

ONLINE OR FACE-TO-FACE? RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND
ATTRACTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS TWO MEDIA

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Online or Face-to-Face? Relationship Satisfaction and

Attraction Across Two Media

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ABSTRACT

Zmyslinski, Anne Nicole, M.S., Department of Communication, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, August 2011. Online or Face-to-Face? Relationship Satisfaction and Attraction in Romantic Relationships Across Two Media. Major Professor: Dr. Judy C. Pearson.

The purpose of this study was to examine romantic relationships that began through face-to-face (FtF) interaction or computer-mediated communication (CMC). Two hundred seventy-six participants who were currently in romantic relationships that began in person (196) or online (80) completed an online questionnaire. The study explored several relational variables (relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction) and tested for differences in the two types of relationships; however, the data were not consistent with the hypotheses and research questions. Post-hoc tests revealed that sample characteristics (including sex, exclusivity of relationships, same/opposite sex relationships, and length of relationships) accounted for several differences when tested with the relational variables. Finally, the study sought to find which of these variables related to relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF and online. Trust and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF, and physical attraction and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began online.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Communication; Relationship; Online; Face-to-Face; Satisfaction; Attraction; Hyperpersonal; Social Penetration

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, individuals initiated romantic relationships through face-to-face (FtF) interaction. In FtF romantic relationships, partners can develop initial impressions based on physical appearance and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or bodily movement. Today, many romantic relationships begin on the Internet (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Seventy-four percent of the 10 million single American Internet users have accessed the Internet in some way for romantic pursuits (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Since its' advent decades ago, the Internet has revolutionized how people communicate and connect with romantic partners.

Beginning relationships on the Internet is now viewed as an acceptable "mainstream social practice" (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 416). According to Online Dating Magazine (2010), more than 280,000 marriages a year occur as a result of people meeting through an Internet dating service. Additionally, the majority of people who date online are not embarrassed to search for companionship on the Internet; the popularity of online dating continues to increase. Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) found that 70% of the participants in their study informed their families and friends they were involved with online dating.

Despite individuals' increasing openness about dating on the Internet, online dating poses some concerns as well. Madden and Lenhart (2006) found that 66% of "Internet users agree with the statement that online dating is a dangerous activity because it puts personal information on the Internet" (p. i). Additionally, online daters must carefully evaluate their potential partners, especially in the beginning of a relationship, to determine whether or not they are presenting their true selves (Ellison, et al., 2006). People who date

online must also monitor the information they choose to share on their own profiles. When online daters evaluate their own profiles they attempt to “balance their desire for self-promotion with their need for accurate self-presentation” (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 430). The prospect of meeting romantic partners FtF compels individuals to maintain accuracy in their profile information and photos online (Ellison, et al., 2006).

Individuals who date online believe that there are positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships through CMC (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2005). Many individuals appreciate the opportunity to “obtrusively gain information about others earlier than would be appropriate in a traditional face-to-face setting” (Heino et al., 2005, p. 14). For example, online profiles could include political views, religious beliefs, etc., and these topics normally would not be discussed on a first date in a FtF setting. Additionally, many people felt that the ability to search through potential partners to filter out “deal-breaker” qualities was an effective way to increase their odds of finding a long-term relationship (Heino et al., 2005).

However, the participants explained that “shopping” for the perfect partner online had downsides as well. Searching through so many potential partners caused them to make judgments more easily than in FtF interaction (Heino et al., 2005). Secondly, participants acknowledged they could have eliminated good matches based on search criteria (e.g., They miss out on someone who is one year older than their search criteria allows) (Heino et al., 2005). Finally, participants felt as if the filtering ability caused less excitement than a similar FtF encounter (Heino, et al., 2005). Once participants met their partners in person they explained that there was a need for a positive social interaction as well as “chemistry” in a FtF setting, which is more difficult to experience online (Heino, et al., 2005).

Therefore, FtF interaction is a vital component for two types of relationships, those that begin in person (e.g., meet at a party) and those that begin online (e.g., meet through a social networking website, such as Facebook). Exploring the characteristics of romantic relationships that begin through FtF interaction or CMC will aid researchers in understanding what differences, if any, exist between two common ways of initiating romantic relationships.

This chapter will first address the theoretical implications of the hyperpersonal communication model and the social penetration process on relationship satisfaction and attraction of couples who begin dating online or FtF. Specifically, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be discussed as potential predictors of relationship satisfaction. Second, the chapter will address the rationale of the study. Third, the definitions of key terms will be presented. Finally, a brief overview of the remaining chapters in the study will be offered.

Theoretical Background

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

To guide this study's explanation of potential differences between initiating FtF and CMC relationships, Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model is utilized. Walther argues, "Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become 'hyperpersonal,' that is to exceed FtF interpersonal communication" (p. 5). Oftentimes, CMC communication is more satisfying than FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). For example, if an individual is usually nervous when meeting new people, he or she may choose to communicate through CMC to initiate

a romantic relationship, which allows for more anonymity and less pressure in terms of nonverbal cues, physical appearance, clothing choice, and so on (Walther, 1996).

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model offers "a fully integrated view of CMC taking into account the sender, receiver, channel, and feedback as each contributes to hyperpersonal interaction in CMC" (p. 28). Senders can formulate their messages in terms of their ultimate social goals and receivers can formulate an equally idealized message back to their partners. Through CMC interaction, individuals do not have to communicate in real time and are released from added pressure to respond immediately as in FtF interaction (Walther, 1996). Partners respond independently and "time is frozen" until the other responds to a message (Walther, 1996, p. 29). CMC allows online daters to contemplate their messages (and even edit messages) for a longer period of time, whereas FtF communication forces an immediate response.

