Internet Initiated Relationships: Associations Between Age and Involvement in Online Dating

Robert J. Stephure
Susan D. Boon
University of Calgary

Stacey L. MacKinnon
University of Prince Edward Island

Vicki L. Deveau
Consultant with PROVOKE

We used data from an online survey (N = 175) about Internet romance to explore the possibility that age might be associated with variation in people’s perceptions of and experiences with online personals ads and Internet dating sites. Results suggest that involvement in online dating may increase rather than decrease with age and that older adults may turn to online dating in part as a response to diminishing satisfaction with and use of more conventional ways of establishing romances. Age was also unrelated to proxy measures of the stigma associated with online dating (i.e., whether respondents had told others they date online, mean rated favorability of responses to such disclosure). Possible explanations for and implications of these findings are discussed.

Key words: Internet, romantic relationships

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Internet Initiated Relationships: Associations Between Age and Involvement in Online Dating

The present paper reports the results of an online survey conducted to explore people’s experiences with online dating and, in particular, their use of online personals ads to initiate romantic relationships. Here we explore the possibility that age might be associated in important ways with variation in people’s experiences with online romance, a possibility researchers have largely neglected to consider in their investigations of relationships established via the Internet.
Online Dating: Prevalence and Popularity

Recent indicators suggest that online dating is a widespread and popular activity. In 2004, for example, dating websites and online personals ads generated nearly US $470 million in consumer spending, ranking first in revenue among categories of paid online content (comScore, 2004). That same year, the number of new unique visitors to online dating sites was estimated at 40 million per month in the U.S. and 7 million in Canada (CBC Marketplace, 2004).

More recent statistics demonstrate that interest in online personals ads and dating websites remains high. According to the 2006 Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (Madden & Lenhart), 74% of the approximately 10 million American Internet users who are single and actively seeking romantic partners have used the Internet as a means to meet potential dates, with online dating sites serving as the core of these users’ online dating-related activities.

Users’ experiences with Internet personals ads and online dating may not all be uniform, however, and age may be an important dimension along which such experiences vary. Indeed, although there is substantial variation in the age of individuals who visit online dating sites (comScore, 2003; Madden & Lenhart, 2006), younger cohorts (e.g., Internet users between 18 and 29 years of age) are more likely to report accessing such sites than are older cohorts (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Thus, while Internet dating appears to have fairly wide appeal across age ranges, individuals in some age groups appear more likely than others to seek opportunities to meet romantic partners online. Indeed, Internet users 55 years of age and older are substantially underrepresented among visitors to online dating sites (comScore, 2003; Madden & Lenhart, 2006).

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory: Toward A Rationale For Expecting Age Differences in Online Dating

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen Fung, & Charles, 2003; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) posits that time perspective affects goal setting and selection such that the salience of different goals varies across the lifespan. In particular, the theory argues that, as people age, their sense that their lives are finite increases and they become increasingly focused on the present and goals associated with emotional regulation and less focused on the future and future-oriented goals.

Given that intimate relationships play a central role in emotional regulation, Socioemotional Selectivity Theory further proposes that emotionally meaningful relationships characterized by intimacy and affection should increase in importance with age (Carstensen, 1995). Consistent with this prediction, longitudinal research (Carstensen, 1992) has shown that frequency of interaction in and satisfaction with relationships with emotionally significant social network members (i.e., siblings, parents, spouses, and children) increases from age 18 to age 50. In contrast, the same study documented significant age-related declines in frequency of and satisfaction...
with interactions with acquaintances. Importantly, such declines appeared as early as age 30 and thus well before old age.

With respect to the pursuit of romance, if we assume that individuals who use the Internet for this purpose are either single or dissatisfied with some aspect of their existing intimate involvements, Socioemotional Selectivity Theory has important implications for understanding whether and how age will affect their approach to the opportunities that Internet dating offers. First, it suggests that older adults should be more likely than their younger counterparts to believe that they are “running out of time” to meet new partners. If, as the theory predicts, aging is associated with shifts in temporal perspective characterized by a sense that the future is diminishing, older adults should be more inclined than younger adults to perceive time as a constraint on their ability to succeed in the romance-seeking enterprise. Second, the theory suggests that age-related variations in time perspective should affect people’s goal preferences. In comparison with younger adults, older adults should be relatively more focused on the present and the present-oriented goal of emotional regulation than on the future and future-oriented goals. In the present context, this suggests that increasing age should be associated with intensified desires to find a romantic partner and, particularly, a partner with whom the individual might share an emotionally meaningful and affectively positive bond.

In sum, Socioemotional Selectivity Theory provides a theoretical basis for expecting that there may be important associations between age and involvement in dating activity, broadly defined. If we further assume that—for reasons we will outline next—older adults may also be more motivated than younger adults to take advantage of technological advances that might facilitate achieving their romantic objectives, Socioemotional Selectivity Theory provides a theoretical justification for predicting that, compared to younger adults, older adults should be more motivated to invest in online dating activity.

On Age and the Advantages of Technology

Shifts in time perspective are not the only changes that accompany aging. Age may also be related to the breadth of a person’s dating “options” as well as the time he or she has available to find and to meet potential partners. Young adults, for example, and especially young adults enrolled in full-time studies, are likely to enjoy greater access to large numbers of potential partners in their normal day to day activities than older adults who have been in the workplace for several or perhaps many years. Not only do current policies in many organizations actively discourage workplace romance (thus eliminating what may be, for many individuals, the single largest pool in which they might seek partners), but older adults may also have less time for socializing outside of work hours than do younger adults who have not yet entered the workforce full-time (Brym & Lenton, 2001). Congruent with the former argument, Hitsch, Hortacsu, and Ariely (2005) have argued that older adults enjoy less involvement in “natural” institutions such as school and university that facilitate
meeting by bringing together large numbers of potential dates. Older adults may thus find the sheer volume of the user base, the speed, and the convenience of use associated with online personals ads appealing to a greater extent than do younger persons.

