteristics of the online dating persona are multifaceted. First, the online dating persona remains relatively anonymous when forming online relationships. Second, an individual's intent and goals appear to determine the level of self-disclosure. Negative intentions and goals may result in an unsuccessful online relationship, whilst openness and a positive outlook contribute to its success. Third, the online dating persona is presented online through online communication and self-photographs. As with self-disclosure, the person's intentions and goals in self-presentation are predictive of the success of the online relationship. Evidently, each individual develops a unique identity within each online relationship. This identity seems to reveal the true online dating persona rather than a fantasy persona. Fourth, attraction to another requires a balance of mutual commitment, closeness and passion. Finally, if the attraction remains, the online dating persona experiences closeness, which in turn may lead to the development of a successful interpersonal relationship. This emphasises the undeniable need for research to expand to a description of the online dating persona.

In describing the online dating persona, research into sociodemographic, personality, affective and life effectiveness variables has been widely overlooked. Looking at the sociodemographic description of people who typically form online relationships, the online dating persona seem to be mostly aged between twenty and forty years, female, Caucasian, living in urban areas, fairly highly educated, and single; and tends to form heterogeneous, romantic relationships. In terms of the personality description of the online dating persona, research reveals diverse results. A few research studies describe the online dating persona as lonely, socially anxious, dysfunctional, withdrawn and shy. Others regard the online persona as socially skilled, verbally skilled, empathic and similar to the face-to-face persona.

Emotional intelligence, also referred to as emotional competence and emotional quotient, pertains to a person's affective abilities, namely, to use, regulate, perceive and understand own and others' emotions. It is still unclear whether emotional intelligence relates to the cognitive, affective or behavioural domain, although a few empirical research findings show no relation. Such an understanding may contribute considerably to an understanding of emotional intelligence and the online dating persona. Finally, life effectiveness concerns people's skills in reaching a position

where they feel successful and satisfied in all areas of life. However, academic research studies pertaining to this subject are lacking.

Evidently, research concerning online dating, especially in South Africa, is limited and warrants further scientific investigation. This literature review raises a number of issues for research. The first need is to ascertain a description of online dating relationships, more specifically their nature and prevalence. Secondly, the personality characteristics of the online dating persona need to be identified. Thirdly, the online dating persona's level of emotional intelligence must be established. Finally, the life effectiveness skills of the online dating persona deserve closer investigation. Such findings will add to the growing body of knowledge concerning the online dating persona in South Africa, and may provide grounds for international comparisons. Furthermore, such results and the recommendations arising from them may have practical applicability for online matchmaking services and could add value to existing social psychological theoretical paradigms.



CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

There is a dearth of research into the online dating persona, especially within South Africa. However, certain considerations are important when defining a successful profiling measurement battery within the South African online environment. Bearing such considerations in mind is imperative to the objectives of this research study and forms part of the decision-making process. This chapter reviews the methodology utilised for this research study, commencing with the research objective and hypotheses. Addressed thereafter is the sampling method, including a description of the sample. Finally, the discussion focuses on the chosen research design, measures used, and the statistical analyses.

2. Research Objective

The research objective of this study was to describe online dating relationships and construct an online dating persona profile. The online dating persona profile of people in South Africa who initiate and maintain relationships online were compared to reports in the international literature.

2.1 Research Goals

Presented below are the primary research goals for this study:

- (a) To compare a description of online dating relationships in South Africa with a description of international online dating relationships.
- (b) To compare sociodemographic characteristics between South African and international online dating personas.
- (c) To compare personality characteristics in South African and international online dating personas.

In order to reach the research goals stated above the following aspects will be explored:

- (a) The level of emotional intelligence of the South African online dating persona will be compared across various biographical and other categories, including for instance, the difference in emotional intelligence between males and females. This will assist in compiling a profile of the online dating persona. In each case differences will be explored statistically by means of a t-test or ANOVA which can be expressed as follows:

$$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0 \text{ OR } \mu_1 = \mu_2 \text{ and } H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

- (b) The same comparisons will be made for the life effectiveness skills of the South African online dating persona, using the same statistical null and alternative hypotheses.

3. Research Design

The research design is the research plan or blueprint of the research study. It guides the researcher in the decision-making process of all facets of the research study, for example the sampling procedure and the data collections methods. This comparative research study applied a quasi-comparative or differential research design. The main characteristics of this design are that random sampling is not used; and that there is only one treatment group, with the result that the comparison is between the treatment group and existing literature (Trochim, 2001). The restrictions on using this research design are that the sampling procedure makes it difficult to determine external and internal validity, and more specifically, the presence of sampling bias (Mouton, 2001).

The rationale for choosing this research design was that random selection would not have been possible with the target population of participants who form interpersonal relationships online. Although participants were self-selected, an internal validation process guarded against multiple participation entries by requesting participant's confirmation of identifying data, for example, email addresses. Generally, it is assumed that online research methods lack demographical diversity, participants are labelled as socially inadequate and untruthful, and may present different results than traditional pen-and-paper methods (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava & John, 2004). Although generalising data across the population is not possible, online research methods in psychology are assumed to have similar levels of reliability and validity to traditional pen-and-paper methods (Gosling et al., 2004; Riva, Teruzzi & Anolli, 2003).

Online research methods allow for access to specific target populations, support data collection, support data generalisation because of external validity, reduce researcher bias, and render the research process cost- and time-effective (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Ulf-Dietrich, 2000). However, online research methods restrict the researcher in controlling the research environment and study participants. Also, participants are generally self-selected, and have a higher participation withdrawal rate (Galimberti & Riva, 2001; Ulf-Dietrich, 2000). Consequently, theorists and researchers alike query the external validity of online research studies, more specifically the

sampling procedures (Galimberti & Riva, 2001; Gosling et al., 2004; Riva et al., 2003; Ulf-Dietrich, 2000).

This study took into account the limitations and qualities mentioned above. Hence, control measures set in place controlled for multiple entries and deception, and used a data comparison with existing literature on online dating participants as the control group. However, the generalisation of the results of this study is not advised.

4. Sampling

The population of the study included individuals who have initiated and maintained close online dating relationships supported by online matchmaking services. The sample was a non-probability, non-random sample of convenience. Because the Internet was the foremost tool used by participants to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships online, the sampling frame included subscribers and members of the Internet dating newsgroup, DatingBuzz. The discussion will now turn to the selection criteria used, followed by the realised sample.

4.1 Selection Criteria

With the sampling method used, it was important to consider the demographic diversity of the sample population in finally creating an online dating persona profile. The selection criteria for participation in this research study were that participants should be (a) currently involved in an online relationship or should have had an online relationship in the past, (b) residing in South Africa and (c) older than 18 years of age. The rationale for the selection criteria was to achieve the research objective of investigating online dating specifically within the South African context. Hewson, Yule, Laurent & Vogel (2003) state that the selected sampling method can influence the external validity of the proposed research study and propose the use of a large sample to combat this.

4.2 Realised Sample

The obtained sample included one hundred and thirty participants. Inadequate information received from 30 participants led to the elimination of such data during the initial data validation process. Of the total obtained sample, only data from a hundred participants (N=100) were included for analysis purposes. However, from the realised sample (N=100), an additional 33 participants were included in the sociodemographic analysis they were although excluded from

further data analysis pertaining to the online dating persona. The reported data of the remaining sixty-seven participants ($n = 67$) were mainly used for data analysis.

5. Procedure

The research was conducted in the online environment, namely, the Internet. The online environment afforded participants the convenience of partaking in the research study and supported their needs accordingly. With the Internet as the foremost tool for data collection, a structured questionnaire with pre-set response categories in a Likert-type format was constructed and implemented online (see Appendix i). The directorial board of DatingBuzz consented (see Appendix ii) to host the advertisement for research participation on their website from March 2005 to August 2005. The advertisement for research participation (see Appendix iii) was posted on the Internet home webpage of DatingBuzz.

This advertisement informed participants about the aim of the research study and participation criteria. Participants interested in partaking in the research study indicated their willingness to do so by means of electronic mail. Using a login email (see Appendix iv), all requests for participation were replied to, thus allowing participants' access to the study and the website address. By entering into the welcoming page of the online dating questionnaire, participants had to consent to the ethical considerations and information (see Appendix i). The ethical considerations inherent to psychological research were adhered to, and participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

6. Instruments

In an effort to increase the reliability and validity of the results obtained from this research, a multi-method assessment procedure was applied in assessing the dependant variables, namely, the Big Five personality traits, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness. The preliminary findings of Lopes et al. (2003) show that by using a combination of ability measures of emotional intelligence, personality measures and self-report measures of psychological wellbeing, one can minimise the overlap between these measures. Subsequently, this method ensured the establishment of a comprehensive online dating persona profile. The multi-method included the following:

A descriptive report on online dating relationships:

- Depicting the nature and prevalence of online dating relationships (assessing online dating relationships and level of attraction with self-constructed questions)

The online dating persona profile:

- A sociodemographic online dating persona description (evaluating the demographic and social description of online dating participants with self-constructed questions)
- Sauciers' 40 Mini-marker Set (measuring the Big Five personality traits Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness)
- Emotional intelligence scale, comprised of 33 items (appraisal, expression, regulation and use of emotion)
- Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (measuring skills that include time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative and self-confidence).

6.1 A Description of Online Dating Relationships

This section of the questionnaire comprised questions pertaining to online dating relationships. Questions integrated participants' relationship type, duration, intensity, sexual orientation and frequency of communication. Additionally, by using an open-ended qualitative question, this section assessed online dating participants' motivation for participating in online dating. Responses were thematically analysed, and categories and themes were extracted, coded and re-coded. The resulting information allowed for a richer understanding of participants' online dating experiences.

This section also included self-constructed questions thought to be pertinent to understanding the level of attraction present in online dating relationships. In addressing level of liking, similarity, proximity, trust, commitment and self-disclosure, the online dating persona's level of attraction was estimated. Participants rated their most significant online relationship on fifteen items (see table 5 on the next page). Participants' responses were reported in a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) no, strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree, and (5) yes, strongly agree.