According to Walther (1996), CMC can function in three different ways. First, CMC can function impersonally especially when future interaction is not anticipated (Walther, 1996). Impersonal communication occurs when "anonymity and thick layers of software-imposed interaction structures" exist (Walther, 1996, p. 32). Secondly, CMC can function interpersonally "when users have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther explains that when individuals expect to have a long-term relationship, CMC is no less personal than FtF interaction. Finally, CMC is hyperpersonal "when users create impressions and manage relationships in ways more positively than they might be able to conduct [in] FtF [settings]" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther points out that CMC is more likely to function

hyperpersonally when the communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that individuals share.

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration processes include “the range of interpersonal events occurring in growing relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). These processes include verbal communication, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions that occur before, during, and after interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Verbal exchanges “include information exchanges” such as, “I’m an accountant” or “I’m originally from Minnesota” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). Nonverbal cues include bodily movement such as postures, gestures, and limb movement. Additionally, facial expressions such as smiling, gazing, and frowning can also be identified as nonverbal cues. Finally, “environmentally oriented behaviors” are characterized by “spatial and personal distance between people and [the] use of physical objects and areas” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). As verbal, nonverbal, and environmental behaviors occur, individuals conduct a series of internal processes before, during, and after contact with others. These internal processes include developing ideas as to what another person is like as well as positive and negative impressions of the person (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5).

Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that *social penetration processes* are most likely never complete because of the unpredictable nature of humans. Also, they point out that the process is not smooth: “There may be spurts and slowdowns, plateaus and sudden new upward cycles, [and] long periods of stability” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 141). Even if a relationship is considered close, both individuals still remain independent entities. For this

reason, Altman and Taylor clarify that a person cannot be fully understood by his or her partner and interaction is fairly unpredictable.

Rationale

This study builds upon the growing literature within the arena of romantic relationships and also examines if any differences exist between levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction in romantic relationships that were initiated through FtF interaction or CMC. This research provides useful additions to the hyperpersonal communication model as well as to social penetration theory. Social penetration theory was developed as a framework that helped to explain how individuals' FtF interactions unfold, and the hyperpersonal communication model was developed in order to explain the types of communication that occur online. Therefore, both theories are important in guiding research that examines two types of relationships, those that begin in person and online. Although this study benefits theory, practical implications exist as well. Individuals who specialize in relationship therapy can benefit from this research in order to offer useful advice to both groups of individuals who began their relationships in either FtF or CMC contexts. Finally, individuals who are seeking new romantic relationships could find the results of this study useful when choosing between initiating relationships FtF or through CMC.

Definition of Terms

Face-to-Face (FtF) Relationships

For the purpose of this study, individuals in FtF relationships are defined as people who initially met the person they are dating in a face-to-face situation such as in a class, at work, or through a mutual friend at a social encounter. According to Antheunis, Schouten,

Valkenburg, and Peter (2009), FtF communication allows individuals to use many cues, physical appearance and nonverbal behaviors, in order “to develop an impression of the other” (p. 4). Individuals who interact in FtF situations are in the same physical and social settings; they not only view and interpret each other’s behavior, but they can also witness the same objects and events happening near their conversations. FtF communication allows for both parties to experience all aspects of the communication process, even something as simple as the temperature of a particular environment.

Previous research has compared communication in FtF and CMC contexts. Chan and Cheng (2004) compared individuals’ online and offline friendships. FtF (offline) friendships allowed “more interdependence, breadth, depth, code change, understanding, commitment, and network convergence than online friendships” (Chan & Cheng, 2004, p. 305). Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn, and Hearst (2008) explain that FtF contexts allow individuals to convey information intentionally, but oftentimes unintentional nonverbal cues such as body language, expressions, or tone of voice can “provide a great deal of information about other people” (p. 798). Initiating relationships through FtF interaction allows individuals to experience all of the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, whereas initiating relationships through (CMC) leaves much more opportunity for interpretation.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Relationships

Individuals in CMC relationships are defined as people who initially met their partners on the Internet through an online dating website, social networking website, or another website or chat service that allows individuals to communicate through CMC. This study includes individuals who have met their partners in person and also those who have

not met their partners FtF. Walther (1996) argues that, in some cases, CMC interactions can also be defined as hyperpersonal or “forms of interaction that exceed what we may accomplish FtF, in terms of our impression-generating and relational goals” (p. 28). Online dating, especially through dating websites, is an effective example of communicative interaction functioning hyperpersonally. Individuals access an online dating website in order to find the proper “match” for them, while also attempting to present the most attractive versions of themselves (Ellison, et al., 2006). Therefore, dating is a well-planned process on the Internet. CMC provides a unique opportunity to individuals who date online in that they can carefully construct messages before sending them, whereas in FtF relationships communication occurs synchronously, meaning response rates are instant.

Other CMC perspectives exist as well. Online relationships lack spatial relations, physical appearance, and individuals’ nonverbal communication habits (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). CMC is often referred to as impersonal and some scholars have defined communication on the Internet to fall within the “cues filtered out” perspective (e.g., Culnan & Markus, 1987). Cues filtered out means that communication in CMC allows for more anonymity and communicators observe less individuality (e.g., choice in clothes) in others with whom they interact (Walther, 1996). These perspectives expect CMC “to be less socially oriented and less personal than FtF communication” (Walther, 1996, p. 8).

