

**EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND INTERNET
DATING**

A Thesis

by

KAMESHA SONDRANEK SPATES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2004

Major Subject: Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Explorative Study of African Americans and Internet Dating. (December 2004)

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The online dating industry is estimated to be worth 1.5 billion dollars. The growing trends in technology have resulted in African Americans logging on to the Web at astonishing rates. Therefore, the goal of this research project is to evaluate dating orientated interaction in the context of virtual communities. The theoretical perspective of this thesis is that of the concept of trust, and I examine the role that trust has on dating oriented interaction in the context of virtual communities. This study utilizes both ethnographic qualitative research methods along with the survey research method to explore the topic of African Americans and their use of the Internet as a tool to find “quality or compatible dates”. This study also provides an examination not only of dating patterns among African Americans via the Internet, but it also provides an examination of the role that technology plays in creating and mediating dating trends. An additional interest is to evaluate dating orientated interaction in the context of virtual communities.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of my friends and family that have given me their unconditional love, support, and understanding throughout this entire process. I would like to thank all of you.

Specifically, I would like to dedicate the completion of this project to my grandmother Bobbie Spates, my Uncle Roy Spates, and last but certainly not least GOD! Without you three, this would not have been possible.

Thank you all very much.

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To my grandmother and uncle, thank you for all of your support. You both always encouraged me to be the best and never to settle for less. Nothing worth anything comes easy. So, thank you very much for everything you have done. This would not have been possible without you. As for the rest of my family and friends, thank you for your understanding and support through out this process. It is finally over.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much of African American literature focuses on negative aspects of the African American community. Absence and shortage of the African American male, single female headed households, and children left to fend for themselves are characteristics that are all too common in literature pertaining to African American relationships and the family. However, although African Americans families face everyday dilemmas, their dating patterns are often overlooked. In other words, even though crime, high unemployment rates, and high rates of imprisonment exist in these communities, so to, does romance and dating.

The online dating industry has grown dramatically over the past few years. Amazingly, the online dating industry is currently estimated to be worth 1.5 billion dollars. In fact, 26% of U.S. adults claim to have met their partners online and these figures are expected to increase (Sheehan 2003). The growing trends in technology have resulted in African Americans logging on to the Web at astounding rates.

This thesis will examine the African American family not strictly from a social problems point of view, as is the case with a large part of the social scientific literature. Although, there definitely are issues that trouble African American communities, there are other aspects of the African American family that are not as commonly discussed. By focusing on the area of black relationships and dating, I attempt to fill a gap that previous studies have failed to address. Numerous studies have examined issues faced by both single and married African Americans, but the literature on dating patterns in the African¹

This thesis follows the style and format of *The Qualitative Report*.

American community is not extensive. Since dating sets the foundation for marriage, this assessment is a vital component in the study of African American relationships.

In my study, I conduct an exploratory study on African Americans and whether or not the Internet is an effective tool to find compatible dates. My theoretical perspective is the role trust or mistrust plays concerning dating orientated interaction in the context of virtual communities. This study examines how the daily encounters African American face in society affect their ability or non-ability to build online relationships via the Internet.

I begin with a literature review and with exposing dilemmas faced by the African American family. Next, I provide a brief history of dating and mate selection, and brief history of the trends of Internet usage. After that, I introduce in detail the methodology of the on-line survey. Finally, I discuss the results, of the African American respondents to the on-line survey.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of Americans today believe that we are living in a less trustworthy society than our parents did. This is disheartening because the foundation of any stable relationship is trust (Putnam 2000). Whether it is a friendship or a romantic partnership trust is essential to the survival of any relationship. In this study, I examine the following aspects of trust: the foundation of trust, the reciprocity of trust, and social trust. Following the evaluation of trust, this review will be applied to Africans Americans, their life experiences, and how the dilemmas they encounter in society affect their levels of trust. Finally, I apply the above to examine the extent to which African Americans encounters affect their ability to build online relationships via the Internet.

Trust

According to Feng, Lazar, and Preece (2004), trust has been an important topic in the field of sociology since the late 1950's. Deutsch (1958) discovered a significant correlation between trust and personality predispositions. Similarly, Wrightsman (1966) also found a very a high correlation between trust and the way that people view human nature.

Along the same lines, Henderson and Gliding (2004) claim that trust involves a set of beliefs and expectations. Thus, in placing trust, we behave as if we already know the future. When human beings make decisions as to whether or not to trust, they make an estimate of trustworthiness. Based on Sztompka's (1999) sociological theory of trust, in making this estimate individuals rely on two forms of information, immanent traits also known as primary trustworthiness, and external influences. The characteristics of

primary trustworthiness are based on three traits: (1) reputation or the record of past performances (2) performance or actual deeds of the person (3) appearance such as clothes, demeanor or ascribed traits such as age, sex, race, etc. The second estimate of trustworthiness is fairly straightforward. According to the author, external influences are based on the context in which the trustee operates. These estimates allow us to make an estimation of the person to determine trust.

Reciprocity of Trust

Generalized reciprocity is a fundamental component to civilized life and morality. Illustrated in the ever so popular “Golden Rule”, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. In attempt to further explain this concept, Putnam (2000) states:

Members of a community that follows the principle of generalized reciprocity—raking your neighbors leaves before they blow onto your neighbors’ yard, lending a dime to a stranger for a parking meter, buying a round of drinks the week you earn overtime, keeping an eye on a friend’s house, taking turns bringing snacks to Sunday school, caring for the child of a crack-head one flight down—find that their self-interest is served (p. 135).

Consequently, a society that is based on general reciprocity will be more efficient than a distrustful one. Individuals in a type of society will not have a problem helping one another out; the end result is more trust and togetherness.

Role of Trust

We have briefly discussed the foundation of trust and the importance of consideration and of returning good deeds. Now we consider the role that trust plays in our everyday lives. The role that trust plays in our lives requires us to take a “leap of faith” in certain situations. Daily, we give personal information to strangers. Whether it is a credit card number or social security number, this information can leave the stranger with a large amount of potentially exploitable personal information (Bargh and McKenna

2004). The role trust plays in our lives causes us to employ the estimates of trustworthiness mentioned earlier. We are less likely to utilize these estimates of trustworthiness in circumstances of closeness, intimacy, and familiarity, and more likely to use these estimates where there is anonymity, such as on the Internet (Henderson and Gilding 2004). Thus, the authors' suggest that trustworthiness not only depends on immanent qualities of reputation, performance and appearance, but also on contextual conditions. Three types of contextual conditions are especially important. First, it depends on accountability of the trustee. To illustrate, Henderson and Gilding (2004:492) state,

This refers to whether or not there are agencies that might monitor and sanction the trustee. Accountability dampens because it provides the truster with a kind of insurance against possible losses, a back up method against potential breaches of trust.

The second type of contextual condition is pre-commitment. What this means is that the trustee purposefully changes his or her own actions, simultaneously surrendering some degree of his or her own freedom. Places with extreme anonymity, such as the Internet, seem to limit the opportunity for pre-commitment.

The third and final type of contextual condition relates to situational features in which relationships occur. These situational features can place pressures on the truster to grant or withdraw trust. Some examples of situational factors include the close-knittedness of the community as well as the sacred quality of the setting (Henderson and Gilding 2004). Therefore, the role that trust plays in our lives is like a defense mechanism. Based on various circumstances, we make an estimation of trustworthiness in an attempt to evaluate the riskiness of the situation. Whether the estimate is based on

past reputation, accountability, or situational features, it is, in essence, an appraisal of whether or not the individual is trustworthy.

Social Trust

According to Putnam (2000) there are two types of trust, “thick” trust and “thin” trust. “Thick” trust is defined as trusting only those with which you have a strong, close relationships with such as with close friends and family. “Thin” trust is when an individual trusts the “generalized other”, such as a new acquaintance at a coffee shop or a friendly waiter in a restaurant. In comparing the two types of trust, the author states, “Thin” trust is even more useful than “thick” trust, because it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we know personally” (Putnam 2000:136).

Additionally, people who exhibit “thin” trust are more likely to be honest and less likely to lie. They are also more likely to volunteer, give blood, be more tolerant of minority issues, and to just be an overall better citizen.