Older adults are also more likely to be divorced or separated than younger adults. We might thus expect them to be relatively more interested than their younger counterparts in those means of identifying and meeting potential partners that offer opportunities for screening and selection. To the extent that individuals become more certain of and perhaps more fixed in their tastes as they age or learn from experience (i.e., failed relationships) what they want or need in a romantic partner, older adults may be attracted to Internet dating sites and online personals ads to a greater extent than younger adults precisely because such sites offer opportunities to restrict their search to prospective partners who meet particular criteria and to filter out those who possess traits or qualities they deem undesirable.2

Life Before the Internet

Based on Socioemotional Selectivity Theory and a consideration of the ways in which Internet dating may provide convenient solutions to some of the particular dating challenges older adults may face, we have argued that there are grounds for expecting that age may be associated with increasing involvement in online dating pursuits. The reality, however, may not be as simple as we have painted it thus far. Consider the following.

First, until the advent of online dating sites in the 1990s and their recent and rapid proliferation on the Internet, the tasks associated with finding a romantic partner typically required that individuals meet face to face before they could get to know one another and determine their compatibility as a couple. True, print media personals ads and offline dating services existed for some time before the emergence of online dating sites, but neither of these means of meeting potential partners became “mainstream” nearly to the extent that online dating has today. To those who began dating before the rise of online dating sites, then, finding a date or a mate usually meant seeking possibilities for face-to-face contact with one or more potential eligibles. Against this experiential backdrop, individuals in older cohorts may find the notion of turning to computers and the Internet to find romance rather more unconventional and counternormative than do today’s younger adults. Indeed, today’s younger adults have come of age in an era in which Internet dating and online personals ads exist as reasonably well-accepted, rather taken-for-granted means of meeting others (Madden & Lenhart, 2006; Pasha, 2005). Consistent with this latter assertion, the Pew survey found that, in addition to being more likely than respondents in older cohorts to report that they had engaged in online dating, individuals in the youngest cohort (those between 18 and 29) were also significantly more favorable in their views of online dating than older users (Madden & Lenhart, 2006).
Second, younger adults may also be more skilled in the use of the Internet for nonwork-related purposes. Whereas many older adults may have first encountered the Internet in workplace or educational environments, younger persons are more likely to have been introduced to the social uses of the Internet along with or before its more utilitarian applications. They may thus be more comfortable using the Internet as a social and relationship-building tool (certainly social network sites such as MySpace and Facebook have provided online resources designed for the maintenance of relationships) than individuals whose early lives did not include the Internet and thus more likely to view the process of meeting romantic partners online as a simple and natural extension of their efforts to meet partners through face-to-face means.

Research on other aspects of Internet behavior provides a basis for expecting a generational gap in patterns of Internet use (e.g., Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001; McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001), particularly with respect to the role the Internet plays in individuals’ social lives. To our knowledge, however, researchers have yet to undertake systematic examinations of the possibility that age may be an important correlate of people’s online dating behaviors and involvement. Indeed, most published reports in this area do not discuss issues of age at all. Nevertheless, a review of the literature on Internet-initiated romantic relationships provides some support for our contention that attitudes toward and experiences in relationships developed online might vary with age.

For example, Donn and Sherman (2002) examined the attitudes of 235 undergraduates (the vast majority of whom were between the age of 18 and 20) and 76 Ph.D. students (ranging from 22 to 50, with a mean age of 30). Overall, both groups exhibited negative attitudes toward using the Internet to meet potential romantic partners. However, compared to the graduate student subsample, undergraduate respondents were significantly more negative in their evaluations of Internet dating and those who engage in it. Undergraduates also expressed significantly greater concern with issues surrounding trust and safety relative to graduate students, although both groups were sensitive to the possible risks in these domains. Finally, undergraduates were less likely than graduate students to report considering using the Internet to meet potential partners or actually having used the Internet for that purpose.

A rather more favorable picture of online dating—or at least of online daters—emerged in Brym and Lenton’s (2001) large-scale survey of members of a Canadian online dating service. The majority (66.7%) of Brym and Lenton’s respondents were 30 years old or older, with more than 80% of the sample aged 25 or older. Contrary to stereotypes of online daters popular at the time of the study, and in direct contrast to the prejudicial views held by participants (especially the undergraduates) in the Donn and Sherman (2002) study, Brym and Lenton found that their sample of online daters was in fact more sociable offline than the general Canadian population. Their respondents were highly involved in clubs and organizations, visited relatives often, and frequently engaged in social and leisure pursuits with others.
Together with the lines of argument we developed above, these two studies highlight the need for further research investigating age in the context of Internet dating. The Donn and Sherman (2002) results suggest that older and younger respondents may differ in their attitudes toward and willingness to engage in dating on the net. The majority of their participants had never used the Internet to initiate a romantic relationship, however, thus limiting our ability to generalize their findings to online daters. The Brym and Lenton (2001) study, in contrast, sampled active members of a popular online dating site. Their results corroborate findings that older adults are active in online dating and call into question stereotyped views—shown in Donn and Sherman to be rather prevalent among younger adults (at least those with little or no involvement in online dating)—which cast online daters as lonely and desperate (Anderson, 2005; Wildermuth, 2001). At the same time, Brym and Lenton did not examine respondent age as a variable of interest. Consequently, the extent to which their participants’ attitudes toward, involvement in, and experiences with online dating varied with age remain empirical questions.

The analyses presented in this paper were intended to build on the contributions of these earlier studies. Following Donn and Sherman (2002), we investigated respondent age as an important variable in its own right. Following Brym and Lenton (2001), we recruited Internet users with at least some exposure to Internet personals ads and online dating sites. We sought to answer the following three research questions:

**RQ1:** Is age associated with involvement in online dating?

**RQ2:** Is age associated with satisfaction with offline methods of meeting people?

**RQ3:** Is age associated with the likelihood that participants have disclosed to friends and family the fact that they use the Internet to meet people?