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Couples who report spending more time interacting with each other are more satisfied than those couples who spend less time together (e.g., Kirchner, 1989; Johnson, Amoloza, &

Booth, 1992; Dickson-Markman & Markman, 1988). Anderson and Emmers-Sommer found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction among CMC couples. Guerrero (1994) found that relationship satisfaction affects individuals' perceptions of their partner in terms of communication skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, not only are there multiple variables that are associated with relationship satisfaction, but an individual's level of relationship satisfaction also can greatly influence how one partner views the other.

Intimacy

Emotional intimacy is a perception of closeness to a romantic partner that allows sharing of feelings, along with expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Mitchell et al. (2008) explain that "an intimate relationship is hypothesized to result from repeated intimate interactions as well as such influences as the relationship history, the commitment of the two persons, and public recognition of the relationship" (p. 21). Depending on the medium in which relationships begin (FtF or CMC), couples may experience different types of intimacy. Walther (1997) found that people who communicated through FtF interaction achieved lower intimacy levels than those who communicated through CMC. Hian, Chuan, Trevor, and Detenber (2004) also found that intimacy developed more quickly in CMC than FtF.

Trust

Trust is "the degree of confidence [one] feels when [one] think[s] about a relationship" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). Along with the degree of confidence in individuals' relationships, Berger and Calabrese (1975) explain that people will desire to gain new information about their partners in order to reduce their uncertainty about them.

A central part of an individual's level of trust includes his or her ability to predict his or her partner's behavior (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Because individuals want to predict how their partner will behave, they will utilize uncertainty-reducing strategies (e.g., asking detailed questions) in order to trust their partners. Trust is especially important for online couples before a FtF meeting occurs because both partners need to trust that accurate information (e. g., photos, description of values, career) is presented on the Internet.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication is satisfying "when one's expectations for the interaction are met and fulfilled" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 159). Cahn (1983) explains that when individuals feel understood by their partners, they feel more content in their communication and relationships. Hecht (1978) points out that context can play a key role in communication skills. For example, an individual may successfully communicate with his or her boss, but may struggle to successfully communicate with his or her partner or vice versa. Since context plays a role in how individuals communicate, the medium could play a role as well. If an individual who is typically shy in person decides to date online, he or she may feel far more comfortable communicating with a potential partner online than in a FtF setting.

Physical Attraction

McCroskey and McCain (1974) conceptualized interpersonal attraction as a three-dimensional construct: 1) a social dimension: "She would fit into my family;" 2) a task dimension: "She works on projects very efficiently;" and 3) a physical dimension: "He is very handsome." For the purpose of this study, physical attraction will be the only

dimension examined. Individuals' attraction to one another may increase depending on proximity (Knapp, 1978). If individuals live close to one another or share an office, they are able to learn a great deal about a potential partner through repetitive everyday conversation (Knapp, 1978). Online daters may feel attracted to their partners in different ways than FtF daters due to the lack of physical proximity. FtF daters can literally see, smell, and touch their partners; online daters must rely on the textual information, pictures, and videos provided on the Internet until, and if, they decide to pursue FtF relationships.

Overview of Study

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter provided a brief overview of related research and a rationale for the study. Chapter Two will contain a review of literature related to the variables within the study (e.g., face-to-face relationships, computer-mediated communication relationships, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction). Chapter Three will discuss the methodology for the study. Chapter Four will highlight the results of the study. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the results of the study in further detail, and will address limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will examine the literature and concepts related to romantic relationships that begin FtF or online. Scholarship that explains and defines the hyperpersonal communication model, social penetration theory, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be introduced. Additionally, research that examines these particular variables will be included in order to shape the argument of this study. The inclusion of literature specific to these variables will seek to support the reasoning for uncovering the potential differences in relationships that begin FtF or online. In particular, the research questions and hypotheses will address if individuals who initiate FtF or CMC romantic relationships have different levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Finally, predictors of relationship satisfaction for both types of relationships will be explored.

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model examines how computer-mediated communication (CMC) functions. The model stems from Walther's examination of previous research that explored how the Internet affected communication. Walther's reconceptualization of how the Internet can affect communication aids in examining how relationships can develop online. This summary will discuss the development of the hyperpersonal communication model, dimensions of hyperpersonal communication, situations in which communication functions hyperpersonally, and an evaluation of the hyperpersonal communication model.

Development of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

In Walther's (1996) article, which introduces the hyperpersonal communication model, he presents previous CMC research such as the cues-filtered out model. Culnan and Markus (1987) developed the cues-filtered out model, which states that because nonverbal cues are absent in CMC, communication is impersonal because individuals are not aware of nonverbal cues such as physical appearance and feedback (e.g., head nodding, facial expressions). Early research predicted that when individuals lacked nonverbal cues (such as in CMC), they would be less able to "alter the mood of a message, communicate a sense of individuality, or exercise dominance or charisma" (Kiesler, 1986, p. 48).

Previous research also explained that impersonal communication through CMC could be valuable in some communicative interactions. Dubrovsky (1985) explained that work-related computer conferencing allows individuals to filter "out affective components of communication and emphasize the content, minimize social influences (influence of status, interpersonal 'noise,' and so on)" (p. 381). Hence, individuals could focus more on the task at hand without being distracted by nonverbal cues or environmental factors. Also, Steiner (1972) explained that the impersonal nature of CMC could enhance group decision-making. CMC allows groups to filter out negative aspects of interaction such as domination by a member or members of the group, pressures to conform, and self-consciousness among lower level members (Walther, 1996). In dating relationships, the impersonal nature of CMC could also allow individuals to meet partners in a less stressful manner. For example, when individuals first communicate with a potential partner online, especially through text-based messages, they are not concerned with their appearance or

any nervous habits that may exist in similar FtF “first date” conversations (Heino et al., 2005).