The issue of social trust addresses the general question; can people in general be trusted? By and large this question speaks to the topic of feelings concerning the trustworthiness of the generalized other, or according to Putnam (2000), also known as “thin trust”. As previously mentioned, most people believe that we live in a less trustworthy society than our parents did. Examples validating these beliefs can be seen throughout society with increasing amounts of unlisted phone numbers, blocked calls, and an overall hesitancy of sharing personal information. Additionally, in virtually every aspect of society, the “have-nots” are less trusting than the haves. These feelings of distrust exhibited by the have-nots are not an illusion, according to Putnam (2000),

When such people tell pollsters that most people can’t be trusted, they are not hallucinating—they are merely reporting their experiences.... Residents don’t feel

this way because of paranoia they feel this way because of experiences.... When urbanites express social distrust, they are accurately reporting something about their social environment (Putnam 200:138).

By the same token, life circumstances account for African Americans expressing less social trust than whites (Putnam 2000). Additionally, African Americans are less likely to exhibit generalized trust than are whites, and more likely to trust only those with whom they are in a close relationship.

The focus of this paper is on African Americans in relation to Putnam's discussion of "thick" and "thin" trust. Putnam implies that African Americans are much more likely to exhibit "thick trust" because of their experiences as have-nots. Will their encounters in virtual communities mimic their encounters in the "real world"? In other words, will they be just as distrusting in attempting to form relationships via the Internet as they are in face-to-face interactions. Does the increase in African Americans logging on to the Web at higher rates than any other minority symbolize that they are more trusting in virtual communities? Or, are African Americans likely to trust only those who are close to them, such as friends and family. The following section addresses some of the dilemmas/experiences faced by African Americans, which ultimately will be related to trust and mistrust, and to responses by African Americans relative to their use of the Internet for dating purposes.

Dilemmas of African Americans

Although the African American family has survived two hundred years of slavery, thirty years of post-civil war oppression, and another century of systematic discrimination in (housing, education, employment etc.) that is, in practically every social sphere possible, the struggle continues (Aguirre and Turner 2001: 56). African American

families nonetheless continue to face hardships in various aspects of their lives. Here, I will study each member of the African American family and describe the dilemmas that affect their unique positions. I will address several of the ways in which society “invalidates” the adult African American male, the adult African American female and African American children. Subsequently, I will broaden my analysis to the “invalidation” of the entire African American family.

Dilemmas of the African American Adult Male

In comparison to other men in society, African American men bear a substantial burden. These men are trying to be men in a society that rejects some of the cultural norms of the group, resulting in inevitable distrust towards other members of society. For that reason, many African American men often are left with a psychological void that places them outside the reach of essential human connections. African American men statistically outnumber their white counterparts in rates of poverty, crime, imprisonment, unemployment rates, and morbidity rates (Roberts 1994).

There are a variety of factors that contribute to the high unemployment rates of African American males. Accordingly, the African American male–job relationship is a fragile one. Furthermore, African American men who are employed they must often accept lower paying jobs. This affects their self-esteem and often generates feelings of fear and incompetence. These feelings of mistrust cause African American men sometimes to turn down jobs where they feel that they have to meet certain expectations which they feel may be beyond their ability, because of this, black men are often considered lazy, yet, the truth is African American men place the same social value on the job that society does. Eliot Liebow’s (1967), *Tally’s Corner* demonstrated the above;

for eighteen months in 1962-63, Liebow performed a study of Negro Street corner men. Liebow lived among a group of seemingly hopeless black men in a traumatized neighborhood in the inner city of Washington, D.C. The results of Liebow's study were eye opening to the American people. This "thick", rich, narrative description of the study portrayed African American men in a totally different light. Liebow's experiences gave America the opportunity to "take a walk in the shoes" of the everyday African American male. During the study, Liebow discovers that the street corner men do objectively evaluate job offers. According to Liebow, it is not that the African American men were unwilling to work, but that realistically for the men who are willing to work they cannot earn enough to support themselves, their wives, or their children (Liebow 1967).

With increasing pressures from society to perform and "keep up", circumstances can result in negative outcomes for the African American male. Higher crime rates are indirectly related to high imprisonment rates, which lead to lowered life chances for the African American adult male. For example, if an African American adult male is recently out of prison and out in the "real world" he will want to start a new life, will want to find a job, and will want to start a family. How many employers are willing to hire an African American adult male directly out of prison? The reality is probably not many; therefore, various outcomes can occur which can lead to a life characterized by crime, violence, and high unemployment rates. According to Robert Sampson (1987):

Blacks are disproportionately represented as offenders: they account for approximately 61% of robbery arrests and 55% of homicide arrests, while representing only 11% of the overall population. The extremely high level of blacks offending and black victimization has led Wilson to conclude that 'perhaps the most dramatic indicator of the extent to which social pathology has afflicted urban blacks is crime, especially violent crime.' ... The theoretical attention that has been focused on these issues has tended to neglect the role of embedded structural factors such as male joblessness (Sampson, 349).

There is a recurring concern in sociology regarding the racial disparity in the imprisonment of African American adult men. Because of racial profiling and unfair court trails, African American adult men are much more likely to be imprisoned for crimes than white men who commit similar offenses. To illustrate, 72% of Black males indicate that they have been stopped on various occasions for reasons that they believe to be none other than their skin color (Aguirre and Turner 2001: 75). Likewise, 33% of young black men in their 20's are under the supervision of the criminal justice system compared to only 4% their white counterparts. Also, African American men get more jail time for possession or sale of crack than for powder cocaine the latter being more prevalent among the middle class. Because more African American men are drug dealers, these statistics speak of the inability for black men to get jobs. Thus, when jobs disappear, selling drugs becomes a viable option (Anderson 1999: 132-33). Additionally, in states where the populations of whites numerically exceed the number of blacks, blacks are still more likely than whites to be imprisoned (Bridges and Crutchfield 1988).

As you can see, the rationale the African American male for lacking social trust are justified by their daily experiences of high crime, high unemployment, and high prison rates. If taken at face value" it is apparent why the media perpetuates the stereotype of African American males as a dangerous, immoral group of individuals. However, if one takes into consideration all other factors that come into play, summarized as institutionalized discrimination, society should be much more sympathetic toward the current state of the African American male. Not only does society not trust the African American male, but also because of these experiences the African American male does not trust general members of society.

Dilemmas of the African American Adult Female

Absence of the African American adult male often results in female-headed households. Thus, in order to survive, African American women must exhibit traits typically displayed by her male partner. Tasks such as being sole income providers for the household, decision makers in the family, and single-handedly raising children, can result in what one sometimes refer to as “matriarchal” traits. With high crime rates, high unemployment rates, and high prison rates affecting African American males, it is essential to the survival of black families for African American women to possess these traits (Kendel 1971). Even though many men in society deem these characteristics unattractive, they are vital for the survival of the African American family, especially for those in the lower class.

African American women are often placed in a position of economic distress (Allen 1981). Some are compelled to live a life of welfare dependency. Unfortunately, because of recent changes in welfare policies, importantly, time limits placed on welfare recipients, many black women face a future filled with turmoil. According to Darity and Myers (1984), this is a significant cause of concern because female headed households are more likely to be in poverty, less likely to have a head in the labor force, and more likely to experience economic hardship than are male headed households. Again, this results in feelings of incompetence and feelings of “invalidation” and mistrust induced by other members of society.

Dilemmas of the African American Youth

Certain issues faced in adulthood often stem from problems faced in childhood. Therefore, it is extremely important to look at the issues faced by children in families.

Unfortunately, because the overall position of the African American family is low on the social scale, so to are their “life chances”. “Life chances” are lower for African American youth than for any other group, hence attitudes towards African American youth also are often negative. Consequently, these negative attitudes along with society’s lack of confidence in African American youth produces feelings of hopelessness and “invalidation”. The youths’ attempt to compensate is often characterized by higher rates of teenage pregnancy and juvenile delinquency, negative attention being better than no attention at all (Hogan and Kitagawa 1985).

While, it may seem as though the African American youth are to blame, there is a greater issue at hand, and that is the African American family. Numerous African American families are in trouble. Troubled African American families are often beleaguered by poorly defined boundaries, disorganization, and weak family coalitions. These families are often characterized by female-headed households and burdened finances. Unfortunately, the youth of this group seems to be suffering the most. As mentioned earlier, the absence of the African American adult male often results in female-headed households. With the female is single-handedly raising the children, she must work to support her family. This often leaves the children unattended, forcing them to fend for themselves. Along these lines, children generally must learn to care for themselves, resulting in significant number of African American children lacking direct positive adult leadership. Consequently, essential life skills are often taught and learned in the street (Cathcart and Hill 1996). According to Cathcart and Hill (1996), many African American children lack consistency and will experience a great deal of instability

and internal conflict; they often feel little or no connection to their fathers, which may ultimately lead to feelings of confusion and abandonment.