**Age and Involvement in Online Dating**

Our review of reasons to expect that age might be an important variable to consider in understanding the pursuit of online romance suggested two competing hypotheses regarding the direction of any correlation we might observe between age and measures of extent of involvement in online dating and the use of Internet personals ads. On the one hand, we argued that, as members of what Donn and Sherman (2002) call the “Net Generation,” younger individuals might both perceive using the Internet to find dates as less counternormative than members of older cohorts and be more likely to view the use of Internet personals ads and online dating sites as an extension of their usual repertoire of ways to establish romances. If this were the case, we would expect involvement in online dating to decrease with age. On the other hand, we also reasoned that a variety of contextual life changes associated with increasing age might intensify individuals’ motivation to seek new partners while both making it more difficult for older individuals to meet people through offline means and increasing the appeal of dating methods that confer benefits in terms of
time and efficiency, size of the pool, and the ability to screen and select potential partners. If this were the case, we would expect involvement in online dating to increase with age. Accordingly, we tested the following competing predictions:

**H1:** Individuals will be more apt to engage in online dating the younger they are.

**H2:** Individuals will be more apt to engage in online dating the older they are.

**Age and Satisfaction With Other Methods of Meeting People**

Regardless of whether involvement in online dating increases or decreases with age, we expected to find a negative association between respondent age and rated satisfaction with non-Internet ways of finding romantic partners. This hypothesis was predicated in part on the assumption that, given older adults' reduced access to natural social institutions (Hitsch et al., 2005) and the greater number and variety of demands on their time (e.g., work, childcare, etc.), the range of alternative means that participants report using to meet prospective dates would decrease commensurate with increases in age. We thus predicted that:

**H3:** Satisfaction with offline means of meeting people will decrease with age, and

**H4:** Self-reported opportunities for meeting potential partners will narrow with age.

**Age and the Stigma of Online Dating**

Our final research question was intended to assess (albeit in an indirect fashion) the degree to which age may be associated with variations in the stigma our participants attached to online dating. Although recent reports suggest that the majority of North Americans no longer view online daters as desperate (Madden & Lenhart, 2006; Pasha, 2005), recent research suggests that people may still be reluctant to “broadcast” to close others their involvement in online dating because of concerns that their reputations might be tarnished if they were to do so (Anderson, 2005; Close & Zinkhan, 2003; Levine, 2000; Wildermuth, 2004).

Once again we offered competing predictions concerning the direction that any correlation between age and stigma might take. On the one hand, older adults might attach more stigma to online dating because, compared to their younger counterparts, their experiences during their early dating years (before online dating became mainstream) may lead them to view online dating as atypical, unconventional, and the domain of the “nerdy, desperate and shy, or sex-crazed” (Anderson, 2005, p. 523). The older they are, then, the less individuals should be inclined to divulge their status as “online daters” to close others. Based on this possibility, we predicted that:

**H5:** The older the participant, the less likely he or she will be to report having told friends and family that he/she uses the Internet to meet people.

Alternatively, younger adults might attach greater stigma to online dating because they have substantially greater access than older adults to the sorts of natural institutions that offer easy access to large numbers of potential partners (Hitsch et al., 2005). Faced with broader opportunities to find dates through offline means, younger
participants might be more inclined than older adults to view those who “resort” to Internet dating as deviant. They ought, in this case, to be less willing to disclose the fact of their involvement in online dating to close others. Thus, along with H5, we proposed the competing prediction that:

**H6:** The younger the participant, the less likely he or she will be to report having told friends and family that he/she uses the Internet to meet people.

**Method**

**Participants**

Internet users who located our online questionnaire through search engines or links placed on academically oriented social psychology websites participated in this study. After screening submissions for missing data and removing the small number of homosexual participants to increase the homogeneity of our sample, the data for 175 respondents (63 males, 112 females) were retained for analysis. Respondents in the final sample ranged in age from 18 to 64 (\(M = 30.81, SD = 11.70\)) and were predominantly Caucasian and single or causally dating (58.2%). The majority were also North American (89.7%) and living in urban centers. Complete demographic data are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Demographic Data for the Final Sample ((N = 175))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate/diploma</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>25.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casually dating</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously dating</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

Demographics and Internet use
Participants reported their age, sex, sexual orientation, highest obtained level of education, race/ethnicity, country of residence, whether they lived in an urban or rural setting, and relationship status. In addition, they reported the number of hours they spent (a) in chat rooms, (b) browsing online personals ads, (c) responding to online personals ads, and (d) posting online personals ads, as well as the total time they spent online (e.g., “In an average week, how much time do you spend responding to online personals ads?”). Participants also estimated (in months and years) how long they had been using the Internet to meet people. We summed participants’ responses to the three items about online personals ads (i.e., the time spent browsing, responding to, and posting such ads) to create an index of total time engaged in online dating activity. We also calculated the ratio of time engaged in online dating activity to total time online to provide an estimate of the proportion of time online spent in activities related to online dating.5

Online dating activity
Several items assessed the nature and extent of participants’ involvement in online dating. Participants first answered a series of forced-choice questions that asked them if they had ever posted and/or responded to an online personals ad (e.g., “Have you ever posted an online personals ad?”). If they had responded to an ad, they were asked to recall the number of ads they had responded to. If they had posted an ad, they were asked to recall how many responses they had received and to estimate the percentages of responses they considered favorable and unfavorable (e.g., “In percent, how many responses were favorable?”). Next, all participants completed a forced-choice item asking whether they had ever met in person someone they had originally met on the Internet. Finally, respondents completed a 7-item checklist to indicate the kind relations they were looking for in an online relationship (e.g., casual friendship, sexual relations, companionship), checking all options that applied.

Offline dating activity
Participants rated their satisfaction with offline means of meeting people by indicating their response to the question “Overall, how satisfied are you with the traditional means of meeting people (i.e., through friends, bars or clubs, church, etc.?)” using a response scale with endpoints 1 “extremely dissatisfied” and 7 “extremely satisfied.” Participants also indicated whether they used each of six methods to meet people (e.g., bars/night clubs, singles events, introduction by friends), checking all options that applied.

Disclosure to social network members
Participants responded to the forced-choice item “Have you ever told your family, friends, etc. that you use the Internet as a means of meeting people?” Those who responded in the affirmative then used a 7-point response scale (endpoints 1 “extremely negatively” and 7 “extremely positively”) to rate how favorably the
recipients of such disclosure had responded (“Overall, how have these people responded to the news that you use the internet to meet people?”).