Another approach in exploring differences between FtF and online communication is media richness theory, which was developed by Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987). Media richness theory assumes “that media have varying capabilities for resolving ambiguity, meeting interpretation needs, and transmitting data” (Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987, p. 557). Communication media, according to Trevino, Lengel, and Daft, can be classified as “rich” or “lean” based on four factors: 1) the availability of instant feedback, which aids individuals in reaching a mutual understanding; 2) the use of multiple cues to express interpretation and emotions; 3) the use of natural language; and 4) the personal focus of the medium. If media are in line with these factors, they are considered to be “rich.” Conversely, media that do not display these factors are considered “lean.” FtF communication is the richest medium because feedback automatically occurs, multiple cues exist, and natural language is used (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). The leanest media are written documents due to the lack of instant feedback and cues (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). CMC lies in between the leanest and richest of media. However, when CMC allows users to communicate through features such as video chat and synchronous instant messaging, it is considered richer than asynchronous, text-based CMC such as email.

Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) explain that efficient communication will take place when the complexity of a message is matched with the appropriate media richness. If a message is complex, rich media (such as FtF) should be utilized, and if a message is simple, lean media (such as a written letter or memo) can be utilized (Daft, Lengel, &

Trevino, 1987). Sheer (2010) explains that social interaction messages are not simple “because feelings, between-the-lines meanings, non-verbal expressions are all difficult to transmit efficiently via lean media” (p. 225). Therefore, the preferred medium for romantic relationships, according to media richness theory, is FtF interaction. However, Walther (1996) explains that social interactions via CMC, in some cases, can match or even exceed what individuals can accomplish in similar FtF interactions.

Walther (1992) argued that CMC could function more effectively and diversely than previously reported. He pointed out that early studies examined only short periods of time in individuals’ FtF and online communication. Also, as relationships via CMC progress, Walther (1992) explained that the quality of unchanging, impersonal characteristics of CMC could be related only to initial interactions among unacquainted individuals and that these conditions could dissolve as communication continues. Therefore, the cues-filtered out model may be related only to individuals in initial CMC interactions, especially individuals who have no intention of continuing the relationship (Walther, 1996). Walther (1996) explained that prior research only examined “one-time only, time-limited CMC groups;” therefore, these participants “are bound to appear more task oriented than are parallel FtF groups” (p. 11). Walther and Burgoon (1992) examined relationship development in FtF and CMC contexts over time. They found that individuals who interacted via CMC were less social at first, but “were more socially oriented than were FtF groups” at the conclusion of the study (Walther, 1996, p. 11).

After examining previous studies and conducting his own research, Walther (1996) offered a reconceptualization of how the Internet affects communication. First, Walther wanted to “integrate theories and research findings pertaining to impersonal and

interpersonal interactions in CMC, not by dismissing one in favor of the other but rather by specifying some conditions that favor each type of outcome, either of which may be desirable and useful in certain contexts” (p. 4). Second, Walther offered a new perspective by explaining that CMC could function hyperpersonally. Walther claims, “Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become ‘hyperpersonal,’ that is, to exceed FtF interpersonal communication” (p. 5). The Internet allows individuals to communicate interpersonally “in heightened” or specialized ways through CMC (Walther, 1996, p. 5).

Dimensions of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Based on previous research pertaining to online communication, Walther (1996) described three types of communication that could occur as a result of CMC. Walther explains that computer mediation alone does not “make communication either impersonal or hyperpersonal;” (p. 33) CMC allows users to more easily communicate in ways that will maximize each particular interaction (Walther, 1996). Three types of communication are utilized online: impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal communication.

Impersonal communication occurs as a result “of the lack of nonverbal cues and, at times, the reduced interactivity of e-mail and computer conferencing systems” (Walther, 1996, p. 7). Additionally, Walther explains that impersonal communication can occur when individuals’ communicative goals are not interpersonal, when individuals have restricted time frames in which to communicate, and also when individuals do not anticipate future communication.

Individuals can also communicate interpersonally through CMC. The social information processing (SIP) approach developed by Walther (1992) presumed that

individuals who communicate via CMC are wired to develop interpersonal relationships, much like individuals who communicate FtF. Walther (1996) explains that CMC is interpersonal when individuals “have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values” (p. 33). When individuals who interact via CMC feel that they will continue a relationship, “CMC is no less personal than FtF [interaction]” (Walther, 1996, p. 33).

Finally, Walther (1996) describes hyperpersonal communication as “CMC that is more socially desirable than [individuals] tend to experience in parallel FtF interaction” (p. 17). Hyperpersonal communication occurs when individuals “experience commonality and are self-aware, [are] physically separated, and [are] communicating via a limited-cues channel that allows them to selectively self-present and edit” (Walther, 1996, p. 33). CMC allows individuals to create and reciprocate representations of their partners and relationships without the intrusion of environmental reality (Walther, 1996). Hyperpersonal communication is more likely to occur when communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that partners share (Walther, 1996).

Several studies offer findings that are consistent with the hyperpersonal model. Hancock and Dunham (2001) compared FtF and CMC dyads' impression formation. Specifically, the participants rated one another's personality profiles (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). The “impressions formed in the CMC environment were less detailed, but more intense than those formed face-to-face” (Hancock & Dunham, 2001, p. 325). When hyperpersonal communication occurs, individuals' impressions of potential partners can be more exaggerated than similar FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). Oftentimes, individuals

who communicate through CMC have “a tendency to fill in the blanks optimistically when faced with limited information about a person” (Fiore et al., 2008, p. 798). Finally, Antheunis et al. (2009) found that the depth of self-disclosure in individuals who communicated through text-only CMC was higher than individuals who communicated FtF, which supports the hyperpersonal model. The hyperpersonal model suggests that CMC can lead to intimate information exchange; individuals share private information earlier than they would in FtF situations.