Another difficulty with which African American youth must cope is the issue of education. Education among youth in African American communities is not up to par with that of white American youth. Previous studies have documented that race and social status of a school's student body is reflected in the levels of spending for public education (Baron 1971). As for college, lower class African American families will not be able to afford college education. In fact, even African American middle class families are financially having trouble sending their children to college. According to the article, *"The Mounting Financial Burden of a College Education for Middle-Class Black Families"* (1996-97):

But more serious is the racial gap in liquid spendable assets. The discrepancies in financial assets (stocks, bonds, money in the bank, etc.), which could readily be used to finance the cost of higher education, are far greater than the figures for net worth. White middle-class families had \$19, 823 in financial assets. Black middle-class families had an average of only \$175 in financial assets. Thus, white middle-class families had 113 times more in financial assets than black middle-class families (p. 30).

Consequently, many black youth seem to have little or no hope for the future, and have, little honor or prestige attached to their existence. Thus, society sometimes dooms these children before they are given a chance. The youth, consequently, settle for negative attention, which results in higher drop out rates, higher rates of teen pregnancy, and higher rates of juvenile delinquency than would be the case otherwise.

Dilemmas of the Entire African American Family

The history of the African American family begins in 1619 when the first slave arrived in the United States. Oppressed for well over 300 years, (O'Connor 2001), it is

currently estimated that African American individuals each still experience about 200 episodes of discrimination a year. African Americans experience everything from racial slurs, to cashiers who will not place change in their hand, and a whole host of other events that go unreported or are difficult to categorize. According to Aguirre and Turner (2001), the legacy of slavery still plagues African Americans today, characterized by disproportionate amounts of inner city and housing projects, single parent homes, high unemployment rates, unequal education, and crime-ridden streets. Events such as these are all too common for African Americans.

Discrimination does not only occur on an individual basis, but systematically as well. As stated [*on the understanding discrimination against African Americans Website*], "If a church is bombed and 5 black children die, that's individual racism, but when 5000 black babies die each year from lack of food, decent shelter, and no medical care, that's institutional racism". Similarly, the Moynihan Report attempted to address several of these issues. Moynihan argued in his 1965 report that circumstances of the African American family rested in the legacy of slavery, growing urbanization, discrimination in employment and education, and a tradition of matriarchy (Moynihan, 1965). In addition, Moynihan claimed that despite the fact that there is an emerging black middle class; conditions of the lower-class black families would continue to worsen. As previous sections of this essay imply, institutional discrimination towards the African American family can lead to what Moynihan refers to as a family breakdown. He believes that the results of a family breakdown will ultimately lead to a social meltdown. In illustration he states,

The result is one of the most serious and potentially explosive problems facing America. I conclude that a concerted national effort is needed to strengthen the

black family to help blacks take advantage of emerging opportunities (Moynihan 1967).

It is not surprising that the African American family continues to face extreme hardships. Considering the fact that the dominant group controls the in the media, which in turn perpetuates myths and stereotypes, society justifiably continues to condemn the African American family before they are given a fair chance (Gutman 1975). For example, according to Greenblatt and Willie (1978):

Here the assumption is clear that any divergence from the family structure that predominates among members of the majority race is inherently inferior and a danger to minorities and to society as a whole (p. 691).

These stereotypes often lead to various forms of discrimination and prejudice in practically every social sphere possible. Although, formerly addressed, it is important to keep in mind that even though the issues faced by African Americans were treated separately above, when anyone within the African American family encounters these setbacks the entire African American family is affected.

According to Kantor and Nystuen (1982), redlining is a form of institutionalized discrimination that affects the entire African American family; this form of discrimination often leads to housing segregation, which leads to a host of other problems. Data from over 25,000 respondents of the Annual Housing Survey demonstrated that high levels of residential segregation in metropolitan areas create barriers inhibiting mobility; in the end this lessens the probability that blacks will turn neighborhood dissatisfaction into a move (Deane and South, 1993).

As you can see, the problems that plague African American individuals are many. Although men, women, and children each face their own set of dilemmas, these issues

ultimately affect the entire African American family. In other words, we can expect that any feelings of “invalidation” mistrust encountered by any member of the African American family ultimately affect the African American community. In addition, I believe African Americans feel these feeling of mistrust to a much greater degree than any other race. Because of the frequency of these feelings, it is very possible that these feelings of mistrust affect face-to-face interaction with members of society. Thus, because of these experiences, African Americans tend to trust only those who have a reputation in the past of not letting them down. Trusting society in general is too risky for today’s minority. For the past 200 years, with reference to African Americans, members of the majority society have often failed along the lines of the characteristics humans use to estimate trustworthiness. This has resulted in African Americans tending to place an inordinate amount of trust only in close friends and family.

Trust/Risk in Virtual Communities

The development of the telephone, radio, and television were all feared in the beginning to negatively impact social life by taking away time from face-to-face interaction. Concerns about the Internet are no different. According to the article “The Internet and Social Life” computer-based-communications follows the “filter model”. According to this perspective, communication in “computer mediated chat-rooms (CMC’s) limits the “bandwidth” of social communication, compared to traditional face-to-face interaction. According to the filter model”, some scholars have

Considered CMC to be an impoverished communication experience, with the reduction of available social cues resulting in a greater sense of feeling anonymity. This in turn is said to have de-individualizing effect on the individuals involved, producing behavior that is more self-centered and less socially regulated than usual (p. 578).

On the contrary, the others believe that these virtual communities can be fertile territory for the formation of friendships and close relationships. The similarities and shared beliefs within the groups are known to contribute to attraction. However, according to Henderson and Gilding (2004) the Internet highlights the dilemmas of anonymity as resulting in limited trust. Characteristics of online communication that contribute to limited trust are limited cues, lack of accountability, and obvious concerns about betrayal.

Not only do the above contribute to limited trust in virtual communities, but also there are various occurrences in virtual communities such as junk mail, “Spam,” and fake contests that have become a real threat to Internet social life. Lack of information and limited non-verbal cues in virtual communities result in individuals assuming the worst (Bargh and McKenna 2004).

Communication of any kind on the Internet can be risky. The anonymity, pseudonymity, and all of the “junk” floating around on the Internet justifies users’ reasons for being skeptical. In illustration of this point, according to Bargh and McKenna (2004):

...Using the Internet involves a leap of faith. We type in our credit card numbers and other personal information in order to make purchases over the Internet and trust that this will not be used in unauthorized or fraudulent ways. We write frank and confidential messages to others. We trust anonymous fellow chat room and newsgroup and members with our private thoughts and dreams, and because of the intimacy such self-disclosure creates, come to trust them enough to give them our phone numbers (p. 585).

Because of anonymity, individuals with stigmatized identities in society tend to assemble towards the Internet groups, which could possibly explain why African Americans are logging onto the Web at high rates. However, because of risk, and because African Americans may be more likely to exhibit “thick trust”, I anticipate that the participants of

this study will tend to favor using their strong, frequent, close relationships with such as with close friends and family rather than using the Internet to find compatible dating partners.

Online Communication among African Americans

Current and previous literature focusing on the African American family has tended to neglect topics such as love and dating among African Americans. In great detail, the literature concentrates on the pessimistic conditions that trouble African American communities. Furthermore, Lerone Bennett Jr., an expert of black relationships, (2003) believes that courtship and love among African Americans has been distorted:

The story or to be more precise...the myth of a never-never land of loveless love and nonstop sex, of hard-hearted men and heartless women, the myth of a land of endless catfish rows where the living and the orgasms are easy...is one of the enduring fascinations of the American public" (p. 73).