**Procedure**

We created an online survey designed to gather broad descriptive data concerning people’s experiences with online personals ads and Internet-initiated romances. We then contacted the webmasters at several academically oriented social psychology websites (e.g., PsychCentral.com and psych.hanover.edu/research/exponent.html) and asked them to place a link to the survey on their websites. Data were collected over a period of approximately 18 months (525 days) from 13 August 2003 through 20 January 2005. Individuals who accessed the survey website advanced to the survey itself only after indicating their consent to participate. Identifying information was stripped from submitted responses and each response was assigned an arbitrary participant number prior to analysis.

In total, we received 487 submissions. After removing 51 completely blank submissions, the first author compared date-time stamps, IP addresses, and similarities in responses across each of the remaining 436 submissions to identify possible duplicates. None were found.

To ensure that all participants in the final sample currently used online personals ads and Internet dating sites (at least to some minimal extent) or had done so in the past, we removed submissions for participants who failed to complete the items that assessed the kinds of relations they sought online (we reasoned that “true users” would complete these items) and/or provided a response of 0 for or failed to complete the item that asked them to estimate the total number of hours they spent online in an average week. Several of the remaining participants had values of 0 for total time in online dating activity. We retained these participants for analysis only if they provided a valid, nonzero value in response to the item that asked how long they had been using the Internet to meet people or responded in the affirmative to one or both of the items asking if they had ever posted or responded to an online personals ad (thus indicating that they had used online personals ads at some point in the past, though they did not report using them at the time of the study). Together, these criteria led to the removal of 206 participants, yielding a sample of 230.

An additional two submissions containing lewd and pornographic responses were also removed, as was the submission for one respondent who was underage (i.e., 17) at the time of the study. To reduce the heterogeneity of our sample, we also removed the data for 35 gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents. Finally, we dropped the data for an additional 17 respondents when subsequent examination of responses identified them as outliers on one or more variables used in the analyses (respondents whose standardized scores on the continuous variables of interest exceeded 3.2 were considered outliers. See Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The final sample thus included 175 participants.6
Analysis
Close inspection of the data revealed that several variables (age, the time online variables, total number of responses to ads participants had posted, and number of ads to which participants had responded) were substantially positively skewed even after removal of outliers. We thus transformed each of these variables prior to analysis (using square root and logarithmic transformations as each case required).

We also conducted preliminary analyses to determine whether age was associated with participant sex, residence (rural vs. urban), or relationship status (i.e., those demographic variables with large enough cell sizes across categories to permit tests of differences in age between groups). T-tests showed that age did not vary with sex or residence, \( p's > .57 \). However, a one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in age associated with relationship status (due to small \( n \) for the remaining groups, we restricted our focus to those who were single/casually dating \( [n = 102] \), seriously dating \( [n = 27] \), and engaged/cohabiting/married \( [n = 22] \)), \( F(2, 148) = 6.37, \ p < .01 \). Posthoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that, on average, participants who reported being in more seriously committed relationships (i.e., those who were engaged, cohabiting, or married) were older (\( M = 33.95, SD = 8.56 \)) than participants who were either single/casually dating (\( M = 28.27, SD = 10.79 \)) or involved in serious dating relationships (\( M = 24.89, SD = 7.06 \)). The latter two groups did not differ from each other.

Results
Involvement in Online Dating
Overall, our participants were quite active in online dating. The considerable majority reported having posted an online personals ad (70.9%), responded to one (70.9%), or met someone in person whom they had first encountered online (74.3%).

To obtain a more differentiated view of participants’ level of involvement in online dating, we constructed a participation index in which respondents received a “0” if they had neither posted nor responded to an ad, a “1” if they had responded to an ad but not posted one, a “2” if they had posted an ad but not responded to one, and a “3” if they had both posted and responded to ads. Higher numbers thus indicate more extensive use of online personals ads for purposes of meeting potential romantic partners (we considered posting an ad indicative of greater involvement in online dating than responding to an ad because more effort is required to post than to respond). With this index as our metric, our sample is comprised primarily of Internet users who have both posted and responded to ads (64.0%). Of the remainder, 7.4% of participants reported having only responded to ads, an additional 8.0% reported having only posted ads, and 20.6% were “browsers” who had neither posted nor responded to an online personals ad.

On average, participants who had responded to online personals ads reported having responded to approximately 20 ads (\( M = 19.67, SD = 24.88 \), range 1 to 100). Reported estimates of the number of responses received by those who had posted ads
were considerably higher, averaging about 50 responses ($M = 51.80$, $SD = 77.63$, range 0 to 500). Interestingly, participants reported receiving significantly fewer favorable ($M = 40.42\%$, $SD = 36.79$) than unfavorable ($M = 56.14\%$, $SD = 37.05$) responses, $t(104) = -2.24, p < .05$.

Descriptive statistics for participants’ estimates of the amount of time in an average week they spent browsing, posting, and responding to online personals ads (as well as time spent in chat rooms and total time spent online) are displayed in Table 2. On average, participants reported spending roughly 19 hours per week online and engaging in some sort of online dating activity (browsing, posting, or responding to ads) for an average of about 3 hours per week (or about 20% of their total time online).

When asked what they were looking for in an online relationship, the considerable majority of participants expressed interest in seeking fun, companionship, and someone to talk to (see Table 3). Most also reported interests in developing casual friendships and dating relationships with online partners. Substantially fewer reported using the Internet for the specific purposes of identifying potential sexual or marital partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Time Spent in Online Dating-Related Activity, in Chat Rooms, and Total Time Online (in Hours per Week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing personals ads</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to ads</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting ads</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online dating activity (total)*</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of total time in online dating activity to total time online</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat rooms</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total time online</td>
<td>18.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Statistics for the browsing, responding, posting, and chat room variables were calculated excluding participants who reported spending 0 hours in these activities at the time of the study. Five participants had missing data on one or more of the online dating activity variables and thus were not included in the calculations for total online dating activity or the ratio of total time in online dating to total time online. As noted elsewhere, statistics for these latter two variables also exclude scores for six participants who reported spending more time engaged in online dating activity in an average week than they reported spending online in an average week.