Implications of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Individuals can capitalize on the limited-cues afforded by CMC when they interact on the Internet. Walther (1996) explained that previous research illustrated that “CMC [allowed] participants in dyads and groups—even those who have never met before—[to] use cues available to them to manage relational development in normal (or perhaps supernormal) fashion” (p. 13). Baker (1998) surveyed 18 couples who met online and asked them about their relationships. Some of the participants revealed that it was easier to reveal more personal thoughts and feelings online through writing than through FtF interaction (Baker, 1998). When communication functions hyperpersonally, individuals can interact in heightened ways through CMC, and “conversation partners [can] disclose their inner feelings at an earlier stage than in face-to-face communication” (Antheunis et al., 2009, p. 5).

Walther (1996) explains that the main “difference between . . . CMC and FtF communication has not to do with the *amount* of social information exchanged but with the *rate* of social information exchange” (p. 10). Despite the slower rate in CMC, individuals who interact online to form romantic relationships can communicate meaningfully.

Participants in Baker's (1998) study of couples who date online revealed that they thought individuals who met online might get to know one another on a deeper level than those who met in FtF contexts. Heino et al. (2005) point out that "social etiquette might prevent discussion of topics such as personal income or political views on a first date, but online dating participants [have] access to this information before the first email [is] exchanged" (p. 14). Individuals who date online potentially know more about their partners at the beginning of their relationships than those who date FtF even though the rate of exchange can be slower online.

Although developing romantic relationships through CMC works well for some individuals, some research explains that deception can occur on the Internet. Hancock and Toma (2009) found that online daters struggle with pressures to enhance their physical attractiveness in photos, while maintaining their desire to avoid deception in the photos they choose. The researchers found that 1/3 of the photos used by online daters were not accurate, meaning that the photos were inconsistent with the individuals' actual appearance (e.g., retouched by a photographer, younger photos). Individuals who date online want to present themselves in a positive and attractive manner, but deception through photographs and social desirability bias prevents them from creating a profile that is as accurate as their FtF selves (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Evaluating the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

The hyperpersonal communication model is useful in many areas of research. The model has explained communication in various contexts including dyads and groups; and in educational, romantic, and group/leadership settings (Walther, 2007). For example, Walther examined how dyads communicate through CMC in order to understand "the

extent to which users employ the means suggested by the hyperpersonal model in electronic conversations” (p. 2540). Specifically, he “examined how CMC users managed message composing time, editing behaviors, personal language, sentence complexity, and relational tone in their initial messages to different presumed targets, and the cognitive awareness related to these processes” (p. 2538). The results were consistent with the hyperpersonal communication model. The model suggests that individuals spend time carefully drafting and editing messages, which was evidenced in this study; the participants processed their messages more mindfully, which led to more effort in message construction (Walther, 2007). Therefore, individuals who communicate via CMC carefully decide what to include or not to include in their messages.

Antheunis et al. (2009) also examined dyads. They compared dyads in FtF, visual CMC conditions, and text-based CMC conditions. Dyads who communicated via CMC (both visual and text-based) exchanged deeper self-disclosure (more intimate information) than FtF dyads, which is evidence of the hyperpersonal communication model in action (Antheunis et al., 2009). These researchers “conclude[d] that it is depth, and not amount, of self-disclosure that accounts for the increased liking in CMC interactions” (Antheunis et al., 2009). Therefore, hyperpersonal communication was occurring in that the depth of information shared by users generated more liking in both CMC conditions. If individuals communicate private or intimate details about themselves, levels of intimacy can increase (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Previous research has explained that higher levels of intimacy are common when individuals communicate online (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997).

The hyperpersonal communication model poses both positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships online. Individuals could have heightened expectations or “idealized notions” of their partner prior to a FtF date “based on limited cues in the absence of contradicting information” (Heino, et al., 2005, p. 8). These idealized notions of partners can lead to FtF letdowns; Brym and Lenton (2001) found that 38% of participants were disappointed upon meeting their partners FtF. Conversely, the idealized versions of individuals’ partners could strengthen their affinity to the relationships and partners once individuals meet in a FtF setting (Heino, et al., 2005). Hence, hyperpersonal communication in the beginning of online romantic relationships can increase or decrease the satisfaction one feels once a FtF date occurs.

Social Penetration Theory

Development of Social Penetration Theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) developed the social penetration theory based on research interests in the process of creating relationships as well as a history of observing the initiation and deterioration of social bonds. After evaluating previous research, Altman and Taylor created a task list. First, they wanted to produce a wide range of ideas that were connected to the development of interpersonal relationships. Second, they wanted to tackle a common sense phenomenon, meaning they wanted to describe how everyday relationships are formed. Lastly, they wanted to address social penetration issues in a way that could resonate with a wide variety of readers.

Social penetration theory focuses on “what people do, say, think, and feel about one another as they form, nurture, and disengage from interpersonal relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). *Social penetration* refers to 1. actual behaviors that take place

during interaction and 2. internal processes that precede, accompany, and follow social exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Events that occur within interpersonal relationships are collectively referred to as *social penetration processes*, which can “include verbal exchange, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3).

Dimensions of Social Penetration Theory

The social penetration process includes four stages: the orientation stage, the exploratory affective stage, the affective stage, and the stable exchange stage. Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that relationship development does not follow a straight course, but for heuristic reasons, providing a process for interaction is useful. In order to construct the social penetration stages, Altman and Taylor examined literature that explored nonverbal and environmental factors such as “richness, spontaneity, efficiency of exchange, pacing and synchrony, degree of stereotype-uniqueness of behavior, permeability of the self, behavioral equivalency or substitutability, and evaluation” (p. 142).