Dating and love does exist in the African American family, just as they do in any other culture. As Bennett (2003) states, "It is in us and above us and beneath us and all around us. It has always existed. It is perhaps the only reason Black people survived in this land" (p. 77). Thus, African Americans are just as much in need of and in search of love, partnerships, as any other member of society would be. Because the majority society has often failed to act in a trustworthy manner toward African Americans, the latter may be tending to experiment with new approaches to maximize their anonymity in search of a trusting environment, such as in online interaction through computer mediated communities (CMC's). In CMC's, there is a substantial amount of communication among the participants, making physical characteristics such as race, height and weight,

material items such as cars, clothes and homes, and economic status such as occupation and income less important, giving individuals the opportunity to “get to know the person”. This could be because physical and economic characteristics of a person are not as initially important during online interaction as they are in face-to-face communication.

Internet Use

Use of the Internet continues to increase. As of 1994, approximately 38 million people were using the Internet. Currently there are approximately 580 million Internet users. Because of the increasing numbers of people using the Internet, virtual communities on the Internet set the stage for millions of people to engage in courtship without being limited by physical space. Not only does the Internet allow great numbers of people to interact, but it also allows for people of all races and ethnicities to participate.

The demographics of Internet users still tends to favor the more successful, better educated consumers; however, the profile by age now appears to represent a more cross section of all adults. As illustrated below in table 1 by Humphrey's (2002) demographics of the online population, users of the Internet are concentrated primarily in the 20-45 year old age group. This group alone represents 64.7% of all Internet users, with users over the age of 65 currently who make-up 16% of the overall adult population, representing less than 5% of those online.

Another intriguing finding revealed in Humphrey's study is that there has been little change in the amount of time Internet users actually spend online. On every occasion measured, users tend to average about seven or eight hours a week online. The amount of time spent online has remained fairly stable over the years. There has been,

however, a significant improvement in technology and in the skill of Internet users. It is likely, then, that Internet users are accomplishing more in the seven or eight hours that they now spend online than they did a few years ago.

Table 1. Demographics of Humphrey's On-line Population: February-March 2002.

DEMOGRAPHICS	Adults Online	All Adults	Percentage Point Difference
	%	%	%
AGE			
18 – 29	28	22	+6
30 – 39	23	22	+1
40 – 49	23	20	+3
50 – 64	24	18	+6
65 +	5	16	-11
SEX			
Men	49	48	+1
Women	51	52	-1
RACE/ETHNICITY			
White	76	76	=
Black	12	12	=
Hispanic	9	10	-1
EDUCATION			
High school or less	37	52	-15
Some college	31	26	+5
College graduate (or post graduate)	32	22	+10

Table 1 Continued

HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
\$25,000 or less	18	25	-7
\$25,001 - \$50,000	25	29	-4
\$50,001 and over	46	32	+14

Dating

Overtime, the term, “dating” has become more and more difficult to define. Typically, dating is defined as the courtship period between two people who will enter a long-term emotional and sexual relationship. Dating and partner selection is complex.

Because of the complexity of understanding and defining dating patterns, social scientists have developed partner selection models to better apprehend the paradigms. The traditional agrarian (TA) model is an example of partner selection. Although, the TA model is rarely practiced in the United States, it is carried out in places such as Africa and India. In these [TA] societies, parents or other kin select marriage mates for children when the children reach a certain age. Often times, the conditions of partner selection are based upon economic considerations and political alliance. In fact, dating is as prohibited in numerous countries, and is predominately associated as westernized [U.S] custom (Sheehan 2003).

Another model commonly discussed in the literature on dating is the courtship model. The United States follows the courtship model much more closely than the previous model presented. This model allows independence in the choosing of partners. Characteristics of the courtship model can be seen throughout American society. For instance, although at some point parents do have an impact, the courtship model is

characterized as one in which young people have a significant amount of control over mate selection. However, there are steps in the process that help to narrow the field of eligible partners among the eligible. Initially a number of individuals are considered potential mates and that province to be the poorest bargains are dropped. The entire process of narrowing partners continues until only one is chosen. At that time two people become committed by reaching a private verbal agreement. This agreement sometimes includes plans leading marriage. Last but not least, once plans for marriage are mutually established, the couple progresses into in engagement period, which ultimately leads to marriage (Sheehan 2003).

The last method of partner selection to be discussed is known as the contemporary dating model. The contemporary dating model differs from the courtship model in that there is little evidence of parental involvement. Partner selection is generally in the hands of the young people. The youth try and manipulate their parents' opinions by emphasizing their partners' good points. In this case, parents show approval by asking about the partner or acknowledging that they like the partner, planning joint events, or giving them privacy (Sheehan 2003).

In this day and age methods of partner selection has become much more diverse than in the past. In illustration, Sheehan claims,

Nowadays in order to find an attractive mate initiative must be taken. Although, there are multiple ways to go about finding a mate, ultimately that person must determine compatibility. As a result, those who are searching are starting to turn to technological matchmakers (p. 86).

Not so long ago, Internet dating was looked upon as taboo, and the idea of Internet dating often was met was met with an attitude of mockery and with sarcastic remarks. Within the past five years, this point of view has changed drastically (Habib

2001). In fact, not only has the online dating industry become universal in North America, but also it is currently estimated to be an industry worth 1.5 billion dollars (Habib 2003). Remarkably in 2003, twenty-six percent of the adults in the U.S. claim to have met their dating partners online and this statistics are expected to continue to increase (Sheehan 2003).

The majority of the previous research conducted on the subject of dating applies to the dominant society and is not necessarily relevant to minorities. Although some of the models previously mentioned are intended to be universal, they don't take into account issues plaguing minority communities, particularly African Americans.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The objective of this study is to conduct an exploratory study determining whether or not the Internet is an effective tool for African Americans to find “compatible” dates. This study also provides an examination not only of dating patterns among African Americans via the Internet, but it also provides an examination of the role that technology plays in creating and mediating dating trends. An additional interest is to evaluate dating oriented interaction in the context of virtual communities. The research methods used during this study are presented in this chapter.

Research Ethics

There has been an ongoing debate as to whether or not various server log files and archives represent public data. Some researchers claim that since social scientists have yet to establish clear guidelines for conducting on-line research, anything is fair game. On the topic of legality, most discussions tend to conclude that if it’s not illegal, it is ethical. Thus, the lack of codified etiquette and guidelines for conducting research in cyberspace makes almost anything acceptable (Gaiser 1997).

In the past, due to technological advancements, methodological questions are often raised when conducting research. For example, when dealing with taped interviews, certain questions are often raised, such as who will have access to the tapes, where the tapes are to be stored, and who will be responsible for making those decisions. Similarly, many of these same concerns are raised with videotapes. Likewise, researchers would like to be responsible about respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the subjects in cyberspace. Although, the technology of computer mediated

communities possess similar dilemmas, they have not been dealt with in previous research.

Because of the way in which messages are sent back and forth across the Internet, researchers cannot guarantee participants protection of privacy and confidentiality. Recruiting a volunteer for an on-line focus group or interview means that the researcher could possibly expose the participants to risks beyond the researcher's control. This insinuates that with or without the researcher's permission, Internet users with basic technological knowledge and interest could have access to a great deal of private information about the participant (Gaiser 1997).

Internet Ethnography/Survey Research

Initially, ethnography was an ideal form of methodology for studying the Internet. Ethnography of the Internet can actually examine with detail the ways in which technology is used. In its most basic form, ethnography consists of the researcher spending time immersed in a field setting, taking into account the relationships, activities, and developing an understanding of those in the setting. The ethnographer must become close enough to the culture being studied to understand how it works, yet at the same time be able to extricate him or herself enough from the setting to be able to report on it (Hine 2000).

Methodological approaches to studying Computer Mediated Communities (CMC) have widely varied. However, ethnography also seems to be rather appealing for studying "what people actually do with the technology". In illustration, Hine (2000) states,

Once we start to think of cyberspace as a place where people do things, we can start to study just exactly what it is they do and why, in their terms, they do it...

Ethnography is a way of seeing through participants' eyes: a grounded approach that aims for a deep understanding of the cultural foundations of this group (p. 21).

The ethnographic method of study, allowed for the unexpected to happen, thus making the data richer. A researcher can often come up with very “thick” detailed explanations in which thoroughly answers a research question. This method allows the researcher to go as deep as he or she wants you to go, with no restrictions.

The other form of methodology used for this study was survey research. Because of the large amounts of time spent observing online dating sites and discussion board content, appropriate and relative survey questions were generated and placed on this researcher's Web page. In addition, information regarding how to participate in the survey was advertised through posts on appropriate Websites as well as through or networked/word-of-mouth/snowball sampling procedure. These procedures lead all interested participants to voluntarily respond to the online survey questions on the researcher's Web page.