*The mean total time in online dating activity does not equal the sum of the individual means for the browsing, posting, and responding items because the former mean was calculated across all participants with nonmissing data, whereas the latter means were calculated excluding those with missing data or reporting values of 0. In other words, in contrast to the means for the individual items, values for the total time in online dating activities variable were calculated including those who did not report current online dating activity.
Table 3  Proportion of Participants Seeking Different Types of Relationships Online
(N = 176)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of relationship</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casual friendship</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating partner</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage partner</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone to talk to</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionship</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>46.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RQ1: Is Age Associated With Level of Involvement in Online Dating?

Our first research question explored the possibility that involvement in Internet dating might vary as a function of respondent age. As the first step in evaluating the competing hypotheses we advanced concerning the direction the results might take, we calculated point-biserial correlations between age and responses to the items concerning whether participants had ever posted an online personals ad, responded to such an ad, or met face to face with someone they had initially met online. Consistent with the hypothesis that individuals might be more apt to engage in online dating the older they are (H2), each of these correlations was positive. The older the participant, the more likely he or she was to report having responded to an online personals ad, \( r = .42, p < .001 \), posted an ad, \( r = .30, p < .001 \), and met someone face to face whom he or she had first encountered online, \( r = .28, p < .001 \). In addition, age was positively correlated with scores on the participation index, \( r = 0.37, p < 0.001 \). As a respondent’s age increased, so too did the extensiveness of his or her participation in online dating activities involving the use of online personals ads.

We also investigated the possibility that age might relate to the number of responses participants submitted or received and to their estimates of the proportion of received responses that were favorable and unfavorable. Of the four relevant correlations, only one was significant, providing only weak evidence of an association. Importantly, that evidence again supports H2 rather than H1: Although small, the correlation between age and number of responses to others’ ads was small but positive, \( r = .18, p = .053 \). The corresponding correlation between age and number of responses received was also positive but failed to achieve significance, \( r = .16, ns \), and the correlations between age and participants’ estimates of the proportion of responses that were favorable and unfavorable were nonsignificant (\( ps > .10 \)) and close to 0 (\( rs < .04 \)).

Correlational analyses also revealed several significant but generally weak correlations between age and time spent in online dating activities. Estimates of time spent browsing personals ads, \( r = .19, p < .05 \), as well as total time engaged in online dating activity, \( r = .19, p < .05 \), and the ratio of total time engaged in online activity to total time online, \( r = .24, p < .01 \), all increased slightly with participant
age. In contrast, total time online, \( r = -0.06, \text{ns} \), time spent posting ads, \( r = .14, \text{ns} \), and time spent responding to ads, .13, \( \text{ns} \), did not vary by age.

Finally, to determine whether age was associated with the kinds of relationships or social opportunities participants’ reported seeking in their use of online personals ads, we calculated point-biserial correlations between age and endorsement of the sexual relationship and marriage partner options (i.e., the two types of relationships not endorsed by the considerable majority of respondents). Although neither correlation was large, both were consistent with Hypothesis 2. The older the participant, the more he or she was likely to report using the Internet to seek marital and sexual partners, \( r = .22, p = .01 \) and \( r = .16, p < .05 \), respectively.

In sum, although the observed associations tend to be small to very small in size (and some variables show no association whatsoever), the overall pattern of results provides consistent support for Hypothesis 2 over Hypothesis 1. Across the majority of variables we examined, if any association between participant age and online dating activity was observed, the tendency was for involvement in Internet dating via online personals ads to increase—rather than decrease—with age.

**RQ2: Is Age Associated With an Individual’s Self-Reported Level of Satisfaction With Offline Methods of Meeting People?**

Our second research question asked whether satisfaction with offline methods of meeting others might vary with age. On average, participants’ responses to the satisfaction question suggested that they were neither particularly satisfied nor particularly dissatisfied with offline means of meeting potential romantic partners, \( M = 3.75 \) (on a 7-point scale; \( SD = 1.56 \)). Congruent with our expectations, however, the picture looked considerably different when we took participants’ age into consideration. Consistent with the hypothesis that a variety of contextual life changes associated with increasing age might render older individuals more inclined than younger individuals to experience dissatisfaction with their efforts to meet people through offline means (H3), age was substantially negatively correlated with participants’ ratings of satisfaction with non-Internet related methods of meeting people, \( r = -0.43, p < 0.001 \).

Additional analyses revealed small but significant associations between age and reported use of several of the offline methods for meeting partners that we investigated. The older the participant, the less likely he or she was to report meeting people by going to bars/night clubs, \( r = -0.24, p < 0.01 \) or through friends, \( r = -0.33, p < 0.001 \), and the more likely he or she was to report meeting people through newspaper personals ads, \( r = 0.25, p < 0.01 \). Age was also significantly negatively correlated with the total number of offline methods participants reported having used to meet others, \( r = -0.28, p < .001 \). This pattern of results provides some support for our hypothesis that individuals’ opportunities for meeting potential romantic partners narrow with age (H4) and thus for our assumption that, as they age, individuals may be more likely to seek nonconventional means of accessing dates such as are available through the Internet and print personals.
RQ3: Is Age Associated With Perceptions of the Stigma Associated With Online Dating?

Our final research question addressed the issue of stigma by exploring whether age was associated with participants’ decisions to disclose to close others the fact that they use the Internet to meet people. We tested two competing hypotheses: H5 was predicated on the assumption that older adults might attach more stigma to online dating because, compared to their younger counterparts, their experiences during their early dating years (before online dating became “mainstream”) may lead them to view online dating as unusual and unconventional. H6, in contrast, was based on the assumption that younger adults might attach greater stigma to online dating because they have substantially greater access than older adults to the sorts of natural institutions that offer easy access to large numbers of potential partners. Faced with broader opportunities to find dates through offline means, younger participants might then be more inclined than older adults to view those who “resort” to Internet dating as deviant.

In actuality, the considerable majority of our sample (70.3%) reported that they had disclosed their involvement in Internet dating to family and friends. Contrary to expectations, however, neither the association between age and disclosure, \( r = 0.10, \text{ns} \), nor the correlation between age and favorability of targets’ responses to disclosure were significant, \( r = -0.09, \text{ns} \). In short, the results supported neither of our hypotheses. Overall, participants reported that the targets of their disclosures had responded in a more or less neutral fashion, \( M = 4.12 \) (on a 7-point scale; \( SD = 0.98 \)).