By adding all item scores to obtain an overall score, level of attraction was determined. However, before adding all scores, it was necessary to reverse scores on items 4, 7, 10, 12, 13 and 15. Factor analysis was used to identify one, two and five factors respectively. However, to ensure reliability, three items were removed, and only two factors were used in the final analysis. Both these factors described a specific domain of attraction. Reliability tests were conducted to confirm the overall level of reliability of this set of self-constructed questions. Subsequently, data were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Table 5: Test items measuring level of attraction

Code	Test Items
1	We share the same interests
2	We share the same values
3	We share the same opinions and views
4	We cannot communicate with each other
5	We communicate our thoughts and feelings
6	We can confide in each other
7	We cannot share our feelings
8	We share secrets with each other
9	I think we are the same
10	I think we do not influence each other
11	I want this relationship to last
12	I do not feel committed to this relationship
13	We have other online relationships too
14	Other people know about our relationship
15	This relationship is not important to me

6.2 Sociodemographic description

To obtain a sociodemographic description of the online dating persona, this section of the online questionnaire included self-constructed questions relating to the demographic characteristics of online dating participants. Questions investigated age, gender, race, relationship status and recreational activities. In addition, questions pertaining to the selection criteria were included, such as their past and current online dating status, region of residence, and online meeting context. These self-constructed questions had pre-set multiple choice answer categories. Instructions prompted participants to answer each question by selecting their chosen answer within the given categories. Data from this section of the questionnaire are descriptive in nature, and were used to construct an online dating persona profile. Hence, these data were not statistically analysed.

6.3 Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set

This section of the questionnaire included Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set, which measures the Big Five personality traits, namely Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N) and Openness (O). In designing this psychometric tool for personality assessment, Saucier recognised the need for a brief measure suitable for use in Internet-based research. Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set is a self-report measure. Participants are instructed to describe themselves as accurately as possible, and report their responses on a 9-point Likert-type scale (Saucier, 1994): (1) extremely inaccurate, (2) very inaccurate, (3) moderately inaccurate, (4) slightly inaccurate, (5) neutral, (6) slightly accurate, (7) moderately accurate, (8) very accurate, and (9) extremely accurate. This measure consists of 40 items and 5 factors (see table 6 on the next page).

Table 6: Factors and test items of Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set

Extraversion (Factor I)	Agreeableness (Factor II)	Conscientious- ness (Factor III)	Emotional Stability (Factor IV)	Openness (Factor V)
Bashful	Cold	Systematic	Moody	Philosophical
Energetic	Harsh	Organised	Envious	Complex
Bold	Cooperative	Careless	Temperamental	Uncreative
Talkative	Rude	Practical	Fretful	Imaginative
Extraverted	Unsympathetic	Inefficient	Touchy	Creative
Quiet	Kind	Disorganised	Relaxed	Un-intellectual
Shy	Warm	Sloppy	Un-envious	Deep
Withdrawn	Sympathetic	Efficient	Jealous	Intellectual

Each factor describes a specific personality domain, which consists of a series of eight self-evaluative statements or traits. In assigning a numerical value between one and nine to each test item, subsequently adding each score within each factor, for every participant, an overall score for all five factors is obtained (Saucier, 1994). Data analysis for this section incorporated descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Some researchers question the accuracy and reliability of using the Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set, and other shorter questionnaires to measure the Big Five personality traits. Another debate concerns the validity of assessing personality traits online as opposed to using the conventional pen-and-paper method. There is however, support for online personality assessment and evidence for the validity thereof (Buchanan, 2000; Chuah, Drasgow & Roberts, 2006). Nonetheless, Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set is considered a short and useful measure for Internet-based research (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann Jr., 2003), with good psychometric properties (Srivastava, 2006). However, when one compares Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set to the NEO-FFI developed by Costa and McCrae in 1992, a disparity is apparent in the constructs these instruments measure (Mooradian & Nezlek, 1996). Because the 40 Mini-marker Set originates from Goldberg's 100 Item Inventory, one needs to reconsider such claims of disparity.

6.4 The 33-item Emotional Intelligence Scale

This discussion concerns the measurement of emotional intelligence. Because of the relative novelty of research on emotional intelligence in the field of social psychology, the development of the 33-item self-report scale of emotional intelligence (EIS) and others deserves closer inspection.

In classifying emotional intelligence as another form of intelligence, Mayer and Salovey developed the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) in 1997 (Mayer et al., 2000). To improve the reliability and factor structure of this measure, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso developed the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT V2.0) (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso &

Sitarenios, 2003). Although both these instruments measure the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions as the four domains of emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2003), the MSCEIT appears to have an improved overall reliability, showing minimal correlation with the Big Five personality traits supporting a one-to-four factor structure (Matthews et al., 2003).

At the same time, Daniel Goleman and Boyatzis developed the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) intended to measure competencies resulting in success in the organisational context (Boyatzis et al., 2000). The Emotional Competency Inventory and the newly developed model showed an overlap with the Big Five personality factors (Matthews et al., 2003). To improve the reliability and validity of this instrument, Boyatzis et al., (2000) reformulated the clusters to only four main clusters: (a) self-awareness, (b) social awareness, (c) self-management and (d) relationship management, thus developing the second version of the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI-2). Reuven Bar-on developed the Emotional Quotient Inventory in 1997 (Bar-On EQ-i), which is seemingly similar to Goleman's Emotional Competency Inventory (Bar-On, 1997).

The controversy surrounding the measurement of emotional intelligence seems to concern the psychometric properties of self-report and ability measurement. To measure emotional intelligence, Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2000) suggested the use of an ability measure rather than a mixed measure. Hence, an ability measurement concerns an interview in which participants receive an emotional problem-solving task, and are evaluated in terms of their response and suggested solution. A mixed measure is a self-report instrument that measures a vague set of abilities including mental abilities, personality traits and generally overlapping self and social concepts (Mayer et al., 2000). Both Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997) have been criticised for using mixed models of emotional intelligence, meaning that they measure abilities other than mental abilities, for example Big Five personality traits. Additional criticism concerns their use of self-report measures of emotional intelligence (Matthews et al., 2003; Mayer et al., 2000).

More recently, based on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) ability model of emotional intelligence, Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim (1998) developed a 33-item self-report Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). The advantage of using this measure is that it is easily administered, relatively shorter than most of the abovementioned measures, and has satisfactory psychometric properties (Austin et al., 2005; Cherniss, 2000; Schutte et al., 1998). However, this measure is presumably related to life satisfaction (Austin et al., 2005), and four of the Big Five personality traits, namely Openness (Schutte et al., 1998), Neuroticism (Austin et al., 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003), Extraversion and Agreeableness (Zeng & Miller, 2003). More so, replicating the internal factor structure seem problematic (Petrides & Furnham, 2000a; Matthews et al., 2003; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and there is a possibility of manipulation such as faking good (Schutte et al., 1998).

For the purpose of this study, the 33-item self-report Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) was considered suitable. The rationale for the selecting this instrument was that administration time is

brief, and its online application is straightforward. Participants are instructed to evaluate each statement on this scale according to how they feel at that moment. Participants record their responses by rating themselves on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

An overall score for this test is obtained by assigning a numerical value to each score, after which the scores are added. Items 5, 28 and 33 are reverse scored. Higher scores indicate a higher level of skill or ability to use, perceive, understand and manage emotions, whilst lower scores indicate a lower level of emotional intelligence. To encapsulate and replicate the factor structure originally obtained by Salovey and Mayer (1990), statistical factor analysis was used. The factor analysis allowed for the identification of four factors, namely the appraisal of emotion, the expression of emotion, the regulation of emotion and utilisation of emotion. This four-factor structure seems stable and reliable. Finally, the data were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

6.5 The Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ)

Garry Richards recognised the need for a reliable and valid psychological measure in assessing self-concept, focussing on the changes in out-of-doors experience-based educational programmes (Neill, Marsh & Richards, 1997; Richards, Ellis & Neill, 2002). To measure life effectiveness, Neill, Marsh and Richards developed the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ) in 1997 (Richards et al., 2002). Life effectiveness and personal development changes are assessed in this self-report questionnaire using eleven dimensions pertaining to organisational, social and self-skills, and overall efficiency in life (Neill et al., 1997; Richards et al., 2002).

Richards and Neill later improved this questionnaire by revising the factor structure to include eight domains or factors, and by including a locus of control dimension (Neill et al., 1997). This measure was named the Review of Life Effectiveness and Locus of Control Questionnaire (ROPELOC), and includes 48 items comprising nine factors (Richards et al., 2002).

A shorter version of this measure, the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire version-H (LEQ-H) comprises eight factors and sixteen items, namely time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative and self-confidence (Neill, 2006). For this study, the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire version-H was chosen because of its good internal structure, satisfactory psychometric properties (Neill, 2006), shorter administration time, and straightforward online application. This questionnaire instructs participants to evaluate their thoughts and feelings on a set of sixteen statements. Participants respond by rating their feelings and thoughts on an eight-point Likert-type scale for each statement (see table 7 on the next page). This measure consists of eight factors.

Table 7: Neill's LEQ-H eight-point Likert-type scale

False / Not Like Me	1	This statement doesn't describe me at all
	2	This statement doesn't describe me
	3	More false than true
	4	More false than true
True / Like Me	5	More true than false
	6	More true than false
	7	This statement describes me well
	8	This statement describes me very well

To determine level of life effectiveness skills, a numerical value between one and eight is assigned to the degree of accuracy. To obtain an overall score for each factor and each participant, scores are added within each factor and for each participant. Subsequently, the total of all scores provides the overall LEQ score for each participant. All the test items are scored in a positive direction. Higher scores indicate a higher level of life effectiveness whilst lower scores indicate a lower level of life effectiveness. Finally, data were analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

7. Statistical Analysis

Research studies that follow a quantitative methodological research approach collect data in a numerical format. The collected set of raw data in this research study is therefore numerical. The collected data in this study was already in electronic format. To eliminate apparent inconsistencies, data were validated by repeatedly coding and recoding the data. The data were statistically analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of gender, age, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type by using t-tests for dependent groups. The aim was to identify and verify any statistically significant results to either reject or fail to reject the stated hypotheses.



CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

1. Introduction

With the increasing use of the Internet, online dating is becoming more prominent. This research aims to describe online relationships and to construct an online dating persona profile, specifically within the South African context. In achieving this, this research may contribute to the social-psychological body of knowledge. This chapter discusses the results of this study. The discussion focuses on descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of gender, age, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type, using t-tests for independent groups. Finally, this chapter reports on whether the results fell within a 95% confidence level, to either reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses.

2. A Description of Online Dating Relationships

To verify the hypothesis that there is a difference in the description of South African and international online dating relationships, the following results should be considered.