Consequently, the methodology for this project involved survey research methods and an extension and adaptation of traditional ethnographic methods. Spending time on discussion boards revealed that in the context of virtual communities, Internet dating is still sometimes frowned upon, thus, using an online survey to disseminate the survey questions is the optimum method. Generally Computer Mediated Communities lack of privacy from the public's eye, which may deter participants from being as honest as they normally would. This can result in an unnecessary misrepresentation of the self. Therefore, by “virtually transporting” the participants from their virtual communities to the researcher's own personal online survey site may help to increase privacy and

minimize misrepresentations of self. In view of that, this method allowed the participants to remain in his or her own physical comfort zone while still allowing the researcher access. Furthermore, because the online dating industry has become universal, the Internet allows us to reach participants regardless of their location, while at the same time allowing the usefulness of the Internet as an evaluation tool to be studied.

Advantageously, the subjects recruited are already familiar with how to use the necessary technology. Thus, it is relatively easy to recruit participants considering all that it involves is some initial messaging, which is relatively inexpensive.

As a result, this approach was one which: (1) assessed the effectiveness of Internet communities as a instrument for discovering “compatible dates” (2) identified dating oriented patterns among African American adults online (3) identified sites used to gather about the online industry and (4) identified how the Internet will provide an examination of the role technology plays in creating and mediating these trends on a large scale among participants.

Recruitment

When it comes to recruitment it is difficult to authenticate any formal demographics to support sampling procedures. Those who claim to have a considerable understanding of the Internet’s demographics are selling the information for substantial amounts of money. Nevertheless, because of the rapid changes in online demographics, it is important to realize that what we know about the Internet today will probably not hold true tomorrow. Therefore, recruiting participants from various places on the Internet provides researchers with the ability to receive diverse opinions (Gaiser 1997).

Even though, it was difficult to obtain any clear demographics to aid in the development of a sample, there are other issues of importance when considering recruitment. First off, it is best to recruit from different locations on the Internet. If all of the respondents are acquired from the same discussion list or location, there is a chance that the participants may have already connected as a group on some level. Previous acquaintances from Computer Mediated Communities may place limitations on average discussions; which in return limits the available data to the researcher. This could result in the overrepresentation of certain perspectives. Diversity of perspectives is important because it will limit criticism of survey results and allows for greater representation of the overall online dating subgroup. Frequently, under these circumstances insights can emerge (Gaiser 1997).

Not by any means is the previous approach meant to imply that the participants reflect a random sample, nevertheless, this method does allow for a diversity of participants from within a particular Internet subgroup. However, as mentioned, the necessary information was advertised through posts and list serves on appropriate Websites as well as through networked/word-of-mouth/snowball sampling procedures. These procedures lead all interested participants to voluntarily respond to the online survey questions on the researcher's Web page.

Participants

The primary sample population in this study consisted of subjects who were directed to a Web-based survey after viewing advertisements posted by the researcher on certain list serves, computer mediated communities, as well as through networked/word-of-mouth/snowball sampling procedures. For a period of approximately eight weeks

(February to May) I sent advertisements/posts to the participants of five prominent African American Websites. These Websites were blackplanet.com, African Americans in search of love (a CMC within MSN), Black Christians online (a CMC within MSN), The black relationship magazine.com (a CMC within MSN), and Blacks seeking Blacks (a CMC within MSN). Each post/advertisement gave information about the study as well as the researcher contact information for any questions or concerns.

A total of eighty respondents completed the online survey. Even though the following demographics reveal the entire survey population, the results will only concentrate on the African American (48%) respondents. The demographics of the respondents are as follows: 48% African American, 3.5% of Hispanic origins, 40% White, 3% were of Asian decent, and 4.7% belonged to some other racial or ethnic group. The African American respondents ranged in age from 18-65 with 65% falling between the ages of 18-34; 29% were between the ages of 35-49; and 4% of the respondents were between the ages of 50-65. Of these, 79% were females and 21% were males.

As for place of residence, the vast majority of the African Americans resided in the United States; 9% represented the Southwest region of the country; 62% represented the Midwest region of the country; 9% represented the Northeast region of the country; and 15% represented the Southeast region of the country, with the remaining 2% of the respondents percentages residing outside of the country (1% in Thailand and the other 1 Germany).

Marital status of the African American respondents were characterize as 15% being married, 71% being single (49% being voluntarily single, 7% being involuntarily single, 11% being single for some other reason, and 31% refused to answer the question),

9% being divorced, and 1% of the respondents are widowed. In regards to education, the group of respondents was extremely educated. The education level of the respondents varied from 39% having some college, 32% were college graduate and 29% of respondents having completed at least some post graduate work. Lastly, the participants reported their yearly income ranges to be under \$25,000 to over \$100,000. More specifically, 21% of the respondents estimated their yearly income to be under \$25,000; 53% of the respondents estimated their yearly income to fall between \$25,000 and \$49,999; 9% of the respondents estimated their yearly income to fall between \$50,000 and \$74,999; 5% of the respondents estimated their yearly income to fall between \$75,000 and \$99,999; and finally, 5% of the respondents estimated their yearly income to be over \$100,000.

Design/Instruments

This study used a Web-based survey to measure the effectiveness of the Internet as a tool to find “compatible” dates by using a Web based survey. However, ethnography provided the researcher with the basis and subject matter for constructing each of the questions. The survey was placed on the researcher’s Web page, which was developed strictly for the purposes of this project. Along with the survey, the Web page consisted of pertinent information to acquaint the participants with background information on the subject matter as well as the researcher’s goals and objects for the study.

The survey consisted of twenty-nine questions some in a qualitative and others in a quantitative format. Upon completion of the survey, each participant submitted their responses by clicking the submit form button located at the end of the survey. The design of the survey was intended to allow simultaneously multi-user access worldwide while

providing privacy to all participants. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the on-line survey segment of the study included an informed consent sheet. To complete the survey, all participants were instructed to fully read, understand, and comply with the information posted. To further protect anonymity, no personal identifiers were collected and all surveys completed were number coded.

Data Collection

The data collection process occurred over the course of approximately twelve weeks. Actual collection of the survey data began in February 2004 and continued until enough subjects responded so as to provide a solid subject population for the study. The survey was completed in May of 2004. Upon completion of the survey, submitted responses were immediately directed to a database. The data set used for the analysis of the quantitative questions was SAS and the qualitative information was coded and analyzed by the researcher.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The online survey respondents answered twenty-nine survey questions posted on the researcher's Web page. However, only the most relevant questions will be evaluated in this study. Because this is an explorative study of African Americans opinions on the subject of Internet dating, only the responses of the African American participants will be evaluated. The results to these questions will help us to explore the viewpoints revealed by the African Americans on Internet dating.

Beginning with the closed-ended questions in the survey, illustrated in table 2, the first set of questions used to inspect African Americans' opinions on the subject of Internet dating were as follows: (1.) List ways you might use to meet people for dating purposes, (2.) Have you ever used the Internet for dating purposes? (3.) If you have not actually used the Internet for dating purposes, have you ever browsed Internet dating sites or looked at potential mates on any online dating sites?

Table 2. Three Close-ended Questions: #16, 17, 18.

	Question and Answers:	
Question 16.	List ways you might use to meet people for dating purposes.	
Answer for 16.	<p>Respondents had to chose from the following choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends =1 (33) • Family =2 (1) • Co-workers (0) • A bar (0) • A coffee shop (0) • The Internet (0) • Church or religious service (0) • Grocery Store (0) • Library (0) • Other (0) 	
Question 17.	Have you ever used the Internet for dating purposes?	
Answer for 17.	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>20%</p> <p>79%</p>
Question 18.	If you have not actually used the Internet for dating purposes, have you ever browsed Internet dating sites or looked at potential mates on any online dating sites?	
Answer for 18.	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>31%</p> <p>15%</p>

Key = Each bullet represents a different participants response.

Numbers in parenthesis represent the number of respondents

Question number 16 asked the respondent to list ways they might use to meet people for dating purposes. The choices were friends, family, co-workers, a bar, a coffee shop, the Internet, a church or religious service, a grocery store, a library, or other. Even though the respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses, 99% chose family and friends as the way that they use to meet people for dating purposes. These statistics indicate that Africans Americans not only exhibit “thick” trust in face-to-face interactions but also online. Thus, participants of this study utilized their strong, frequent, close relationships with such as friends, family, etc as opposed to using the Internet to find compatible dates.