Stage one, orientation, tends to occur in public areas when individuals first meet at a party, social gathering, first date, or in varieties of other circumstances (Altman & Taylor, 1973). When someone enters the orientation stage, he or she only shares a small part of him or herself on a verbal, nonverbal, and environmental level (Altman & Taylor, 1973). His or her responses are socially desirable and are not extraordinarily unique. Interaction does not break through to the intermediate and private details of individuals' personalities, and basic information such as hometown, education, work, is shared. If very personal information (e.g., intimate details of a recent breakup) is shared, responses to that personal information are likely to be very restricted and people may even openly display

ONLINE OR FACE-TO-FACE? RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND
ATTRACTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS TWO MEDIA

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Anne Nicole Zmyslinski

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Department:
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Graduate School

Title

Online or Face-to-Face? Relationship Satisfaction and

Attraction Across Two Media

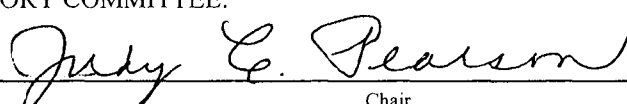
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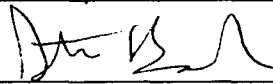
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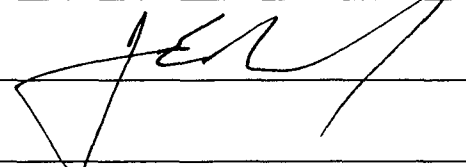
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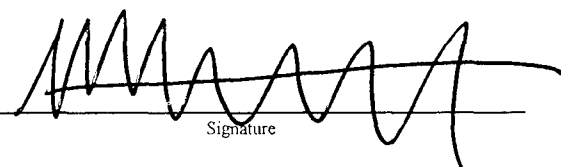




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ABSTRACT

Zmyslinski, Anne Nicole, M.S., Department of Communication, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, August 2011. Online or Face-to-Face? Relationship Satisfaction and Attraction in Romantic Relationships Across Two Media. Major Professor: Dr. Judy C. Pearson.

The purpose of this study was to examine romantic relationships that began through face-to-face (FtF) interaction or computer-mediated communication (CMC). Two hundred seventy-six participants who were currently in romantic relationships that began in person (196) or online (80) completed an online questionnaire. The study explored several relational variables (relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction) and tested for differences in the two types of relationships; however, the data were not consistent with the hypotheses and research questions. Post-hoc tests revealed that sample characteristics (including sex, exclusivity of relationships, same/opposite sex relationships, and length of relationships) accounted for several differences when tested with the relational variables. Finally, the study sought to find which of these variables related to relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF and online. Trust and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF, and physical attraction and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began online.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Communication; Relationship; Online; Face-to-Face; Satisfaction; Attraction; Hyperpersonal; Social Penetration

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, individuals initiated romantic relationships through face-to-face (FtF) interaction. In FtF romantic relationships, partners can develop initial impressions based on physical appearance and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or bodily movement. Today, many romantic relationships begin on the Internet (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Seventy-four percent of the 10 million single American Internet users have accessed the Internet in some way for romantic pursuits (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Since its' advent decades ago, the Internet has revolutionized how people communicate and connect with romantic partners.

Beginning relationships on the Internet is now viewed as an acceptable "mainstream social practice" (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 416). According to Online Dating Magazine (2010), more than 280,000 marriages a year occur as a result of people meeting through an Internet dating service. Additionally, the majority of people who date online are not embarrassed to search for companionship on the Internet; the popularity of online dating continues to increase. Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) found that 70% of the participants in their study informed their families and friends they were involved with online dating.

Despite individuals' increasing openness about dating on the Internet, online dating poses some concerns as well. Madden and Lenhart (2006) found that 66% of "Internet users agree with the statement that online dating is a dangerous activity because it puts personal information on the Internet" (p. i). Additionally, online daters must carefully evaluate their potential partners, especially in the beginning of a relationship, to determine whether or not they are presenting their true selves (Ellison, et al., 2006). People who date

online must also monitor the information they choose to share on their own profiles. When online daters evaluate their own profiles they attempt to “balance their desire for self-promotion with their need for accurate self-presentation” (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 430). The prospect of meeting romantic partners FtF compels individuals to maintain accuracy in their profile information and photos online (Ellison, et al., 2006).

Individuals who date online believe that there are positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships through CMC (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2005). Many individuals appreciate the opportunity to “obtrusively gain information about others earlier than would be appropriate in a traditional face-to-face setting” (Heino et al., 2005, p. 14). For example, online profiles could include political views, religious beliefs, etc., and these topics normally would not be discussed on a first date in a FtF setting. Additionally, many people felt that the ability to search through potential partners to filter out “deal-breaker” qualities was an effective way to increase their odds of finding a long-term relationship (Heino et al., 2005).

However, the participants explained that “shopping” for the perfect partner online had downsides as well. Searching through so many potential partners caused them to make judgments more easily than in FtF interaction (Heino et al., 2005). Secondly, participants acknowledged they could have eliminated good matches based on search criteria (e.g., They miss out on someone who is one year older than their search criteria allows) (Heino et al., 2005). Finally, participants felt as if the filtering ability caused less excitement than a similar FtF encounter (Heino, et al., 2005). Once participants met their partners in person they explained that there was a need for a positive social interaction as well as “chemistry” in a FtF setting, which is more difficult to experience online (Heino, et al., 2005).