Table 8 shows (see next page) the descriptive statistics, namely, the nature and prevalence of online dating relationships in South Africa. The categories of this table have been collapsed (for complete categories see Appendix i). In summary, results show that most participants have had previous online dating relationships (88 %) and the majority (60%) report current involvement in an online relationship. Results show that online matchmaking services are the predominant meeting place (89%). Furthermore, online dating relationships are mostly of a romantic nature (61%) with the opposite sex (95%). Most online dating relationships last less than one year (80%) with frequent online communication (62%) being integral to the development of online dating relationships.

A further aim of this study is to investigate people's motivation for forming online relationships. Table 9 (see next page) reflects the descriptive statistics of participants' motivation for forming online dating relationships in terms of percentages. Results indicate that the majority of participants (31%) claim their chief motivation for seeking relationships online is the perception of control and a greater choice of future partners. A mere 6% of participants reported shyness and loneliness as motivational indicators, while 16% of participants did not reveal their motivation.

Table 8: Categories of online relationships

Category	Detail	Percentage score (N = 100)
Past online dating experience	Past experience	88%
	No previous experience	12%
Current online dating experience	Current experience	60%
	No current experience	40%
Meeting context	Online matchmaking service	89%
	Other online environments	11%
Context migration	Have met face-to-face	77%
	Have not met face-to-face	23%
Relationship type	Friendship	39%
	Romantic relationship	61%
Relationship duration	Less than one year	80%
	More than one year	20%
Contact frequency	Regular	62%
	Irregular	38%
Gender preferences	Opposite gender	95%
	Same gender	5%

Table 9: Motivation for online relationship formation

Motivation	Percentage score (N = 100)
No response	16%
Lifestyle	15%
Curiosity	29%
Control and choice	31%
Shyness and loneliness	6%
Ease	14%

Results' pertaining to online dating participants' level of attraction follows next. Table 10 (see next page) shows descriptive statistics (expressed as percentage) of the number of participants who agreed with each statement concerning the perceived level of attraction. The categories of this table have been collapsed (for complete categories see Appendix i). It appears that the most participants agreed that frequent communication (94%) and sharing personal information (85%) contributed to the perceived level of attraction. Fewer participants agreed to having multiple relationships (40%) and the perception of similarity (32%).

Table 10: Level of attraction

Test items	Percentage score (N = 67)
1 We share the same interests	67%
2 We share the same values	70%
3 We share the same opinions	54%
4 We cannot communicate with each other	6%
5 We communicate our thoughts and feelings	70%
6 We can confide in each other	65%
7 We cannot share our feelings	15%
8 I think we are the same	32%
9 I do not feel committed to this relationship	36%
10 We have other online relationships too	40%
11 Other people know about our relationship	66%
12 This relationship is not important to me	21%

Table 11 below shows the statistical characteristics of the descriptive items for assessing the perceived level of attraction. Evidently, descriptive items 1 to 8 share a higher confidence level than items 9 to 12.

Table 11: Statistical characteristics of descriptive items of level of attraction

Descriptive items	SD	Mean
1 Compatibility	0.81	3.71
2 Similar values	1.10	3.67
3 Similar opinions	0.94	3.49
4 Frequent communication	0.80	4.53
5 Self-disclosure	0.88	3.91
6 Trust	1.14	3.61
7 Non self-disclosure	0.95	4.31
8 Liking overall	1.07	2.92
9 Commitment	1.31	3.8
10 Attitude	1.34	3.05
11 Openness	1.26	3.71
12 Importance	1.1	4.14

In conducting a factor analysis using SAS software, the relationship between the descriptive items was determined. Two factors were extracted and called *sharing* and *closeness*. In extracting only two factors, the reliability of this question set was established. Table 12 (see next

page) shows the rotated factor structure of the perceived level of attraction. Both factors appear to be interrelated with scale intercorrelations of 0.18.

Table 12: Rotated factor structure of perceived level of attraction

Descriptive items	Cronbach Alpha	
	Factor 1: Sharing	Factor 2: Closeness
1 Similarity	0.67	0.00
2 Similarity	0.68	-0.02
3 Self-disclosure	0.60	0.00
4 Frequent communication	0.73	0.07
5 Self-disclosure	0.67	0.24
6 Interdependence	0.70	-0.05
7 Liking	0.55	0.31
8 Similarity	0.66	-0.23
9 Commitment	0.05	0.55
10 Commitment	0.03	0.47
11 Openness	0.03	0.48
12 Importance	0.02	0.51

Table 13 presents the statistical characteristics of the two factors. The first factor, *sharing*, ($A = 0.86$, $SD = 0.68$; $Mean = 3.77$) pertains to the mutual enthusiasm and desire towards one another in establishing a successful online dating relationship. More specifically, this factor encompasses liking, compatibility, similarity, frequent communication, trust and self-disclosure. The second factor namely, *closeness* ($A = 0.58$, $SD = 0.82$; $Mean = 3.68$) concerns one's determination and objectives in forming an online dating relationship. Thus, this factor pertains to commitment, openness and perception of the importance and uniqueness of the online dating relationship.

Table 13: Statistical characteristics of factors of perceived level of attraction

Factor	Mean	SD
1 Sharing	3.77	0.68
2 Closeness	3.68	0.82

To assess the differences in the level of attraction, results were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Table 14 (see next page) shows these results. Table 14 shows F values rather than t-statistics. F-statistics can be converted into t-statistics by computing the square root of the F-statistics.

Table 14: Differences in the perceived level of attraction

Variable	Factor 1: Sharing						Factor 2: Closeness				
	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender											
Male	19	3.74	11.07	0.17	1,61	0.68	3.47	9.19	3.14	1,61	0.08
Female	48	3.78	0.76				3.76	0.80			
Age											
18 - 39 years	45	3.73	0.68	0.30	1,61	0.58	3.76	0.89	2.06	1,61	0.15
40+ years	22	3.85	0.71				3.52	0.70			
Region of residence											
Gauteng	39	3.72	0.76	0.57	1,61	0.45	3.66	0.82	0.24	1,61	0.62
Other	28	3.83	0.56				3.70	0.86			
Relationship status											
Single	57	3.71	0.68	2.59	1,61	0.11	4.11	0.65	2.38	1,61	0.12
Involved	10	4.11	0.65				4.10	1.05			
Relationship type											
Friendship	23	3.66	0.70	0.11	1,61	0.73	3.54	0.80	0.97	1,61	0.32
Romantic	44	3.82	0.68				3.75	0.84			

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

N = 67

Each factor was analysed for differences in age, gender, geographical location, relationship status and type. The results show no significant differences in the level of attraction between variables. Because the mean scores for sharing (Mean = 3.77) and closeness (Mean = 3.68) are not significantly different, there appears to be no significant differences between variables in terms of level of attraction in South African online dating relationships .

In summary, the description of South African online dating relationships seems to compare to online dating relationships internationally. It is evident that online dating relationships seem globally similar.

3. Online Dating Persona Profile

This section describes the South African online dating persona. More specifically, the sociodemographic characteristics, personality description, level of emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills of people who participate in online dating in South Africa are discussed.

3.1 Sociodemographic Description

The sociodemographic description takes account of the age, gender, race, online dating relationship status, region of residence and recreational activities of the South African online dating persona. It was hypothesised that there is a significant difference between the sociodemographic characteristics of the South African online dating persona and the international online dating persona.

Table 15 below lists the descriptive statistics pertaining to the participants' demographic description, expressed as a percentage. The variable categories have been re-categorised to simplify the interpretation of the results.

Table 15: Demographic description

Variable	Category	Percentage score (N=100)
Age	18 - 39 years	75%
	40 + years	25%
Gender	Male	30%
	Female	70%
Race	Black	11%
	White	89%
Geographic location	Gauteng	62%
	Other provinces	38%
Relationship status	Single	88%
	Involved	12%
Recreational activities	Sports, hobbies and travelling	24%
	Art, drama, reading and surfing the Internet	31%
	Socialising with friends and family	33%
	All of the above	12%

Results suggest that participants are mostly female (70%), aged between 18 and 39 years (75%), and Caucasian (89%). All of the participants currently reside in South Africa, whilst most currently reside in the Gauteng region (62%). Interestingly, the realised sample does not include any participants from Mpumalanga or the Northern Province. Furthermore, most participants reported their relationship status as single (88%), while 12% of the participants are involved in a relationship. Recreational activities include socialising with friends and family members (33%), and enjoying art, drama, reading and surfing the Internet (31%).

In generalising the results of the study, the sampling method should be considered. As mentioned before, the sample is a non-probability, non-random sample of convenience and the sampling frame included subscribers and members of the Internet dating newsgroup, DatingBuzz

(N=100). Even though the use of a large sample may counter this threat to external validity, generalising the results of this research are questionable.

The results indicate that the null hypothesis may be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis, namely, there are significant differences between the sociodemographic characteristics of the South African online dating persona and the international online dating persona, if compared. It should be noted that these results originate from descriptive rather than inferential statistics. These sociodemographic variables form the basis for an inferential statistical analysis in terms of the Big Five personality traits, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills.

3.2 Personality Description

Using Saucier's 40 Mini-marker Set, this study measured the Big Five personality traits, namely Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N) and Openness (O). It is hypothesised that there is a significant difference between the personality characteristics of the South African and the international online dating persona. To determine if there are significant relationships between the Big Five personality traits and sociodemographic variables, scores were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The data on the Big Five personality traits revealed several significant results, which are discussed below.

Table 16 (see next page) shows the traits reported by participants, expressed as a percentage. Categories have been reorganised to simplify the interpretation of the results. The first four categories (ranging from extremely inaccurate to slightly inaccurate) were collapsed and labelled "inaccurate". Category 5 ("neutral") was treated as a single category. Categories 6 to 9 (slightly accurate to extremely accurate) were collapsed and labelled "accurate". Interestingly, all of the participants regard the traits "Imaginative" (100%), "Intellectual" (100%) and "Kind" (100%) as an accurate description of their own personality. Very few participants described themselves as "Un-intellectual" (7%), "Sloppy" (10%) and "Inefficient" (12%).

As mentioned earlier, the factor structure of the 40 Mini-marker Set incorporates five factors. The statistical characteristics of the five factors are such that different mean scores indicate that differences exist in the Big Five personality traits of the total sample. As shown in table 17 (see next page), participants reported higher levels of openness (Mean = 58.08, SD = 0.85), followed by agreeableness (Mean = 56.70, SD = 1.20) and lastly conscientiousness (Mean = 56.49, SD = 1.17). These results were not compared to the established norms for the 40 Mini-marker Set because of the small total sample size (N=67).