Discussion

The present paper investigated three research questions concerning the possibility that people’s attitudes toward, involvement in, and experiences with online dating might differ by age. Consistent with the key tenets of Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen et al., 2003; Carstensen et al., 1999) as well as arguments based on a consideration of aspects of the broader social context in which Internet dating occurs, the results suggest that age may indeed be a more important variable for understanding the processes by which people seek to initiate romances online than existing research has acknowledged.

Age and Involvement in Online Dating

Our first research question examined the possibility that age might be associated with variation in involvement in pursuits related to online dating. The associations we observed were small in magnitude and some of the variables we examined showed no relation to age at all. Nevertheless, the general pattern of results was surprisingly consistent and, overall, supported Hypothesis 2, which predicted that degree of involvement in online dating increases (rather than decreases) with age. Older participants were more likely than younger participants to have both posted and responded to online personals ads and to have met face-to-face with someone they
had first encountered online. The number of responses participants reported sending increased somewhat with age, as did the time they reported spending browsing online personals ads, the total time they spent involved in activities related to online dating, and the ratio of total time involved in online dating activities to total time online. Finally, although the association was small, older adults were significantly more likely than younger adults to report seeking marital and sexual partners online. Importantly, this latter finding—especially the positive association between age and using online personals ads to find marital partners—suggests that older adults are not only more involved in the pursuit of romantic partners via the Internet than younger adults, but more serious in their pursuits, as well. This latter interpretation fits well with Socioemotional Selectivity Theory.

With respect to previous literature, our results are generally consistent with Donn and Sherman’s (2002) findings that the (younger) undergraduate students in their sample were less likely than the (older) graduate students who participated in their study to report having used the Internet to meet potential partners. Our results extend Donn and Sherman’s findings, however, because few participants in their study had ever visited an online dating site whereas our participants all had at least some exposure to such sites, the majority having accessed such sites for purposes of both posting and responding to personals ads.8

Interestingly, despite consistent (if rather weak) evidence that the amount of time participants spent engaged in activities related to online dating increased with age, age and total time online were not related. This pattern of results—and the positive and significant (albeit small) correlation between age and the ratio of time engaged in online dating activity to total time online—suggests that the older adults in our sample focused proportionally more of their time online on efforts to establish romance than did their younger counterparts. Such a pattern is again consistent with our claim, based on Socioemotional Selectivity Theory, that older participants may have been more serious in their pursuit of online romance than younger participants.

**RQ2: Age and Dissatisfaction With Offline Means of Meeting People**

Our second research question examined the association between age and participants’ satisfaction with non-Internet methods of meeting people and was based on the assumption, tested as Hypothesis 4, that people experience a narrowing of opportunities for meeting people as they age. Guided by this assumption, we predicted that age and satisfaction with offline means of meeting people would be negatively correlated (H3).

Congruent with both hypotheses, we found a fairly robust and negative correlation between satisfaction and age and some (albeit fairly weak) evidence that reported use of the various offline methods for meeting people examined in this study decreased with age. Specifically, older participants were significantly less likely than younger participants to report meeting people at bars and nightclubs and through their friends. Age was also negatively correlated with the total number of offline methods participants reported using to meet people. The most interesting exception
to this general trend (although the correlation was small) was the finding that older participants were more likely than younger participants to report using print personals ads. Importantly, this latter finding provides further support for our argument, used to advance Hypothesis 2, that older adults find it more difficult to meet people through conventional offline means and thus turn to less conventional means—such as the Internet and print personals—to enhance their odds of meeting new people. Interestingly, however, this pattern did not extend to use of either dating services or attendance at singles events.9

We are unaware of any research that examines either of the hypotheses tested here. Clearly, these are issues that would benefit from further investigation. It remains to be determined, for example, whether the dissatisfaction and decreased use of the means observed here reflects perceptions of their ineffectiveness, diminishing access (Hitsch, et al., 2005), or growing discomfort with either the venues involved or the kind of people met there (perhaps especially in the case of bars and nightclubs). Future research might explore people’s repertoires of methods for finding partners in more depth with an eye toward understanding how changing life contexts and advances in technology influence the breadth of these repertoires and people’s utilization of the various means within them.

**RQ3: Age and the Stigma of Online Dating**

Our final research question investigated the association between age and participants’ perceptions of the degree of stigma associated with meeting people online. Hypothesis 5 predicted that participants would be less likely to report having told friends and family that they use the Internet to meet people the older they are; Hypothesis 6 predicted the reverse. Neither hypothesis was supported. Approximately 70% of participants had told their friends and family that they used online dating. More importantly, the association between age and participants’ disclosure status was small and nonsignificant and participants’ ratings of their audiences’ reactions to disclosure did not vary with age.

The reasonably high rates of disclosure observed here are consistent with Madden and Lenhart’s (2006) conclusions about stigma based on the 2006 Pew survey. Madden and Lenhart found that relatively few internet users (less than 30%) harbored the belief that online daters are desperate and that the proportion of users who did so fell to just 20% when they focused their analyses on Internet users who—like most of those in our sample—were single and “looking.” Our results appear less consistent with claims in the online dating literature. For example, Anderson (2005) describes online dating as a “talk show phenomenon” (p. 521) and argues that media coverage of the topic is frequently negative. Wildermuth (2004) goes even further to suggest that the stigma prevalent in the media is manifest in the scholarly literature, as well. Moreover, both authors discuss stereotypes characterizing online daters as nerdy, desperate, shy, and sex-crazed (Anderson, 2005) and bored, lonely, socially anxious, weird, nuts, and insane (Wildermuth, 2001).
We can think of at least two explanations for our finding that age was unrelated to whether or not participants had disclosed to family and friends. First, and supported by the relatively high rates of disclosure observed in this study, Madden and Lenhart’s (2006) assessment of the degree of stigma that society currently attaches to online dating may be more accurate than views reported in the research literature as exemplified by Anderson (2005) and Wildermuth (2001, 2004). If the public’s attitudes toward online dating have indeed shifted in a more positive and accepting direction, then we would not necessarily expect disclosure to vary with age. Alternatively, insofar as participants (or some participants) continue to attach stigma to online dating, the assumptions underlying both our hypotheses may be true such that any differences between older and younger participants may cancel each other out. That is, whereas younger adults may worry about being viewed as desperate because they have “resorted” to online dating, older adults may experience similar apprehensions because they perceive online dating as unusual, counternormative, and unconventional. If both cohorts have reasons (albeit different reasons) to view turning to the Internet to find romantic partners as deviant, the lack of an association between age and disclosure status would be understandable, even predictable.