Because of the anonymity the Internet provides, individuals with stigmatized identifications, such as being African American, may be more likely to use the Internet. This being the case, the results of the survey tended to support the fact of Internet use among African Americans. (Granted, this was an Internet survey, which almost certainly inflated responses concerning Internet use.) When examining questions 17 and 18, even though nearly all of the respondents revealed that they used friends and family to meet individuals for dating purposes, 21% of the respondents said that they have used the Internet for dating purposes, and an additional 31% said that they have at least browsed Internet dating sites or looked at potential mates using online dating sites.

In addition to the closed-ended questions examined in the study, the remainders of the questions deemed important in inspecting the opinions of African Americans on the subject of Internet dating were open-ended. Illustrated in table 3, the questions were as follows: (1.) What is your definition of dating? (2.) What sites have you used for this purpose? (3.) Now including the Internet as well as the other ways you may have

mentioned in question 16, which ways would you say tend to be the most effective in finding a date? Why?

Table 3. Three Open-ended Questions: #15, 19, 20.

	Questions and Answers:
Question 15.	What is your definition of Dating?
Answers for 15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending Quality time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ spending quality time with one person whom you enjoy and are compatible ○ with - this is the time that you need to try to get to know this person and allow this person to get to know you - take time to be good friends before moving forward ○ talking, spending time, and going out with a person, romantic involvement ○ Spending romantic intimate time with another person, in the interest of getting to know them and their interests. ○ Getting to know someone of the opposite sex by spending a lot of time with him/her for the purpose of seeking out similarities and differences finding out whether or not you are compatible for a long-term relationship/marriage. ○ a mutual meeting with a member of the opposite sex with the intention of getting to know the person better • A screening process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a screening process leading to the selection of a lifetime mate ○ dating is the act of getting to know someone through different activities and is not limited to one person ○ Exploring relationships with others in search of someone compatible. ○ To me dating is when you go out with people who you look at as potential mates. ○ getting to know someone • Participating in Activities with the opposite sex <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dating to me includes the following; frequent outings where either the man pays most of the time or there is an alternating pay scheme most days are spent

Table 3 Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ conversing with this person or in actual physical contact with this person mutually exclusive ○ Dating is two individuals that go out to movies, to eat, etc and talk on a regular base. ○ PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS LOOKING FOR POSSIBLE LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS ○ Going on outings with some one you enjoy being around ○ two people hanging out having fun and finding things out about each other ● Intent to commit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regularly talking and going out with an individual that you have interest in, be it love, lust, getting married, and/or having children. ○ An understanding your seeing that one person or an understanding your seeing more than one person ○ Going out with someone you would like to have relations with. ○ I think it should only be for two individuals growing toward marriage as a courtship ○ Committed to a person to the extent that it will lead to marriage.
Question 19.	What sites have you used for this purpose?
Answers for 19.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Black Planet (4) ● AOL chat room (5) ● Match.com (13) ● Yahoo Personals (8) ● Chat rooms (1) ● DK (1) ● Couple makers (1) ● College Club (1)

Table 3 Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ChurchofChristsingles (2) • MSN (1) • Lavalife (2) • Love and seek.com (1) • Loveaccess.com (2) • Kiss.com (1) • Personals Austinchronicle.com (1) • Jdate.com (1) • Matchmaker.com (3) • 8minutedating.com • one2one.com (1) • Eharmony (3) • HoustonConnect.com (1) • Faceparty (1) • Matchup.com (1) • Black Voices (1) • ICQ (1) • Talk city chat room (1) • Couple makers (1) • Latin singles (1) • Christian coffee shop (1)
Question 20.	Now including the Internet as well as the other ways you may have mentioned in question 16, which ways would you say tend to be the most effective in finding a date? Why?

Table 3 Continued

Answers for 20.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends and Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Someone you meet that is an acquaintance of someone you know. Because your friend, family member, co-worker etc. would know this person in some sort of detail. ○ Friends they know you very well and they try to play matchmaker with someone that they think compliment you. ○ Meeting a date is most effective when you know friends who have friends who are looking to date ○ Friends Family because there is a certain amount of trust that is given because of the relationship the other two have ○ Friend's family. They usually know the people and can offer some advice or information about the person. • Internet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internet- because you get a chance to talk to the person and possibly learn more about them before meeting, friends- because they know my likes, dislikes and could potentially find a suitable match. ○ Meeting face to face - I find people are disappointed ○ Internet. able to gather broad data about a persons, likes, dislikes and ascertain potential compatibility" ○ Internet - so many men respond to personal ads online, use these dating services ○ The Internet because I've found people that I can really relate to and are a lot like myself in various ways. • Other Ways to meet mates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ school related functions because I meet people who are most like me in terms of education level, background, and goals ○ Social settings or bars ○ Church ○ On my own
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Key = Each bullet represents a different participants response.

Numbers in parenthesis represent the amount of respondents

As illustrated on the researcher online Web page, dating is difficult to define. As a result, each respondent was asked to give his or her definition of dating. As illustrated in Table 3, there were numerous responses to the question. Although, worded differently for each respondent some of the common themes in defining dating among the respondents were as follows: spending quality time; a screening process, participating in activities with the opposite sex, and the intent to commit.

Question number 16, which was previously discussed, was associated with question 20 which asked the respondents which ways would they say tend to be the most effective in finding a date? For the most part the researcher was able to categorize the respondent's replies into two sections, Family and Friends and the Internet. Similar to the previous findings, by far, the respondent's believed family and friends to be the most effective way to find a mate for dating purposes. This can be seen in some of the respondents replies as they stated, "Friends Family because there is a certain amount of trust that is given because of the relationship the other two have"; Friends they can recommend people that are looking for the same things you are; and "references from close friends and family tend to work the best because a built in trust factor exists." The vast majority of the remaining responses fell under the Internet category. Some of those responses were the following: "Internet- because you get a chance to talk to the person and possibly learn more about them before meeting. "The Internet's able to gather broad data about a person's, likes, dislikes and ascertain potential compatibility," and "Internet - so many men respond to personal ads online, use these dating services." Although the Internet was chosen by a few of the respondents, these results again reveal, by far, that the friends and family is the most trusted approach for finding dates.

Illustrated in table 4, the second set of open-ended questions used to inspect African Americans opinions on the subject of Internet dating were as follows: Where did you meet the individuals that you dated? What did you find satisfying about your experiences with individuals you have met through the Internet? And, what's most unsatisfying about experiences with individuals you met on the Internet?

Table 4. Three Open-ended Questions: #21a, 25, 26.

	Questions and Answers:
Question 21a.	Where did you meet the individuals that you dated?
Answer for 21a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church [1] • School [4] • Friends [3] • Work [2] • Internet [2] • Dance club [2] • Store [2] • Restaurant [1] • Mall (1) • Party (0) • Bar (3) • Already knew from past [2] • Home (1) • Singles seminar [1]

Table 4 Continued

Question 25.	What did you find satisfying about your experiences with individuals you have met through the Internet?
Answer for 25.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting new people • Get to know the persons' personality before meeting them face to face • Allows you access to a larger pool of potential mates whom you may not otherwise have had access to. • Convenient • Boundless access • Meeting someone on the Internet at least shows that they have some sort of interest in dating. • Less threatening and less emotional risk • Intelligence is easier to discern through written word rather than through speaking • You can weed through people more quickly • Opportunity to become friends first • Easier to say no on the Internet than in person • I'm satisfied with everybody that I've met. Haven't had a lot of negative experiences with people I've met over the Internet. I meet and, or connect with good people for the most part.
Question 26.	What's most unsatisfying about exp with individuals you met on the Internet?
Answer for 26.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people have a tendency to be deceiving • Hard to find women that are close to me on line, I live in a small town. Once we meet, it is hard to carry on a relationship long distance. • Trust and honesty • It's too easy for uncommitted people to just fish from the ocean, since you get lots of bites via Internet dating

Key = Each bullet represents a different participants response.