Table 16: Participant traits

Test items	Percentage score	Test items	Percentage score
1 Bashful	54%	21 Cooperative	94%
2 Energetic	91%	22 Imaginative	100%
3 Moody	60%	23 Relaxed	84%
4 Systematic	82%	24 Un-envious	73%
5 Bold	81%	25 Creative	96%
6 Envious	51%	26 Inefficient	12%
7 Organised	90%	27 Rude	19%
8 Talkative	82%	28 Un-intellectual	7%
9 Careless	22%	29 Deep	93%
10 Extraverted	73%	30 Intellectual	100%
11 Philosophical	82%	31 Shy	45%
12 Cold	22%	32 Unsympathetic	27%
13 Temperamental	49%	33 Disorganised	27%
14 Fretful	45%	34 Kind	100%
15 Practical	90%	35 Jealous	48%
16 Touchy	61%	36 Withdrawn	27%
17 Complex	81%	37 Sloppy	10%
18 Harsh	42%	38 Warm	94%
19 Quiet	37%	39 Efficient	97%
20 Uncreative	18%	40 Sympathetic	90%

Table 17: Statistical characteristics of factors for 40 Mini-marker Set

Factors	MEAN	SD
I Extraversion	50.38	1.47
II Agreeableness	56.70	1.20
III Conscientiousness	56.49	1.17
IV Emotional stability	46.41	1.40
V Openness	58.08	0.85

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

To assess the internal reliability of the 40 Mini-marker Set, a coefficient alpha was computed for each subscale. Saucier (1994) suggests scale intercorrelations of between 0.27 and 0.37 with an average of 0.31 (N = 230). Table 18 (see next page) shows these subscale

intercorrelations. The subscales show moderate internal consistency. Intercorrelations range from 0.10 to 0.40, with an average of 0.25 (N = 67). The most significant correlations (*p < 0.01) are between Emotional stability and Extraversion (0.40*)², Emotional stability and Agreeableness (0.33*), as well as Emotional stability and Openness (0.33*). Although the scale intercorrelations of this study are lower in comparison with findings from Saucier (1994), this may be due to the difference in sample size.

Table 18: Intercorrelations between the dimensions of the 40 Mini-marker Set

Factors	Cronbach A	1	2	3	4	5
I Extraversion	0.84	1	1.00	0.10	0.10	0.40*
II Agreeableness	0.84	2		1.00	0.29	0.33*
III Conscientiousness	0.82	3			1.00	0.21
IV Emotional stability	0.81	4				1.00
V Openness	0.57	5				

* p < 0.01

N = 67

In establishing the norms for the 40 Mini-marker Set, results were based on a sample of 1125 students (Saucier, 1994), whereas the realised sample of this research was N = 67. According to Saucier (1994), the 40 Mini-marker Set has an average Cronbach Alpha level of 0.78, with the Alpha levels ranging between 0.73 and 0.84 (N = 230). However, this study found the Cronbach Alpha levels to range between 0.57 and 0.84, with a similar average of 0.78 (N = 67). Hence, the internal consistency and reliability of this measure seem satisfactory.

Using analysis of variance (ANOVA), significant differences were found in the reported Big Five personality traits in terms of age, gender, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type. As mentioned before, the sociodemographic variable categories were re-categorised to simplify the interpretation of the results. Looking first at gender differences in the Big Five personality traits, a significant gender difference is evident. Females showed significantly higher scores on Extraversion [F (1, 61) = 5, 20; p = 0.02*] than males (see table 19 below).

The most significant association was between age and the Big Five personality traits. Tables 20 and 21 (see next page) reflect these findings. Of the total sample, participants aged 40 years of age and older scored significantly higher on the Agreeableness scale [F (1, 61) = 6, 87; p = 0.01**] and the Conscientiousness scale [F (1, 61) = 8, 16; p = 0.00**].

² * An asterisks indicate a significance level of p < 0.05.

Table 19: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor I Extraversion

Sociodemographic variable categories	n	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	44.94	12.33	5.20	1,61	0.02*
Female	48	52.54	11.07			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	49.40	12.04	0.75	1,61	0.38
40+ years	22	52.40	11.48			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	50.76	11.57	0.10	1,61	0.74
Other	28	49.85	12.43			
Relationship status						
Single	57	50.17	12.06	0.43	1,61	0.51
Involved	10	51.60	11.12			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	51.13	12.56	0.08	1,61	0.77
Romantic	44	50.00	11.60			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 N = 67

Table 20: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor II Agreeableness

Sociodemographic variable categories	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	54.31	10.57	1.10	1,61	0.29
Female	48	57.64	9.19			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	54.53	10.06	6.87	1,61	0.01*
40+ years	22	61.13	7.03			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	55.48	9.35	1.20	1,61	0.27
Other	28	58.39	9.95			
Relationship status						
Single	57	56.42	9.90	1.17	1,61	0.28
Involved	10	58.30	8.24			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	57.00	9.60	0.62	1,61	0.43
Romantic	44	56.54	9.77			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 N = 67

Table 21: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Factor III Conscientiousness

Sociodemographic variable categories	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	54.47	7.99	0.90	1,61	0.34
Female	48	57.29	9.84			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	54.15	9.65	8.16	1,61	0.00*
40+ years	22	61.27	6.77			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	56.94	9.31	0.78	1,61	0.38
Other	28	55.85	9.62			
Relationship status						
Single	57	56.61	9.53	0.12	1,61	0.72
Involved	10	55.80	8.92			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	55.21	10.26	0.37	1,61	0.54
Romantic	44	57.15	8.94			

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

N = 67

There do seem to be Big Five personality trait differences between the online dating participants. As reported above, females tend to be more extraverted than males; and participants aged 40 years of age and older experience themselves as more agreeable and meticulous than those aged between 18 – 39 years. However, no significant differences were found when the Big Five personality traits, namely Emotional stability and Openness, were correlated with age, gender, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis because of the differences found in the Big Five personality traits of the South African online dating persona in comparison with the international online dating persona.

3.3 Emotional Intelligence

The 33-item Emotional Intelligence Scale measured the appraisal of emotion, expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilisation of emotion. This section reports on the descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for emotional intelligence. Results on emotional intelligence revealed several significant results.

Table 22 (see next page) shows the descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence, and indicate the number of online dating participants who agreed with the various statements, expressed as a percentage. The categories have been reorganised to simplify the interpretation of the results.

Categories 1 and 2 were collapsed and labelled “Disagreed”. Category 3 (“Undecided”) remained a single category, while categories 4 and 5 were labelled “Agreed”. Most of the participants felt that one or more of the major events in their lives led them to reassess what is important and unimportant (91%), and to compliment others on their achievements (91%). Of the total sample, only 3% of the participants give up when confronted with a challenge because they believe that they will not succeed. Looking at the reported frequency percentages, it is clear that participants reported higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 22: Participant responses to 33-item EIS

Test items	Percentage score (N = 67)
1 I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.	78%
2 When facing obstacles, similar obstacles overcome is recalled	87%
3 I expect that I will do well on most things I try	90%
4 Other people find it easy to confide in me.	85%
5 I find it hard to understand the nonverbal messages of other people.	16%
6 Some of the major events in my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important.	91%
7 When my mood changes, I see new possibilities.	55%
8 Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living.	69%
9 I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.	85%
10 I expect good things to happen.	85%
11 I like to share my emotions with others	67%
12 When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.	64%
13 I arrange events others enjoy	64%
14 I seek out activities that make me happy.	88%
15 I am aware of the nonverbal messages I send to others.	58%
16 I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.	72%
17 When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.	88%
18 By looking at their facial expressions, I recognise the emotions people are experiencing	79%
19 I know why my emotions change.	81%
20 When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.	81%
21 I have control over my emotions.	54%
22 I easily recognise my emotions as I experience them.	75%
23 I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.	82%
24 I compliment others when they have done something well.	91%
25 I am aware of the nonverbal messages other people send.	67%

26	When another tells me about an important event, I almost feel that I have experienced this event myself.	45%
27	When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.	48%
28	When I am faced with a challenge, I give up as I believe I will fail.	3%
29	I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.	48%
30	I help other people feel better when they are down.	78%
31	I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.	63%
32	I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.	75%
33	It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.	22%

The 33-item EIS scale includes four factors, namely the appraisal, expression, regulation and utilisation of emotion. An investigation into the statistical characteristics of the four factors revealed that 'appraisal of emotion' (A = 0.89; Mean = 34.31, SD = 6.49) was the most frequently reported scale by online dating participants (see table 23 below).

Table 23: Statistical characteristics of factors from the 33-item EIS measure

Factors	Cronbach A	MEAN	SD
1 Appraisal of emotion	0.89	34.31	6.49
2 Expression of emotion	0.65	32.24	3.73
3 Regulation of emotion	0.69	31.30	4.07
4 Utilisation of emotion	0.72	31.61	4.65

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

By computing coefficient alphas for each subscale, the internal reliability of the 33-Item EIS can be assessed. Table 24 (see next page) shows the correlation matrix. The results clearly indicate that the four scales are highly interrelated, suggesting a higher internal consistency. Intercorrelations ranged from 0.41 to 0.66 with an average of 0.54. The most significant correlations ($*p < 0.01$) were between the regulation of emotions and the utilisation of emotion (0.66*); and between regulation of emotions and expression of emotion (0.60*).

Findings from Schutte et al. (1998) confirm a Cronbach Alpha level of 0.90 (N = 346) and a test-retest Cronbach Alpha level of 0.78 (N = 28) for the 33-item EIS. Consistent with Schutte et al.'s (1998) findings, this study found the Cronbach Alpha levels to range between 0.65 and 0.89 with an average of 0.74. Hence, the internal consistency and reliability of this measure seem satisfactory.

Table 24: Intercorrelations between the scales of the 33-item EIS measure

Factors	Cronbach A	1	2	3	4
1 Appraisal of emotion	0.89	1	1.00	0.48*	0.41*
2 Expression of emotion	0.65	2		1.00	0.52*
3 Regulation of emotion	0.69	3			1.00
4 Utilisation of emotion	0.72	4			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

N = 67

Using analysis of variance (ANOVA), this research examined the results for differences between the participants' level of emotional intelligence and age, gender, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type. An analysis of the data revealed several significant results. Firstly, significant differences were found for gender and geographic location. As shown in table 25 below, females showed significantly higher levels than males in the appraisal of emotion [F (1, 61) = 7, 30; p = 0.00**]. In addition, participants geographically located in Gauteng scored significantly higher than participants in other provinces on the appraisal of emotion [F (1, 61) = 4, 02; p = 0.04*]. Table 26 (see next page) shows that females showed significantly higher levels than men in the regulation of emotion [F (1, 61) = 6, 98; p = 0.01**]. Finally, females demonstrated a significantly higher level of utilisation of emotion [F (1, 61) = 8, 34; p = 0.00**] than males (see table 27 on the next page).