Therefore, FtF interaction is a vital component for two types of relationships, those that begin in person (e.g., meet at a party) and those that begin online (e.g., meet through a social networking website, such as Facebook). Exploring the characteristics of romantic relationships that begin through FtF interaction or CMC will aid researchers in understanding what differences, if any, exist between two common ways of initiating romantic relationships.

This chapter will first address the theoretical implications of the hyperpersonal communication model and the social penetration process on relationship satisfaction and attraction of couples who begin dating online or FtF. Specifically, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be discussed as potential predictors of relationship satisfaction. Second, the chapter will address the rationale of the study. Third, the definitions of key terms will be presented. Finally, a brief overview of the remaining chapters in the study will be offered.

Theoretical Background

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

To guide this study's explanation of potential differences between initiating FtF and CMC relationships, Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model is utilized. Walther argues, "Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become 'hyperpersonal,' that is to exceed FtF interpersonal communication" (p. 5). Oftentimes, CMC communication is more satisfying than FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). For example, if an individual is usually nervous when meeting new people, he or she may choose to communicate through CMC to initiate

a romantic relationship, which allows for more anonymity and less pressure in terms of nonverbal cues, physical appearance, clothing choice, and so on (Walther, 1996).

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model offers "a fully integrated view of CMC taking into account the sender, receiver, channel, and feedback as each contributes to hyperpersonal interaction in CMC" (p. 28). Senders can formulate their messages in terms of their ultimate social goals and receivers can formulate an equally idealized message back to their partners. Through CMC interaction, individuals do not have to communicate in real time and are released from added pressure to respond immediately as in FtF interaction (Walther, 1996). Partners respond independently and "time is frozen" until the other responds to a message (Walther, 1996, p. 29). CMC allows online daters to contemplate their messages (and even edit messages) for a longer period of time, whereas FtF communication forces an immediate response.

According to Walther (1996), CMC can function in three different ways. First, CMC can function impersonally especially when future interaction is not anticipated (Walther, 1996). Impersonal communication occurs when "anonymity and thick layers of software-imposed interaction structures" exist (Walther, 1996, p. 32). Secondly, CMC can function interpersonally "when users have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther explains that when individuals expect to have a long-term relationship, CMC is no less personal than FtF interaction. Finally, CMC is hyperpersonal "when users create impressions and manage relationships in ways more positively than they might be able to conduct [in] FtF [settings]" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther points out that CMC is more likely to function

hyperpersonally when the communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that individuals share.

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration processes include “the range of interpersonal events occurring in growing relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). These processes include verbal communication, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions that occur before, during, and after interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Verbal exchanges “include information exchanges” such as, “I’m an accountant” or “I’m originally from Minnesota” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). Nonverbal cues include bodily movement such as postures, gestures, and limb movement. Additionally, facial expressions such as smiling, gazing, and frowning can also be identified as nonverbal cues. Finally, “environmentally oriented behaviors” are characterized by “spatial and personal distance between people and [the] use of physical objects and areas” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). As verbal, nonverbal, and environmental behaviors occur, individuals conduct a series of internal processes before, during, and after contact with others. These internal processes include developing ideas as to what another person is like as well as positive and negative impressions of the person (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5).

Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that *social penetration processes* are most likely never complete because of the unpredictable nature of humans. Also, they point out that the process is not smooth: “There may be spurts and slowdowns, plateaus and sudden new upward cycles, [and] long periods of stability” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 141). Even if a relationship is considered close, both individuals still remain independent entities. For this

reason, Altman and Taylor clarify that a person cannot be fully understood by his or her partner and interaction is fairly unpredictable.

Rationale

This study builds upon the growing literature within the arena of romantic relationships and also examines if any differences exist between levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction in romantic relationships that were initiated through FtF interaction or CMC. This research provides useful additions to the hyperpersonal communication model as well as to social penetration theory. Social penetration theory was developed as a framework that helped to explain how individuals' FtF interactions unfold, and the hyperpersonal communication model was developed in order to explain the types of communication that occur online. Therefore, both theories are important in guiding research that examines two types of relationships, those that begin in person and online. Although this study benefits theory, practical implications exist as well. Individuals who specialize in relationship therapy can benefit from this research in order to offer useful advice to both groups of individuals who began their relationships in either FtF or CMC contexts. Finally, individuals who are seeking new romantic relationships could find the results of this study useful when choosing between initiating relationships FtF or through CMC.

Definition of Terms

Face-to-Face (FtF) Relationships

For the purpose of this study, individuals in FtF relationships are defined as people who initially met the person they are dating in a face-to-face situation such as in a class, at work, or through a mutual friend at a social encounter. According to Antheunis, Schouten,

Valkenburg, and Peter (2009), FtF communication allows individuals to use many cues, physical appearance and nonverbal behaviors, in order “to develop an impression of the other” (p. 4). Individuals who interact in FtF situations are in the same physical and social settings; they not only view and interpret each other’s behavior, but they can also witness the same objects and events happening near their conversations. FtF communication allows for both parties to experience all aspects of the communication process, even something as simple as the temperature of a particular environment.