As for the lack of association between age and mean rated favorability of the target audiences’ response, this finding indicates that, whatever participants may have believed to be true concerning the stigma they would experience were they to share their involvement in online dating with others, those others’ reactions did not vary with the age of the participant. Again, this may suggest that Madden and Lenhart’s (2006) conclusions about societal views of online dating more accurately represent people’s real attitudes toward finding romance on the Internet than do the conclusions of scholars such as Anderson (2005) and Wildermuth (2001, 2004) such that—for persons of any age—online daters are no longer viewed in the pejorative terms they once were. Alternatively, perhaps both younger and older persons experience real stigma but the reasons for this stigma vary, resulting in reactions from others that are more similar across age than different. Future research will be necessary to tease these explanations apart.

Although we think it makes sense to assume that individuals would seek to conceal their involvement in online dating to the extent that they associated stigma with this behavior, it is also important to note that they might also choose to conceal the fact that they use the Internet to meet people for any number of reasons that have nothing to do with perceiving online dating as a stigmatized behavior. Thus, our disclosure measure is at best a proxy for stigma, its validity unknown at this time. Further research with more direct measures of perceived stigma (such as the items Anderson, 2005, used) is necessary to determine with greater certainty whether and how age and perceived stigma may be associated. Our results are suggestive of the possibility that, at least among those who actively engage in online dating, the perceived stigma associated with online dating may be rather low. We do not know, however, how
different our results might have been had we asked participants directly to rate the degree to which stigma is attached to online dating.

Limitations, Future Research, and Implications
Four limitations of this study deserve mention. First, our sample comprised self-selected Internet users who found our study online and completed it in the absence of extrinsic reward. Our participants may thus differ from the broader population of online daters in important ways. For example, those who participated in our study may be relatively more invested in the pursuit of romance via the Internet or have had more favorable experiences with online dating than those who would not participate without an incentive.

Certainly, such differences may have biased our findings in ways we can neither measure nor control. Nevertheless, we believe that our sample more closely resembles the North American online dating population than samples recruited directly from educational settings (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Bonebrake, 2002; Donn & Sherman, 2002) precisely because our participants were recruited online rather than from the classroom (of course, the fact that our survey was linked to academic websites may mean that our sample is not as distinct from samples obtained from education settings as might be ideal). To the extent that universities and colleges serve as natural social institutions and thereby promote opportunities for contact between potential partners (Hitsch et. al, 2005), studies of Internet dating that rely exclusively on students as participants may paint a biased portrait of Internet dating because their samples may enjoy greater natural access to dates than the broader population of Internet users looking for romance.

Our sample is also highly educated, mostly white, and spends a higher than average amount of time per week online (as compared to the 15.3 hours per week reported in the 2008 survey of The Center for the Digital Future). We must be cautious, therefore, in generalizing our findings beyond the present sample. It is possible that age might be more or less important to understanding the online dating experiences of people of color, those who have less education, and those who spend less time on the Internet. Future research examining age in relation to people’s attitudes toward, involvement in, and experiences with Internet romance would benefit from efforts to obtain more diverse samples and from more focused examinations of the broader socioeconomic contexts in which their samples are located.

Given the number of partial submissions and the amount of missing data in our data set, our survey also appears to have taxed respondents’ attention spans. Unfortunately, we cannot know how our findings might have differed had more participants completed our survey in full. Researchers might be wise to limit the length of the surveys they construct when conducting online research in this area (cf. Whitty, 2003).

Finally, we investigated individuals’ involvement in and experiences with online dating and Internet personals ads at a single point in time during a particular historical era. The age effects we observed might thus reflect cohort effects restricted in their
applicability to the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Of course, our predictions were to an important extent grounded in the premise that today’s adults belong to two cohorts: those who grew up “before the Internet” and those who belong to the “Net Generation.” Still, we recognize that much has changed in the domain of online social interaction in recent years (including the advent of online social networks such as Facebook and Myspace, which postdate both our research and that of Donn & Sherman, 2002). Such changes may have important and far-ranging implications for online social relationships—dating/mating relationships and otherwise—and we would fully expect that such changes may limit the generality of our findings to the particular time period during which our data collection took place.

These limitations notwithstanding, we think our findings have important implications for research on online dating and Internet romance. The effects we obtained were generally quite small in magnitude, but they were nevertheless sufficiently consistent in direction and observed across a sufficiently wide array of variables to suggest that age may be a variable of some importance in understanding how romantic relationships are established online. To the extent that future research corroborates or extends our findings and especially if the trend of growing Internet use among older cohorts continues (Center for The Digital Future, 2005), it will be important for investigators to take care in recruiting participants. In particular, our findings suggest that conclusions derived from young, college-aged samples may not be generalizable to the online dating population in general and especially to the experiences of “older” adults.

Conclusion

Scholars have argued that shifting demographic trends have encouraged the evolution and growth of new ways of initiating romantic relationships (e.g., Brym & Lenton, 2001; Hardey, 2004). The present study explored the possibility that people’s involvement in and experiences with online dating—the highest profile and most rapidly proliferating of these new techniques—varies with age. Our findings suggest that age may be an important variable to consider as investigators continue their efforts to map the terrain of relationships established online. We hope that other researchers will incorporate examinations of age in their studies to provide a fuller understanding of when, how, and why age matters when it comes to matters of the heart initiated and enacted online.