Table 25: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the appraisal of emotion from the 33-item EIS

Sociodemographic variable Categories	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	31.36	6.92	7.30	1,61	0.00*
Female	48	35.47	6.06			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	34.44	6.45	0.09	1,61	0.76
40+ years	22	34.04	6.86			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	35.71	5.24	4.02	1,61	0.04*
Other	28	32.35	7.68			
Relationship status						
Single	57	33.78	6.60	2.24	1,61	0.13
Involved	10	37.30	5.57			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	33.86	7.37	0.27	1,61	0.60
Romantic	44	34.54	6.13			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

N = 67

Table 26: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the regulation of emotion from the 33-item EIS

Sociodemographic variable categories	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	29.15	4.05	6.98	1,61	0.01*
Female	48	32.14	3.83			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	30.77	3.83	1.52	1,61	0.22
40+ years	22	32.36	4.49			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	31.43	4.39	0.30	1,61	0.58
Other	28	31.10	3.70			
Relationship status						
Single	57	31.43	4.04	0.30	1,61	0.58
Involved	10	30.50	4.55			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	31.26	4.97	0.22	1,61	0.63
Romantic	44	31.31	3.62			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 N = 67

Table 27: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the utilisation of emotion from the 33-item EIS measure

Sociodemographic variable categories	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	29.26	4.93	8.34	1,61	0.00*
Female	48	32.54	4.29			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	31.33	5.11	0.00	1,61	0.98
40+ years	22	32.18	3.69			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	30.87	5.18	2.12	1,61	0.15
Other	28	32.64	3.74			
Relationship status						
Single	57	31.78	4.77	0.65	1,61	0.42
Involved	10	30.60	4.22			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	30.82	6.11	2.68	1,61	0.10
Romantic	44	32.02	3.75			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 N = 67

The results show that there are gender and geographical location differences in the emotional intelligence of the South African online dating persona. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

3.4 Life Effectiveness

Results from the LEQ-H were analysed with a focus on the eight dimensions of Life Effectiveness, namely, time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative and self-confidence. Results reveal several significant relationships in the life effectiveness skills of online dating participants. This section reports on the inferential statistics for life effectiveness skills. Table 28 below presents the descriptive statistics for the test items of the LEQ-H. The sociodemographic variable categories have been reorganised to simplify the interpretation of the results. Categories one to four were collapsed and labelled false, whilst categories five to eight were collapsed and labelled true.

Table 28: Results from items on the LEQ-H

Test items	Percentage score (N = 67)
1 I do not waste time.	82%
2 I am successful in social situations.	85%
3 I try to get the best results when I do things.	100%
4 I am open to new ideas.	99%
5 I can get people to work for me.	75%
6 I can stay calm in stressful situations.	84%
7 I like to be active and energetic.	82%
8 I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do.	88%
9 I communicate well with people.	84%
10 I try to do the best that I possibly can.	96%
11 I am adaptable and flexible in my thinking and ideas.	97%
12 I am a good leader when a task needs to be done.	82%
13 I stay calm when things go wrong.	82%
14 I like to be an active 'get into it' person.	91%
15 I believe I can do it.	96%
16 I manage the way I use my time well.	73%

All of the online dating participants that they strive towards the best results (100%), and almost all believe that they are open to new ideas (99%). A large number reported that they have successful time management skills (73%) and effective leadership skills (75%).

As mentioned before, the LEQ–H encompasses eight factors. Table 29 below presents the statistical characteristics of each of these eight factors.

Table 29: Statistical characteristics of the LEQ–H factors

Factors	Cronbach A	MEAN	SD
Time management	0.80	5.80	1.63
Social competence	0.82	6.20	1.64
Achievement motivation	0.65	6.99	0.86
Intellectual flexibility	0.77	6.92	0.96
Task leadership	0.83	5.97	1.82
Emotional control	0.89	5.89	1.56
Active initiative	0.75	6.25	1.50
Self-confidence	0.83	6.69	1.34

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

N = 67

The alpha levels for all eight factors of life effectiveness indicate a good internal structure and interrelationships amongst items. However, it should be noted that the results were not measured against the established norms for the LEQ–H measure because of the small sample size (N = 67). To measure against the established norms, a sample size of at least one hundred participants is required. To determine the internal reliability of the LEQ–H it was necessary to compute coefficient alphas for each sub-scale. As shown in table 30 below, the correlation matrix clearly indicates that the four scales are highly interrelated, with a higher internal consistency.

Table 30: Intercorrelations between the factors of the LEQ–H

Factors	Cronbach A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Time management	0.80	1	1.00	0.64*	0.38	0.31	0.44	0.11	0.53*	0.49*
Social competence	0.81	2		1.00	0.51*	0.50*	0.65*	0.26	0.63*	0.54*
Achievement motivation	0.65	3			1.00	0.54*	0.42	0.20	0.51*	0.62*
Intellectual flexibility	0.76	4				1.00	0.43	0.34	0.38	0.43
Task leadership	0.82	5					1.00	0.35	0.48*	0.44
Emotional control	0.89	6						1.00	0.33	0.03
Active initiative	0.74	7							1.00	0.57*
Self-confidence	0.83	8								1.00

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

N = 67

Intercorrelations ranged from 0.11 to 0.64 with an average of 0.38. The most significant correlations were between (*p < 0.01) social competence and task leadership (0.65*), social competence and time management (0.64*), social competence and active initiative (0.63*). The reliability of the LEQ–H determined by this research study appears to be consistent with the findings of Neill et al. (1997). The alpha levels in this study range between 0.65 and 0.89 with an average of 0.79, while those in Neill et al.’s (1997) study ranged between 0.81 and 0.93 with an average of 0.87 (N = 2120). It may therefore be assumed that the internal consistency and reliability of this measure are satisfactory.

Using analysis of variance (ANOVA), this research examined the results for any differences in the life effectiveness skills of the total sample. Scores from the LEQ–H total sample were calculated and compared for differences in age, gender, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type. Results revealed significant differences between the life effectiveness skills of males and females. The most significant relationship found was the Social Competence dimension, where females scored significantly higher than males [F (1, 61) = 5, 80; p = 0.01**] (see table 31 below) and the Achievement Motivation dimension [F (1, 61) = 4, 66; p = 0.03*] (see table 32 on the next page).

Table 31: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Social Competence (LEQ–H)

Sociodemographic variable categories	n	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	5.42	2.14	5.8	1,61	0.01**
Female	48	6.51	1.3			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	6.05	1.74	0.58	1,61	0.45
40+ years	22	6.5	1.43			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	6.3	1.72	0.71	1,61	0.4
Other	28	6.05	1.55			
Relationship status						
Single	57	6.28	1.54	0.91	1,61	0.34
Involved	10	5.75	2.17			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	6.15	1.68	0.57	1,61	0.45
Romantic	44	6.22	1.65			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

N = 67

Table 32: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Achievement motivation (LEQ-H)

Sociodemographic variable categories	n	Mean	SD	F	df	p
Gender						
Male	19	6.60	1.08	4.66	1,61	0.03*
Female	48	7.14	0.71			
Age						
18 - 39 years	45	6.90	0.87	0.90	1,61	0.34
40+ years	22	7.18	0.82			
Geographical location						
Gauteng	39	6.96	0.98	0.01	1,61	0.91
Other	28	7.03	0.67			
Relationship status						
Single	57	7.05	0.75	1.35	1,61	0.24
Involved	10	6.65	1.31			
Relationship type						
Friendship	23	7.02	0.79	0.13	1,61	0.72
Romantic	44	6.97	0.90			

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

N = 67

These results suggest differences in the life effectiveness skills of the online dating persona, specifically that females are socially more competent and motivated to achieve success than males. As such, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis pertaining to the life effectiveness skills of the South African online dating persona. A discussion of the results presented in this chapter follows in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

In South Africa 5,100,000 people use the Internet for various purposes. Of these, 401, 848 are currently using the Internet to initiate and develop interpersonal, romantic and friendship relationships. With the increase in the availability and affordability of information technology to more of the South African population through re-development and structuring, the number of Internet users and online dating partners are increasing. This wave of technological advancement has provided an opportunity to study people who initiate and develop relationships online.

To further an understanding of online relational development, this study examined online dating relationships and the online dating persona. Online relational development may provide an important framework for understanding how and why people in South Africa meet and initiate relationships with others through the Internet. Therefore, this enquiry regards the online dating persona as an essential area of research. This study investigated the South African online dating persona in a sample of 67 South Africans dating online. In this chapter, an outline of the goals of the study and the methodology are reviewed. A discussion of online dating relationships and the online dating persona follows. Finally, conclusions are drawn and limitations mentioned for future research.

2. Goals of This Study

The first goal was to develop a description of online dating relationships specifically within the South African context in comparison to international online dating relationships. The second goal was to create a profile of the South African online dating persona in comparison to the international online dating persona by looking at (a) sociodemographic characteristics, (b) personality characteristics, (c) level of emotional intelligence and (d) life effectiveness skills.

3. Methodology

By applying a quasi-comparative or differential research design, this comparative research study investigated online dating relationships and the online dating persona. One treatment group allowed for comparison with the international online dating persona using the existing literature. As such, a non-probability sampling procedure and a non-random sample of convenience were used.

Subscribers and members of the Internet dating newsgroup, DatingBuzz, comprised the sampling frame. The realised sample for the study was 100 participants ($N = 100$) who reported on online dating relationships, and 67 participants ($n = 67$) who reported on the online dating persona. In consenting to hosting the advertisement for research participation, the online matchmaking service, DatingBuzz, posted an advertisement for research participation.

During March and August 2005, the data collection was completed with the use of an Internet-based questionnaire with pre-set response categories in a Likert-type format. This online questionnaire investigated (a) online dating relationships and the sociodemographic characteristics of the online dating persona with self-constructed questions, (b) the Big Five personality traits using Sauciers' 40 Mini-marker Set; (c) emotional intelligence with the 33-item EIS and (d) life effectiveness skills with the LEQ-H. The data were statistically analysed for descriptive statistics, using SAS, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of gender, age, relationship status, geographical location and relationship type.