Numbers in parenthesis represent the amount of respondents

As one might imagine, the results of question 21a closely resembles the previous findings in the study. When respondents were asked where they actually met persons whom they have dated, only two of the respondents met their dates online through an Internet dating site. The remainder of the participants met their dates through face to face encounters, such as church or school and through family and friends. For participants who claimed to have used or at least browsed the Internet for dating purposes, questions 25 and 26 gave them the opportunity to reveal what was most satisfying and what was most unsatisfying about their experiences. Some of the respondents most satisfying experiences with dating online were; “You get to know the persons’ personality before meeting them face to face,” “Allows you access to a larger pool of potential mates whom you may not otherwise have had access to,” and “Less threatening and less emotional risk.” As for the most unsatisfying experiences that the respondents who claimed to have used the Internet for dating purposes were; “people have a tendency to be deceiving,” “Hard to find women that are close to me on line, I live in a small town. Once we meet, it is hard to carry on a relationship long distance,” and “It’s too easy for uncommitted people to just fish from the ocean, since you get lots of bites via Internet dating”.

Illustrated in table 5, the third set of open-ended questions used to inspect African Americans opinions on the subject of Internet dating were as follows: “If you haven’t used the Internet, what do think would be advantageous or disadvantageous about meeting people on the Internet?” “What are some things that can be done to improve experiences?” “What are some things you would recommend to someone not familiar with the Internet that might increase their chances of the Internet being an effective tool for them?”

Table 5. Three Open-ended Questions: #25a, 28, 29.

	Questions and Answers:
Question 25a.	If you haven't used the Internet what do think would be advantageous or disadvantageous about meeting people on the Internet?
Answer for 25a.	<p>Disadvantageous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Too scary and dangerous ○ disadvantageous to many crazy people online ○ disadvantage; dangerous ○ You are meeting somebody you have never met in person and that person could be a convicted felony that you have seen on American most wanted. I don't think there is an advantage in meeting a person on the Internet. ○ If you don't be careful you can meet some people that are into you for the wrong reasons. They could harm you physically if it got that far • Can't actually see the person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't know if they're being truthful ○ You do not know what this person looks like they may not be attractive to you once you get the chance to meet them in person. This is a disadvantage, because you may have become close over the net, but after seeing them you may no longer have interest" ○ Disadvantage: there is no body language to read or you're not quite sure if you're talking to a 14 or 60 year old man or even if you're really talking to a man ○ Disadvantageous: cannot read body language and look into their eyes & face ○ People are probably not truthful about their looks and for anyone to get to know someone with the potential to date, there has to be an attraction • People can be Deceiving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ disadvantage: fear that the person is not being honest or true to personality due to ability to behind computer ○ Deceiving ○ Don't know if they're being truthful

Table 5 Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ disadv-can't trust the person could all be lies questionable motives, reasons for having to meet on the Internet ○ The disadvantage of meeting someone over the Internet is not being able to actually meet him or her face-to-face. Physical attraction seems to be very important to most people. <p>Advantageous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantage: I guess you could get to know the person without any preconceived notion • adv-being able to talk freely before meeting the person, get to know better at a safe distance • advantageous: screening for desirable characteristics • advantageous: privacy and the decision to meet or not • Safe and convenient • Less pressure • Can get to know someone for more than just his or her looks. • Advantage: meet many people in short time • Advantage: I guess you could get to know the person without any preconceived notion. • Advantage is there is an abundance of people to meet..... • an advantage would be the mystic of the situation
Question 28.	What are some things that can be done to improve experiences?
Answer for 28.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be much easier if men were better verbal written communicators generally speaking. • Require identification to place an ad. • I have heard e-harmony has better screening, I haven't tried it but I'd be willing to if it meant more honest answers and a better sense of what that person is all about • voice messages or video that would be more personal introductions than short written summaries

Table 5 Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the trust factor is too low and you can barely trust people you meet face to face without eye contact or an close contact of sort it can be danger. easier access
Question 29.	What are some things you would recommend to someone not familiar with the Internet that might increase their chances of the Internet being an effective tool for them?
Answer for 29.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be cautious <ul style="list-style-type: none"> be very cautious, don't give out too much information about yourself initially don't take Internet dating too seriously Be safe. Go slow and take your time I would say be cautious and don't think automatically that you'll find someone worthy of dating on the Internet. Be optimistic but most importantly have fun meeting people and treat them as if you're meeting with them in person. Do it only if you feel comfortable Be honest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be honest and do not expect too much in return Be honest. IGNORE people who seem weird - they are weird. First meetings only after phone contact. Ask for recent pictures Work number and assure they are single. Remain flexible and open-minded Just be open and willing to engage with anyone - you never know... Always give it a second date. Be sincere about who you are and what you're looking for and be discriminating about who you contact and investigate who they are by asking questions. Get to know the person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> talk to the person for a longer period of time before meeting get to know them better and see if you're really compatible, before wasting your time with a face-to-face meeting First remember that it is just a search tool it helps you find people that might be interested, but you still have to meet them. Don't prolong the online relationship, take a chance and meet them. Look for local people.

Table 5 Continued

.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make sure that they get a picture, and that they talk frequently with the person that they're interested in. They also should make sure that they are asking valuable questions about that person. ○ Don't be afraid to politely state what you will not accept in a dating partner, not just what you're looking for. Strong men will appreciate your candor, and you're more likely to meet someone with whom you are compatible. ○ Look at other profiles before you create your own.
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Key = Each bullet represents a different participants response.

Numbers in parenthesis represent the amount of respondents

This next question was aimed at the participants in the study who had not utilized the Internet as a tool to find mates for dating purposes. Question 25a states, if you haven't used the Internet, what do think would be advantageous or disadvantageous about meeting people on the Internet? The responses were divided into two sections, namely, advantages and disadvantages. To reiterate what the respondents said, a few of the advantages of online dating were: "Advantage: "I guess you could get to know the person without any preconceived notion." "Screening for desirable characteristics," "Privacy and the decision to meet or not," and "Safe and convenient." As for the disadvantages, the responses were for the most part centered on issues of safety, lack of trust, and deception by other users. The most common themes that emerged from disadvantages of Internet dating were that it is dangerous, that one cannot actually see the person, and people can be deceiving. To quote some of the responses: "I think that using the Internet would be a disadvantage since you can't trust anyone, especially someone you don't know on the other end of a computer"; "Cannot read body language and look into their eyes & face"; "Don't know if they're being truthful"; "You are meeting

somebody you have never met in person and that person could be a convicted felony that you have seen on America's most wanted"; "I don't think there is an advantage in meeting a person on the Internet." Even though there were a few participants who found some things that were satisfying or advantageous about meeting their partners via the Internet, the vast majority of the participants displayed large amounts of distrust.

The final two questions analyzed in this study, were aimed at African Americans who actually did use the Internet for dating purposes. They offered advice as to how to make the Internet an effective tool for them and what can be done to improve the experiences of individuals concerning online dating. Most of the suggestions for improvement were aimed at the owners and directors of websites. However, readers could also consider these suggestions as important for sites to have should they decide to use the Internet as a dating tool: "Talk to the person for a longer period of time before meeting get to know them better and see if you're really compatible, before wasting your time with a face-to-face meeting"; "Voice messages or video that would be more personal introductions than short written summaries"; "I have heard e-harmony has better screening, I haven't tried it but I'd be willing to if it meant more honest answers and a better sense of what that person is all about." As for advice as to how to make the Internet an effective tool for Internet dating, respondents gave advice on the subject ranging from "Be safe, be honest, to go slow take your time"; to recommending that one not use the Internet at all. The following quotations are from survey respondents:

"First remember that it is just a search tool it helps you find people that might be interested, but you still have to meet them. Don't prolong the online relationship, take a chance and meet them. Look for local people first"

“I would say be cautious and don’t think automatically that you’ll find someone worthy of dating on the Internet. Be optimistic but most importantly have fun meeting people and treat them as if you’re meeting with them in person.”

“Make sure that they get a picture, and that they talk frequently with the person that they’re interested in. They also should make sure that they are asking valuable questions about that person.”

“Don’t be afraid to politely state what you will not accept in a dating partner, not just what you’re looking for. Strong men will appreciate your candor, and you’re more likely to meet someone with whom you are compatible.”

“I wouldn’t recommend it. I think it’s better to use family or friends as a source at least that way they aren’t complete strangers...your family and friends can tell you what they know about the person.”