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Notes

1 We use the terms “younger” and “older” in a relative sense. The term “older adults,” in particular, should not be taken to refer to persons of advanced age but to those who reached adulthood before Internet dating sites became the widespread, mainstream phenomenon they are today.

2 Of course, the effects of divorce/separation are complex and varied and, rather than increasing the appeal of Internet dating, divorce/separation may decrease its appeal. As one reviewer suggested, compared to those without such experience, those who have experienced the dissolution of a committed, long-term relationship may be more cautious in their approach to online dating and less enthusiastic about the opportunities it may afford.

3 We examined age as a continuous variable to maximize the power of our analyses, avoid problems associated with unequal n among groups, and because any cut-offs used to categorize participants by age would necessarily have been arbitrary.

4 Ancillary analyses show that the results do not differ substantially if we retain homosexual participants in our sample. More generally and across the full range of variables examined in this study, the responses of homosexual participants were substantially similar to those of heterosexual participants except that homosexual participants were (naturally) less likely (29.4% vs. 49.1%) than heterosexual participants to report seeking marriage as a goal of online dating. $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 6.06, p < .05$, Full results of these analyses are available upon request from the second author.

5 We excluded the data for six participants from the calculation of the total time engaged in online dating activity because they reported spending more time in online dating activity than total time online. As computation of the ratio of total time in online dating to total time online also involves this variable, we excluded these same participants from the computation of this index, as well.

6 We conducted a series of tests to determine whether the final sample ($N = 175$) differed from the group of individuals whose responses had been removed from the data set during screening ($N = 261$). The dependent variables were age, gender, relationship status, education level, and urban or rural residence. Significant differences emerged for age, $t(421) = −2.04, p < .05$, relationship status, $\chi^2(7, N = 412) = 27.36, p < .001$, and education level, $\chi^2(8, N = 404) = 26.96, p < .01$. The final sample of participants was about 2 years older ($M = 30.01, SD = 11.70$) on average than those participants whose data were not retained ($M = 28.35, SD = 12.56$). In addition, compared to the remaining participants, participants who were retained for analysis were more likely to be casually dating (17.2% vs. 9.7%), less likely to be married (5.7% vs. 14.7%), and more likely to be divorced (12.1% vs. 2.9%). Participants retained for analysis were also less likely than participants removed from the data set to report that their highest level of education was high school (5.8% vs. 12.0%) and more likely to report having obtained university degrees (26.3% vs. 19.7% for 4-year undergraduate degrees, 12.9% vs. 3.9% for masters degrees). Although small, these differences suggest some need for caution in interpreting the results of the analyses reported here.

7 Donn and Sherman’s (2002) results suggest that education may be an important variable to consider in understanding people’s attitudes toward and experiences
with online dating. To examine this possibility in the present data set, we reran our correlational analyses substituting education level for age (with participants categorized into three groups: some postsecondary education or less \(n = 66\), postsecondary diploma/degree \(n = 79\), or graduate degree \(n = 26\)). In all but two cases, the correlations involving education level were nonsignificant or substantially similar in size and direction but smaller than those involving age. Because age and education level were significantly correlated, \(r = .36, p < .001\), we also computed partial correlations with age controlling for education level. Of the 21 partial correlations computed, four were substantially different from the zero-order correlations involving age. The correlations between age and time spent browsing, total time spent in online dating activities, number of ads responded to, and interest in seeking a sexual partner were nonsignificant controlling for education level. All remaining correlations involving age were unchanged despite partialing out education. Taken together, the results of these analyses suggest that, generally, the observed relations involving age are not attributable to variation in education and that age more often accounts for observed variation in participants’ responses than does education. Full results of the analyses involving education are available from the second author.

8 At first blush it may appear to do so, but the finding that involvement in online dating increased with age in our study does not conflict with the results from the Pew survey discussed previously (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). First, although our participants ranged considerably in age, on average they were just 30.81 years old and the distribution was positively skewed such that most (82.9%) were 44 years of age or younger. The distribution in the Pew survey, in contrast, was intended to represent the population of households with telephones in the continental United States and included proportionally more adults in older cohorts than our sample. In addition, the Pew statistics are based on “visits” to online dating sites, whereas our data track involvement in ways that extend well beyond mere browsing (e.g., posting ads, responding to ads).

9 One of the reviewers suggested that, in addition to varying by age, breadth of dating options might also vary by residence i.e., (urban vs. rural). To test this possibility, we ran a series of analyses examining (a) the association between residence and satisfaction with offline means of meeting potential partners and (b) whether participants were more or less likely to report using the various offline means as a function of whether they lived in an urban or a rural setting. In other words, we reran the analyses performed to test Hypotheses 3 and 4 (which were based on the assumption that breadth of dating options might vary by age) substituting residence for age as the independent variable. Interestingly, none of these associations was significant. Satisfaction and residence were uncorrelated \((r = .09, p = .25)\), none of the point-biserial correlations between residence and the meeting variables was significant (all \(ps > .20\)), and the correlation between residence and the total number of offline means used to meet people was essentially 0 \((r = .04, p = .62)\). These results suggest that, at least in the present sample, individuals residing in urban centers did not experience any greater difficulty meeting potential partners through conventional means than did individuals residing in rural settings, a pattern of results suggestive of the possibility that breadth of dating options may not vary by residence.
References


About the Authors

Robert J. Stephure has Bachelor of Science degrees in Electrical Engineering, Math, and Psychology from the University of Calgary. His research interests focus on the interface between technology and the ways people meet and become attracted to one another.

Address: Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, 2500 University Dr. NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada

Susan D. Boon is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary. Her research focuses on close relationships, broadly defined, with a particular emphasis on the dynamics of dating relationships.

Address: Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, 2500 University Dr. NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada

Stacey L. MacKinnon is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Prince Edward Island. Her research interests focus on both implicit and explicit social and relationship cognition.

Address: Memorial Hall 206, Department of Psychology, University of Prince Edward Island, 550 University Avenue, Charlottetown, PE C1A 4P3, Canada

Vicki L. Deveau is a consultant with PROVOKE, a strategic insight and planning boutique in Calgary.

Address: PROVOKE, Suite 700, 2303–4th St SW, Calgary, AB T3B 2B9, Canada