4. Discussion

This discussion evaluates the degree to which the study achieved its stated goals. This discussion will first focus on online dating relationships and second, on the online dating persona profile.

In investigating a description of online dating relationships in South Africa, this research focussed on the nature and prevalence of online relationships, the social psychological aspects involved, and the level of attraction pertaining to the online dating persona. The results show that there are differences between South African and international online dating relationships.

The majority of the participants in this study report some experience in initiating and maintaining online dating relationships and are currently involved in online dating relationships. Based on this, a reasonably high level of competence and confidence in establishing social relations with others may be assumed. This finding may be related to the success of online dating relationships. Gibbs et al., (2006) believe that online dating relationships may be successful when participants have gained online dating relationship experience, because people learn from previous experiences and then draw on this information in future online dating relationships.

Online matchmaking services seems to be the predominant place for initiating and maintaining online dating relationships. The popularity of online matchmaking services may be because they offer a safe and relatively effortless environment for relationship formation and because of the increased likelihood of meeting like-minded others. Popular online matchmaking services in South Africa are DatingBuzz and MSN Match (Thomas, 2004).

Looking at context migration, most participants report having met their online dating partners in face-to-face setting. This confirms previous research findings concerning the successful transition of online dating relationships to other traditional environments such as the face-to-face environment (Ellison et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 2002; Parks et al. 1996; Sveningsson, 2002; Walther, 1995). More so, those that have not met face-to-face, plan to do so. Such future anticipation seems indicative of the success of online dating relationships. Additionally, this challenges assumptions questioning the realness of online dating relationships.

The participants generally report forming online relationships of a romantic nature. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Hardey, 2004; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Wolak et al., 2002; Yum & Hara, 2005). Conversely, Thomas (2004) argues that the nature of online relationships in South Africa are primarily friendships rather than romantic relationships. A possible explanation for this is that the initial relationship is perceived as being a friendship, which later develops into a romantic relationship. In addition, findings suggest that people generally form online relationships with those of the opposite gender, which is consistent with the findings of Thomas (2004) and Van Rensburg (2001).

Looking at the average duration of online relationships, research (Thomas, 2004) suggests that online relationships in South Africa last less than one year. Researchers agree that online dating relationships take longer to develop than face-to-face relationships (Wallace, 1999; Parks & Floyd, 1996). Because of the elevated level of self-disclosure, which typically precedes attraction, it seems likely that online relationships develop more rapidly. Possibly, then, the short-lived nature of such relationships could be that the decision to terminate the online relationship is taken earlier than in face-to-face relationships.

Since online communication is central to online relational development, it is important to examine the level of communication of those dating online. Findings suggested that people who date online communicate frequently. Online communication is most important in online dating relationship development because text forms the basis for the process of relationship formation. Furthermore, social cues are embedded in text rather than in body language and physical appearance (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). Online communication further allows emotional relations to develop between online dating participants (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Chenault, 1998; Parks & Floyd, 1996). Thus, frequent communication permits to successful online presentation, self disclosure and emotional relations.

Findings relating to the motivation for online dating relational development suggest that the perceptions of control and increased choices of future partners are the predominant motivational indicators. This may be due to the relative anonymity that people experience online, which result in a feeling of control in the relationship. It seems likely that since the Internet transcends the boundaries of space, people who date online have a greater choice of potential partners. Some participants report lifestyle and inquisitiveness as their motivation for participating in online dating.

According to Brym and Lenton (2001), lifestyle changes have occurred since people spend longer hours in the workplace. This area of investigation found no substantiation for the literature finding that online dating participants are lonely and shy (Barnes, 2001; Bonebrake, 2002; Joinson, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Scharlott & Christ, 1995). Instead, shyness and loneliness were the least reported motivational indicators for online dating. Although this finding may be ascribed to participants faking good, or conversely that the Internet has fewer gating features (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; McKenna et al., 2002; Scharlott & Christ, 1995).

The investigation into level of attraction between online dating participants revealed no significant differences between South African and international participants. According to earlier research, attraction online is determined by one's (a) level of self-disclosure (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Joinson, 2003), (b) degree of idealisation and expectations (Joinson, 2003; Levine, 2000), (c) perceived visual presentation (Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell, 2001), (d) similarity (Levine, 2000; Utz, 2000), (e) mutual liking, (f) the frequency of communication and (g) proximity (Levine, 2000). The findings from this study show that online dating participants regard frequent communication, self-disclosure, similarity and proximity as crucial to the development of online relationships. However, no support was found for the degree of idealisation and expectations, perceived visual presentation and mutual liking. McKenna et al. (2002), and Knapp and Vangelisti (1992) found that trust and liking are prerequisites for self-disclosure online, which in turn determines the level of closeness and intimacy.

Finally, it seems that online dating participants consider their online relationships to be important. They report a moderate level of openness and commitment, which seem related to their self-presentation as well as the anonymity of online interactions. Anonymity online allows people to represent themselves honestly or deceitfully. It is likely that a positive orientation towards the online dating relationship will encourage partners to be honest, open and committed. Conversely, a negative orientation is likely to result in people being dishonest, aloof and uncommitted. A profile of the online dating persona was constructed through a consideration of participants' sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills. The sociodemographic description of the South African online dating persona takes account of several sociodemographic variables namely, age, gender, race, relationship status, region of residence and recreational activities. The results reveal no significant differences between the sociodemographic characteristics of the South African and the international online dating persona. Online dating participants characteristically appear to be single Caucasian females aged between 25 and 34 years. They are more likely to reside in urban areas, and specifically in Gauteng. This conforms to previous research which found that online dating participants are mostly located in urbanised areas (Brym & Lenton, March 2001; Thomas, 2004). Recreational activities include socialising with friends and family, an appreciation for art and drama, reading and surfing the Internet. Overall, these results compare favourably with existing literature pertaining to the international online dating persona. However, within the South African context, Thomas (2004)

found males to participate in online dating more often than females. This discrepancy may be explained by the possibility that males dominate online matchmaking services to a lesser degree now than previously.

Concerning the Big Five personality traits of the online dating persona, significant differences were found between the South African online dating participants. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Significant differences were found on the Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness traits, which endorses previous research findings (Cronje, 2000; White et al., 2004).

First, females were found to be more extraverted than males; therefore, female online dating participants may seem more enthusiastic, confident and hold a more positive outlook. One might attribute this to the lack of stereotypical role restrictions in online dating relationships that are more often present in face-to-face environments. This may also be related to online dating participants' moderate level of openness and their positive orientation towards online dating relationships. This confidence may also be linked to the participants' previous experience gained from online dating relationships.

Second, online dating participants 40 years of age and older, are more likely to report that trait of agreeableness within their interpersonal relationships. It is possible that life experience, experience in social relationships and learnt acceptable behaviour may contribute to a higher level of agreeableness. Gibbs et al. (2006) state that relationship goals, degree of self-disclosure and relationship experience contributes to the development of successful online dating relationships. Again, the latter may be associated with the experience participants have already gained in forming online dating relationships.

Third, online dating participants 40 years of age and older, are more conscientious in managing their behaviour, including engaging in consistent, effective communication. As mentioned before, this may be because older online dating participants have acquired the necessary communication and interpersonal skills in self-other relations. Evidently, such skills are crucial to developing successful online dating relationships because online communication is text-based and requires consistent and continuous attention. Previous research found that the use of emoticons (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996) and self-photographs (Barnes, 2001; Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2006; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther & Bunz, 2005) compensate for the challenges of online communication. Presumably, online dating participants of 40 years old and older have learnt to compensate for the challenges of online communication.

Finally, to initiate and maintain successful online dating relationships, one should have honest intentions, a positive attitude, closeness, mutual trust and frequent communication (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Wright, 2004). Taken together, it seems that a positive outlook toward online dating relationships, frequent online communication and experience or learnt

behaviour is essential to the successful development of online relationships. Furthermore, sufficient quantities of three of the Big Five personality traits, namely Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, may contribute to the successful formation and maintenance of online dating relationships.

This study found several significant differences pertaining to the emotional intelligence of the South African online dating persona. As such, the null hypothesis can be rejected. It is significant that the absence of literature concerning the international online dating persona made a comparison impossible. Such a comparative study may provide additional valuable insight into the online dating persona's emotional abilities in self-other relations.

The results of this study found that females show significantly higher levels of emotion appraisal, regulation and utilisation than males. It is therefore likely that women who date online may be better able than men to recognise and communicate nonverbal emotions and actively evaluate and think about their own and others' emotions. It seems therefore that female online dating participants may be more emotionally intelligent than their male counterparts. Coetzee et al., (2006) believe that people with an introverted personality type are more emotionally competent, whilst extraverted personality types show higher levels of confidence in their emotional intelligence abilities. This finding may relate to findings from the current study concerning the Big Five personality traits. Because female online dating participants seem to be more extraverted and confident, one can assume a higher level of confidence in their emotional intelligence abilities. Previous research shows that four of the Big Five personality traits, namely Openness (Schutte et al., 1998), Neuroticism (Austin et al., 2005; Zeng & Miller, 2003), Extraversion and Agreeableness (Zeng & Miller, 2003) are related to emotional intelligence. Even though this study found evidence that female online dating participants are more extraverted, with those older than 40 years being more conscientious and agreeable, the relationship between these traits and emotional intelligence deserves further investigation.

Second, online dating participants who are geographically located in the Gauteng region demonstrate significantly higher levels of emotion appraisal, in other words, one's ability to recognise and communicate nonverbal emotions. It is possible that people residing in urban areas with a larger concentration of people gain additional experience in social self-other relations. Conversely, it can be argued that urban living isolates people from meaningful social self-other relations, despite considerable contact with others. These findings tie in with the sociodemographic finding that online dating participants are mostly located in urban living areas.

Finally, emotional intelligence refers to one's affective abilities in self-other relations, regardless of the stability (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) or variability thereof (Goleman, 1998). However, learnt behaviour concerning the initiation and maintenance of online dating relationships should be considered in relation to people's ability to develop their own emotional intelligence. Taken together, it seems that female online dating participants shows a higher level of emotional

intelligence than males, which might demonstrate a more positive orientation and openness in social self-other relationships.