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper was to examine whether or not “dilemmas faced in everyday society by African Americans account contribute to the increase in African Americans logging on to the Web at higher rates than in the past. Are African Americans utilizing the Internet as a source for meeting “compatible” dates (as opposed to meeting those same dates using face-to-face interactions)? The results of the study tend to support the idea that although the stigmatized identifications of African Americans may contribute to their logging on to the Web at increasing rates, their lack of trust and faith in the Internet as a tool to build stable relationships account for their meeting their dates largely through face-to-face encounters, having been introduced in large part through close friends and family.

The African American participants of this study displayed large amounts of distrust of the Internet as a source for locating potential dating partners. Participants believed that the risks of online interaction for dating purposes far outweighed the advantages. Thus, although a little over half of the respondents claim to have at least browsed the Internet with the intent to interact with possible dates, the vast majority of the participants of this study believe dating via the Internet is unsafe and that one should be extremely careful with Internet dating.

Employing Putnam’s theory of “thick” trust and “thin” trust, there is some indication from the data confirming that the dilemmas African Americans face on a daily basis generate feelings of distrust. Along the same lines, the stigmatized identification

that African Americans face may be encouraging African Americans, because of the anonymity that virtual communities provide to use the Internet. Unfortunately, the new opportunity for electronic communication might not necessarily provide African Americans with stable healthy relationships. Dilemmas experienced daily by African Americans may influence African Americans to trust only those who are close to them such as their friends and family. Ironically, though, because the majority of African Americans are meeting their dates mainly through trusted sources, such as family and friends, they maybe decreasing their chances overall of finding a compatible mate. By only utilizing family and friends they are placing limitations on other opportunities for meeting dates. Thus, the African American family faces issues that will dramatically affect their future and the future of their romantic relationships. Thus, as you can see, regardless of their position within the family, none are exempt from the tribulations faced on a daily basis. Not only are they facing major hardships but also their future of being able to maintain stable healthy relationships may be bleak. One would hope that careful use of the Internet could provide a wider dating population for African Americans. Because of the current real limitations of Internet dating and because of the possible additional mistrust of African Americans toward those not close family and friends, the actual utility of the Internet as an effective dating tool for African Americans remains problematic.

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APPENDIX

INFORMATION FROM RESEARCHER'S WEB PAGE

Informed Consent Form

Graduate student/Researcher Kamesha Spates from Texas A&M University is conducting a study of individuals who participate in Internet dating sites and virtual communities.

These online questions are an important part of the research. They ask some basic questions about your age, location, and activity on rave-related discussion boards. It also asks for your opinions about using the Internet as a tool for dating. If you chose to complete the questions, keep in mind that:

- Your participation in the study is purely voluntary
- Your participation is anonymous
- Any information that you provide is strictly confidential
- Any information that you share will exclusively be used for research purposes
- You have the right to refuse to answer any question

Also:

- You must be at least 18 to participate
- Be as truthful as possible
- Please be as complete as possible in your answers
- If you have any further questions you can email Kamesha Spates at kspates@tamu.edu or Dr. Edward Murguia at 979-845-7285, Murguia@tamu.edu.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Upon completion of the survey please submit your responses by clicking the radio button following the survey. This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through Dr. Michael W. Buckley Director of support services, IRB Coordinator, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067

Kamesha Spates
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Texas A&M University 77843-4351
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Fax: (979) 846-7755

If you agree with the above information please go to this link to answer the survey. (Link)

COPY OF SURVEY

1. Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Hispanic Origin
- ☐ White
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other

2. What is your country of residence?

2a. If you reside in the United States, what region of the country do you reside?

- ☐ Southwest (CA, NV, UT, AZ, NM, CO, OK, HI, TX, NE)
- ☐ Midwest (IL, IA, IN, KY, OH, MN, MI, WI, MO, KS)
- ☐ Northeast (DC, MD, NY, NH, PA, VA, ME, DE, CT, MA, NJ, RI, VT, WV)
- ☐ Northwest (WA, OR, ID, MT, ND, SD, AK)
- ☐ Southeast (FL, GA, AL, AR, LA, MS, TN, SC, NC)

3. Which of the following best describes your level of education?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ College Graduate

☐ Post-graduate work

4. Which of the following best represents your yearly income?

☐ Under \$25,000

☐ \$25,000 - \$49,999

☐ \$50,000 - \$74,999

☐ \$75,000 - \$99,999

☐ Over \$100,000

5. Which of the following best describes your current marital status? If you answered, “single” please answer the next question (#6), if you answered married, widowed, or divorced, please go to question # 7.

☐ Married

☐ Single

☐ Divorced

☐ Widowed

6. If you are single please choose the response that best fits your reason for being single?

☐ Voluntarily Single (*please explain*)

☐ Involuntarily Single (*please explain*)

☐ Some other reason (*please explain*)

7. To which age category do you belong?

- ☐ 18 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 49
- ☐ 50 - 65
- ☐ 66 and over

8. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

9. Do you have any children? *If yes, how many?*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. Are you currently employed? *If you are employed, what is your occupation?*
(If your answer is no, go to question #14.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Are you a student? *If you are a student, what is your major?* (If you are a student, go to question #14.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12. Do you have the Internet at work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

13. How often do you use the Internet at work?

- ☐ More than 10 hours per week
- ☐ Between 6-9 hours per week
- ☐ Between 4-6 hours per week
- ☐ Between 1-3 hours per week
- ☐ Not at all

14. Where would you say you use the Internet most often?

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Work
- ☐ School
- ☐ Other, if other please explain:

15. What is your definition of Dating?

16. List ways you might use to meet people for dating purposes.

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Co-workers
- ☐ A bar
- ☐ A coffee shop
- ☐ The Internet
- ☐ At church or religious service
- ☐ Grocery Store
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Other

17. Have you ever used the Internet for dating purposes? *(If no, go to question #20.)*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. If you have not actually used the Internet for dating purposes, have you ever browsed Internet dating sites or looked at potential mates on any online dating sites? *(If no, go to question #20.)*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. What sites have you used for this purpose?

20. Now including the Internet as well as the other ways you may have mentioned in question 16, which ways would you say tend to be the most effective in finding a date? Why?
***If you have not used the Internet for dating purposes, please choose from your response or responses given for question 16.*

21. Within the past year, how many individuals would you say that you have dated?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 5 or more

- 21a. Where did you meet the individual/individuals that you dated?
***If your answer to question #21 is 0, then answer "N/A".*

22. Within the past year, how many individuals would you say that you have met on the Internet that you have actually spent time getting to know (i.e., face-to-face, telephone, on the Internet) or actually dated?
If none go to question 25a.

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 3-4

☐ 5 or more

23. Of those individuals, how many lead to face-to-face interaction, or the sharing of personal information (address, phone number, etc.)?

Please explain.

☐ 0

☐ 1-2

☐ 3-4

☐ 5 or more

24. Of those individuals, how many turned into valued friendships, serious relationships, or even marriage?

Please explain.

☐ 0

☐ 1-2

☐ 3-4

☐ 5 or more

25. What do you find satisfying about your experiences with individuals you have met through the Internet?

***If you have not used the Internet for dating purposes go to question 27A.*

- 25a. If you have not used the Internet for these purposes, what do you think might be advantageous or disadvantageous about meeting someone on the Internet?

***If you have not used the Internet for dating purposes answer "N/A" for the remainder of the questions and submit the survey.*

26. What do you find unsatisfying about your experience with individuals you have met through the Internet?

27. In what ways have you found the Internet to be useful in meeting people you wanted to date? In what ways not useful?

28. What are some things that can be done to help improve your experiences with Internet dating?

29. What are some things you would recommend to someone who is not familiar with Internet dating to increase their chances of the Internet being an effective tool for them?

<u>Submit</u> Form	Clear_ Form
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VITA

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Education

M.S., 2004 Texas A&M University, Sociology
B.A., 2002 Northern Illinois University, Sociology

Experience

August 2002 – December 2003-Research Assistant to Dr. Murguia, Department of Sociology, Texas A&M University

January 2001 – May 2002-Information Technology Service Attendant, Information Technology Services, Northern Illinois University

Awards and Honors

Liberal Arts and Science Dean's Award, May 2002, Northern Illinois University
S-Plans highest mentors GPA award, May 2000, Northern Illinois University
NAACP's Best Female Leadership Award, December 2001, Northern Illinois University

Activities

2004 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.
2000 Golden Key National Honor Society
2000 Sociology Advisor Committee