Concerning life effectiveness, the results reveal significant differences between the sexes in terms of the description of the life effectiveness skills of the South African online dating persona. In general, the results suggest that females are socially more competent and motivated to achieve success than males. Thus, female online dating participants appear to be more confident in social self-other relations and show a greater willingness and effort in achieving relationship goals. This is relevant in terms of Austin et al.'s (2005) finding that there is a relationship between life satisfaction or effectiveness and emotional intelligence.

Consequently, it seems likely that a relationship exists between the higher extraversion and emotional intelligence scores of female participants and higher life effectiveness skills in terms of social competence and achievement motivation. The higher levels of social competence shown among female participants suggest confidence in social self-other relationships. In light of this, it is possible that the online dating relationships of these participants are more likely to be successful. This is because life effectiveness abilities promote the initiation, formation and maintenance of successful online dating relationships.

Contrary to expectation, the results of this research show only a few significant findings. However, these findings outline the affective, cognitive and behavioural characteristics that constitute the online dating persona profile of the online dating participant.

5. Conclusion

The lack of empirical research pertaining to online relationships and the online dating persona within the South African context amplified the need for the research conducted in this study. The focus of this research was a description of online dating relationships and the creation of an online dating persona profile, specifically within the South African context.

Online dating is a relatively recent phenomenon, which is increasing worldwide. Online dating, and the initiation and maintenance of computer-mediated social relationships, bridges the gap between what it means to be human and machine, respectively. Subsequently, the conception of the online dating persona becomes relevant. The online dating persona may be constructed through a consideration of the sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness of people dating online. The current study shows that the South African online dating persona profile seems similar to the international online dating persona in terms of sociodemographic traits and the Big Five personality traits. Online dating participants in South Africa appear to be mostly young, single, heterosexual females residing in Gauteng. In terms of personality traits, females tend to more extraverted, while online dating participants older than

forty years of age rate themselves as more agreeable and conscientious. In terms of emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills, females show a higher level of emotional intelligence, specifically evaluating, regulating and using their emotions. The female online dating participant also appears to be socially more competent and motivated to achieve success. Gender differences seem to account for most of the significant differences concerning the South African and the international online dating persona.

6. Future Research and Limitations

It is important to consider the implications that may be drawn from this study. An elucidation of online dating relationships and a description of the online dating persona may be useful both for online matchmaking services and researchers.

The prevalence and success of online matchmaking services testifies to the increase in online dating relationships. Online dating participants anticipate that their online dating relationships will be successful, and perceive these relationships to be real, interpersonal engagements. Careful consideration of the sociodemographic and personality characteristics, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness skills of the South African online dating persona could be mutually beneficial to both the online matchmaking service and the online dating participants. By incorporating assessments of personality, emotional intelligence and life effectiveness into the online profile of members and subscribers involved in online matchmaking services, matchmaking programmes may be more effective in creating and calculating matches. Basing the online matching process on standardised psychological assessments rather than biased self-descriptions may improve the service of online matchmaking services. This may also be beneficial to the members and subscribers involved in online matchmaking services because a calculation of one's preferred matches would be more accurate when based on set criteria, and may reduce the risk of deception.

From a research perspective, an elucidation of online dating relationships and the online dating persona profile contribute to the social psychological study of self-other relationships within the mediated environment. This research extends the growing body of knowledge on online social relations and personality perception, and also enquires into emotional intelligence and life effectiveness specifically within the online dating environment. Accordingly, this research has important implications for the planning, implementation and management of online psychological assessment.

There are a number of limitations in this study that merit comment. First, because the selected sampling procedure was non-random, the results and findings of this research should be generalised to all online dating participants within the South African context with great caution. The sample of this research was merely a sub-group of the online dating population in South Africa and

lacked sufficient control groups for comparison. This may affect the external validity of this research. Future research should consider using treatment and control groups to determine if the results can be generalised to the larger South African online dating population.

Another limitation is sample size. To counter the threat to the external validity of this research, a sample size of at least one hundred participants is required. Future research using a larger sample size is warranted, possibly by using multiple online matchmaking services within the South African context. Self-reporting biases may be another limitation of this research study. In conducting online research, the researcher has little control over the sample and participants. However, by implementing control measures this research study partially bridged this gap. These control measures included the proviso that, prior to research participation, participants email the researcher to acquire access to the online research questionnaire. Future research may consider the use of unique passwords for such an intervention.

Finally, in constructing the online questionnaire, this research failed to consider the importance of an enquiry into participants' educational qualifications. Instead, a higher level of intellectual capacity and computer literacy was assumed. However, research that addresses this issue may be relevant in further understanding the online dating persona. Notwithstanding these limitations, it is hoped that this research may contribute to the field of online relationships and expand our understanding of the online dating persona. Therefore, future research should consider replicating this research study to extend current research findings.



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APPENDICES

Appendix i: Online Dating Questionnaire

Online Dating Survey

Online dating within a South African context: A psychological study of the persona profile

The purpose of this research study is to collect information about people that partake in online dating and or use the Internet to meet others. In this online survey I will be asking you general questions about your relationships formed online, demographic description, and personality characteristics. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

To qualify for participation in this research study you should (a) use the Internet to meet and or initiate online dating relationship with others, (b) have had or initiated a dating relationship with another person online, (c) be 18 years of age or older, and (d) currently reside in South Africa.

Any information and personal details gathered during the course of the research study are kept confidential and anonymous. Please note that participation is voluntary. Please read the instructions carefully. This is not a test - there are no right or wrong answers, and everyone will have different responses. It is important that you answer honestly and give your own views and opinion. Please answer all the questions. Please do not talk to others while you think about your answers.

Please select the option below to continue and complete the survey

Continue with survey

Read more

Read more...

Please note that all data and records collected from this survey, personal information and your identity will remain confidential. The use of information from this survey is solely for research purposes. The researcher considers completion and return of any part of the research survey as your consent to participate in this research study. You have the right to end your participation in this research study at any time without penalty. There are no risks involved, and or personal or monetary benefits known to the researcher for participating in this research study. The copyright in and title to this online dating survey 2005 subsists in and belongs solely to the researcher and no part of it whatsoever may be reproduced in any form or by any means, including photocopying or



recording, without the prior written authority of the researcher. If authorised by the researcher, each copy or reproduction of the material will be marked by you with all proprietary notices which appear on the original and will be subject to the requirement that you will acknowledge on the face of the reproduced material that the material belongs to the researcher, who has authorised you to reproduce it. Any unauthorised reproduction of this work will constitute a copyright infringement and may result in both a civil claim for damages and criminal prosecution. Please complete this survey before or on the 31st of July 2005. This research study will form part of the University of Pretoria's requirements for the researcher to obtain a Master of Arts degree in Research Psychology, in the form of a dissertation. The University of Pretoria's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this study. For any further information, queries or complaints please email [the researcher]. All correspondence will be treated in confidence and investigated fully.

SECTION 1

Please describe yourself by answering the questions below.

1. How old are you? (*Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below*)

18 – 24 25 – 29 30 – 34 35 – 39

40 – 44 45 – 49 50 – 54 55 +

2. What is your gender / sex? (*Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below*)

Male Female

3. What is your racial / ethnic identity? (*Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below*)

Black Asian Hispanic / Latino Coloured

White / Caucasian Other (*Please specify*)

4 Do you currently reside / live in South Africa? (*Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below*)

Yes No

4 (a) If 'Yes', in which region in South Africa do you live? (*Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below*)

Gauteng Mpumalanga Western Cape Northern Cape

- Limpopo Eastern Cape Kwazulu Natal Northern Province
- Orange Free State

5. What is your current relationship/ marital status? *(Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)*

- Single Married Separated Divorced
- Widow Involved Living with someone

6. Describe how you prefer to spend your free time? *(Multiple response, please select all the options that appeals to you)*

- Hobbies Sports activities Travelling Surf the Internet
- Read Art & drama (cinema, theatre)
- Socialising with friends and or family Other (Please specify)

7. Have you had or initiated an online dating relationship/(s) in the past? *(Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)*

- Yes No

8. Are you currently involved in an online dating relationship/(s)? *(Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)*

- Yes No

9. How did you meet the person with whom you have or had this online dating relationship? *(Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)*

- Face-to-face E-mail Online dating agency
- Chat room Mailing list Internet relay chat
- News group Bulletin board Other (Please specify)

SECTION 2

Now... Think of your most important online dating relationship. *Please describe this particular online dating relationship by answering the questions below.*

1. How long have you had this online dating relationship? *(Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)*



- () Less than 6 months () 6 Months to 1 year () 1 year to 2 years
() 2 years to 5 years () More than 5 years

2. How often do you contact and or communicate with this person online or vice versa? (Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)

- () Rarely () Seldom () Sometimes () Often () More than often

3. Is this online dating relationship with a person of the same / opposite sex? (Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)

- () Same sex / gender () Opposite sex / gender

4. Why do you or did you choose to have an online dating relationship? (Maximum 100 letters)

5. How would you describe your online dating relationship(s)? (Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)

- () Friendship () Pen pal () Romantic relationship () Work relationship
() Other (Please specify)

6. Have you met this person face-to-face? (Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)

- () Yes () No

6. (a) If “No” would you like to meet this person face-to-face? (Single response, please choose and select one option only from the categories given below)

- () Yes () No

7. How would you describe your most important online dating relationship?

Please use this list of statements below to describe your online dating relationship. Please use the scale below to respond to the statements and then select the option that corresponds to your response or feeling about each particular statement. (Single response across columns)

1	2	3	4	5
No, strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Yes, strongly agree



Fretful									
Practical									
Touchy									
Complex									
Harsh									
Quiet									
Uncreative									
Cooperative									
Imaginative									
Relaxed									
Un-envious									
Creative									
Inefficient									
Rude									
Un-intellectual									
Deep									
Intellectual									
Shy									
Unsympathetic									
Disorganised									
Kind									
Jealous									
Withdrawn									
Sloppy									
Warm									
Efficient									
Sympathetic									

(From Saucier, 1998)

SECTION 4

How accurately can you describe your thoughts and feelings?

Please use this list of statements below to describe your thoughts and feelings as accurately as possible. Please use the scale below to respond to the statements and then select the option that corresponds to your response or feeling about each particular statement. (*Single response across columns*)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.					
When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them.					
I expect that I will do well on most things I try.					



Other people find it easy to confide in me.					
I find it hard to understand the nonverbal messages of other people.					
Some of the major events in my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important.					
When my mood changes, I see new possibilities.					
Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living.					
I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.					
I expect good things to happen.					
I like to share my emotions with others.					
When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.					
I arrange events others enjoy.					
I seek out activities that make me happy.					
I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.					
I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.					
When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.					
By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.					
I know why my emotions change.					
When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.					
I have control over my emotions.					
I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.					
I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.					
I compliment others when they have done something well.					
I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.					
When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself.					
When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.					
When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail.					
I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.					
I help other people feel better when they are down.					
I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.					
I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.					
It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.					

(From Schutte et al., 1998)

SECTION 5

How do you think and feel about yourself?

Please use this list of statements in the table below to describe how you think and feel about yourself. The statements are more or less true ('like you') or more or less false ('unlike you').

Please use the 8-point scale to indicate how true ('like you') or how false ('unlike you'), each statement is **for you, the way that you feel now**.

False Not Like Me						True Like Me	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
This statement doesn't describe me at all; it isn't like me at all		More false than true		More true than false		This statement describes me very well; it is very much like me	



Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I do not waste time.								
I am successful in social situations.								
I try to get the best results when I do things.								
I am open to new ideas.								
I can get people to work for me.								
I can stay calm in stressful situations.								
I like to be active and energetic.								
I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do.								
I communicate well with people.								
I try to do the best that I possibly can.								
I am adaptable and flexible in my thinking and ideas.								
I am a good leader when a task needs to be done.								
I stay calm when things go wrong.								
I like to be an active 'get into it' person.								
I believe I can do it.								
I manage the way I use my time well.								

(From Neill, 2003)

END OF SURVEY

THANK YOU

Appendix ii: Informed consent from DatingBuzz

1. Title of the study

Online dating in a South African context: A psychological study of the persona profile.

2. Purpose of the study

The objective of the proposed research study is to determine a persona profile of the individuals that participate in online dating, within the South African context. From a social psychological perspective, the proposed study will then examine individuals who engage in online relationship formation. Information obtained from this study will be used to inform subsequent analysis or studies on the data.

3. Research process and procedures

To explain the research process I have outlined the following phases for the study below:

- **Phase 1: Study design.** This phase in the research process is the sole responsibility of the researcher. The researcher reviews relevant literature, formulates research questions, define a methodological approach and scientifically design the study. The University of Pretoria's ethical committee has approved this study. A signed informed consent from DatingBuzz is required prior to participation in the research study.
- **Phase 2: Data collection.** DatingBuzz and participants will be included in this phase. This phase would include the recruitment of participants and data collection with the online survey. DatingBuzz will play an important role in the recruitment process.
- **Phase 3: Data analysis.** This phase in the research process is the sole responsibility of the researcher. The process of data analysis includes the coding of data and statistical analysis using the statistical programme called SPSS.
- **Phase 4: Data interpretation.** This phase in the research process is the sole responsibility of the researcher. Findings from the data analysis will be compared to relevant literature to draw conclusions.
- **Phase 5: Report of research findings.** This phase in the research process is the sole responsibility of the researcher. The final phase entails the report writing, publication of the dissertation and informing all parties involved of the results and findings.

DatingBuzz will play a key role in Phase 2 of data collection, more specifically in the recruitment process. With the assistance and participation of DatingBuzz, participants will be informed of the

proposed research study with an online advertisement on the DatingBuzz web page. Participants may email the researcher to ascertain the direct web link to access the research questionnaire. The online questionnaire will be the foremost tool for the purpose of data collection.

4. Duration of the study

The duration of the study is approximately one year. The indicated timeframe includes all the phases of the research process. Phase 2 of the research process, where DatingBuzz plays an important role, will continue for a minimum of three months to a maximum of six months.

5. Rights of DatingBuzz and the researcher

Prior to the commencement of the research study, it is necessary to establish a clear and fair agreement between the researcher and DatingBuzz, outlining the rights of DatingBuzz and the researcher. To follow, the rights of DatingBuzz and the researcher:

5.1 Rights of DatingBuzz

Participation in the research study is voluntarily. If DatingBuzz wishes to withdraw their participation, it will not have any effect on the relationship with the researcher or the University of Pretoria. DatingBuzz may withdraw from participation at any point in time in the research process, without any penalty. However, if DatingBuzz wishes to withdraw from participation, the researcher does request that DatingBuzz withdraw immediately. The research proposal, methodology, work plan, research instruments developed by the researcher, and reports and or any part thereof are the property of the researcher who reserves copyright. DatingBuzz agrees not to disclose to any third party, copy, and use and or apply the research proposal, methodology, and work plan, research instruments developed by the researcher, and reports and or any part thereof, without the written informed consent of the researcher.

5.2 Rights of the researcher

The researcher accepts responsibility for conducting research in a professional, scientific and ethical manner. The researcher also accepts responsibility for the design of the study, the chosen methodology, and report of findings from the research study. The data collection throughout the study will be handled in a confidential and professional manner to prevent any loss or damage thereof. The researcher undertakes to store and safeguard research data against any unauthorised access or fraud.

6. Confidentiality

To ensure the confidentiality of all information, unless otherwise agreed upon, the researcher regards any information obtained during the research process as being confidential. The researcher undertakes to treat all information as confidential. The name of the representative of

DatingBuzz will be regarded as confidential, and the researcher undertakes to ensure the anonymity of the name of the representative of DatingBuzz. Any information whatsoever, regarding the business of DatingBuzz are regarded as confidential and will not be disclosed to any other party. The Name and nature of DatingBuzz, with the permission of DatingBuzz will be used in the report of findings. If DatingBuzz withdraws from participation in the research study, any information obtained by the researcher, will be destroyed. The identity and or any personal and or identifying information regarding the research participants will not be disclosed to DatingBuzz or any other third party, without the research participants written informed consent. The researcher, and supervisor, the ethical committee and research committee, have exclusive access to research data. If any other person requires access to the research data, permission in the form of written consent has to be obtained from the researcher. Subsequently, the researcher will inform and attain permission from DatingBuzz in the form of written consent.

7. Risks and benefits

The researcher undertakes to safeguard DatingBuzz against any loss or harm whether psychological, moral and or social, that DatingBuzz might suffer, as part of the research process. To the knowledge of the researcher, there are no risks involved for DatingBuzz. There are no incentives and or financial gains or costs for DatingBuzz and or research participants in the research study. I am of the opinion that knowledge of virtual social interaction, relationship formation and the virtual self, within a South African context, could be gained through the research study. In addition, in South Africa only a few online dating services exist. Although these services are relatively new, the popularity thereof is increasing. Therefore, this research study could make possible attributions and suggestions to DatingBuzz for future expansion and growth. Also, this research study will contribute to the scientific community, more specifically, Social psychology.

8. Sources of additional information

Prof David Maree from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria is the supervisor of the proposed research study. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Prof David Maree (012) 420 2916 or email at david.maree@up.ac.za. **Please complete and sign the following and send back as soon as possible to the researcher. A signed informed consent is required prior to participation in the research study.**

I, (Name of person) in the capacity of (Position) will be the responsible representative acting on behalf of DatingBuzz. I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, conduct and benefits of this research study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information regarding the research study. I am aware that the results and findings of the research study will be processed in the study report. I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation of DatingBuzz in the research study. I voluntarily declare myself, as the



responsible representative for DatingBuzz, and DatingBuzz as prepared and willing to participate in the study.

Signature _____

I, **Prof D. J. F Maree** (Supervisor), herewith confirm that the above participant has been informed fully about the nature, conduct and benefits of the study.

Supervisor's name: **Prof David Maree**

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: _____

I, _____ (name of researcher), herewith confirm that the DatingBuzz has been informed fully about the nature, conduct and benefits of the study.

Researcher's name: **Chereé Rietchard**

Researcher's signature _____



Appendix iii: Advertisement for research participation

Research Survey

Currently, a research study is being conducted on online dating in a South African context. The purpose of the study is to determine who participates in online dating. Information gathered from this study will be confidential and used for research purposes only. To participate you should be residing in South Africa, 18 years of age or older and have or had an online relationship. Tell us about your online dating experiences, and yourself. Read more >>

Note: *This advertisement was posted online by DatingBuzz, resulting in changes to text and format, as deemed appropriate for web-based purposes.*

Appendix iv: Electronic mail to participants

ONLINE DATING SURVEY 2005

Dear participant,

Thank you for your interest shown in the Online Dating Survey 2005. The survey is open for participation. The following email provides you with all the information you will need to access and complete the survey online.

Survey information

- You may complete the survey at your leisure, you can fill in as many of the sections / questionnaire as you would like and then start again, where you finished. Your completed responses will be saved, so that when going back in, you will not be required to start from the beginning again. Please note that once a section is completed you will not be able to go back in.
- Please be aware that if you need to make changes, you do have the option to go backwards. HOWEVER once you start moving forward again, your answers ahead that you have filled in will be cleared and you will be required to fill them in again
- Certain technical errors might occur when completing the survey online owing to your bandwidth limitations, server stress or traffic on the Internet. If you experience any such errors and are unable to complete the survey online, please contact the researcher.

Closing date

The closing date for completion of the survey is the 31st of August 2005. We will be unable to offer extensions past this date as this would delay the publication of the final report.

Online access details

As the survey is web-based, you will need to click on the web address that is located below to access the questionnaire. Some frequently asked questions are provided below, however, if you have any queries at all regarding the survey, please contact the researcher. Once again, we would like to thank you for your participation and we are confident that this survey will provide valuable information to the field of research psychology.

Regards,

Researcher

The on-line address is located directly below this:

Visit: <http://www.proactive-survey.co.za/onlinedatingsurvey/default.asp>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When do I need to complete my responses?

The survey needs to be completed by the 31st of August 2005 in order for us to meet the publication deadline for the report. If you have any queries or need any help completing the survey, please contact the researcher.

How do I fill in the questionnaire?

You have a number of options available to you. You can complete the survey online by selecting the link provided. Alternatively, you may first want to print a copy and complete the questionnaire by hand before completing the survey online. Please note that when you complete the questionnaire online, you will be able to move both backwards and forwards through the survey. However, if you move backwards and then go forwards again, any information already entered ahead of where you are, will be deleted and will have to be re-entered.

What will I need to complete the questionnaire?

You will need to have Internet access to complete the online questionnaire. The survey is compatible with both Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. However, you will need to have either Internet Explorer Version 5 or higher, or Netscape Version 6 or higher.

Who will be able to see the information I enter?

The information you provide in this survey will be used for research purposes only. No third party will be able to access your information and the researcher will ensure the confidentiality of your data.

When will we be able to see the outputs of the study?

The final report will be available upon request.

How long will this take me?

This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.