Previous research has compared communication in FtF and CMC contexts. Chan and Cheng (2004) compared individuals’ online and offline friendships. FtF (offline) friendships allowed “more interdependence, breadth, depth, code change, understanding, commitment, and network convergence than online friendships” (Chan & Cheng, 2004, p. 305). Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn, and Hearst (2008) explain that FtF contexts allow individuals to convey information intentionally, but oftentimes unintentional nonverbal cues such as body language, expressions, or tone of voice can “provide a great deal of information about other people” (p. 798). Initiating relationships through FtF interaction allows individuals to experience all of the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, whereas initiating relationships through (CMC) leaves much more opportunity for interpretation.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Relationships

Individuals in CMC relationships are defined as people who initially met their partners on the Internet through an online dating website, social networking website, or another website or chat service that allows individuals to communicate through CMC. This study includes individuals who have met their partners in person and also those who have

not met their partners FtF. Walther (1996) argues that, in some cases, CMC interactions can also be defined as hyperpersonal or “forms of interaction that exceed what we may accomplish FtF, in terms of our impression-generating and relational goals” (p. 28). Online dating, especially through dating websites, is an effective example of communicative interaction functioning hyperpersonally. Individuals access an online dating website in order to find the proper “match” for them, while also attempting to present the most attractive versions of themselves (Ellison, et al., 2006). Therefore, dating is a well-planned process on the Internet. CMC provides a unique opportunity to individuals who date online in that they can carefully construct messages before sending them, whereas in FtF relationships communication occurs synchronously, meaning response rates are instant.

Other CMC perspectives exist as well. Online relationships lack spatial relations, physical appearance, and individuals’ nonverbal communication habits (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). CMC is often referred to as impersonal and some scholars have defined communication on the Internet to fall within the “cues filtered out” perspective (e.g., Culnan & Markus, 1987). Cues filtered out means that communication in CMC allows for more anonymity and communicators observe less individuality (e.g., choice in clothes) in others with whom they interact (Walther, 1996). These perspectives expect CMC “to be less socially oriented and less personal than FtF communication” (Walther, 1996, p. 8).

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Couples who report spending more time interacting with each other are more satisfied than those couples who spend less time together (e.g., Kirchner, 1989; Johnson, Amoloza, &

Booth, 1992; Dickson-Markman & Markman, 1988). Anderson and Emmers-Sommer found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction among CMC couples. Guerrero (1994) found that relationship satisfaction affects individuals' perceptions of their partner in terms of communication skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, not only are there multiple variables that are associated with relationship satisfaction, but an individual's level of relationship satisfaction also can greatly influence how one partner views the other.

Intimacy

Emotional intimacy is a perception of closeness to a romantic partner that allows sharing of feelings, along with expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Mitchell et al. (2008) explain that "an intimate relationship is hypothesized to result from repeated intimate interactions as well as such influences as the relationship history, the commitment of the two persons, and public recognition of the relationship" (p. 21). Depending on the medium in which relationships begin (FtF or CMC), couples may experience different types of intimacy. Walther (1997) found that people who communicated through FtF interaction achieved lower intimacy levels than those who communicated through CMC. Hian, Chuan, Trevor, and Detenber (2004) also found that intimacy developed more quickly in CMC than FtF.

Trust

Trust is "the degree of confidence [one] feels when [one] think[s] about a relationship" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). Along with the degree of confidence in individuals' relationships, Berger and Calabrese (1975) explain that people will desire to gain new information about their partners in order to reduce their uncertainty about them.

A central part of an individual's level of trust includes his or her ability to predict his or her partner's behavior (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Because individuals want to predict how their partner will behave, they will utilize uncertainty-reducing strategies (e.g., asking detailed questions) in order to trust their partners. Trust is especially important for online couples before a FtF meeting occurs because both partners need to trust that accurate information (e. g., photos, description of values, career) is presented on the Internet.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication is satisfying "when one's expectations for the interaction are met and fulfilled" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 159). Cahn (1983) explains that when individuals feel understood by their partners, they feel more content in their communication and relationships. Hecht (1978) points out that context can play a key role in communication skills. For example, an individual may successfully communicate with his or her boss, but may struggle to successfully communicate with his or her partner or vice versa. Since context plays a role in how individuals communicate, the medium could play a role as well. If an individual who is typically shy in person decides to date online, he or she may feel far more comfortable communicating with a potential partner online than in a FtF setting.

Physical Attraction

McCroskey and McCain (1974) conceptualized interpersonal attraction as a three-dimensional construct: 1) a social dimension: "She would fit into my family;" 2) a task dimension: "She works on projects very efficiently;" and 3) a physical dimension: "He is very handsome." For the purpose of this study, physical attraction will be the only

dimension examined. Individuals' attraction to one another may increase depending on proximity (Knapp, 1978). If individuals live close to one another or share an office, they are able to learn a great deal about a potential partner through repetitive everyday conversation (Knapp, 1978). Online daters may feel attracted to their partners in different ways than FtF daters due to the lack of physical proximity. FtF daters can literally see, smell, and touch their partners; online daters must rely on the textual information, pictures, and videos provided on the Internet until, and if, they decide to pursue FtF relationships.

Overview of Study

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter provided a brief overview of related research and a rationale for the study. Chapter Two will contain a review of literature related to the variables within the study (e.g., face-to-face relationships, computer-mediated communication relationships, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction). Chapter Three will discuss the methodology for the study. Chapter Four will highlight the results of the study. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the results of the study in further detail, and will address limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will examine the literature and concepts related to romantic relationships that begin FtF or online. Scholarship that explains and defines the hyperpersonal communication model, social penetration theory, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be introduced. Additionally, research that examines these particular variables will be included in order to shape the argument of this study. The inclusion of literature specific to these variables will seek to support the reasoning for uncovering the potential differences in relationships that begin FtF or online. In particular, the research questions and hypotheses will address if individuals who initiate FtF or CMC romantic relationships have different levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Finally, predictors of relationship satisfaction for both types of relationships will be explored.

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model examines how computer-mediated communication (CMC) functions. The model stems from Walther's examination of previous research that explored how the Internet affected communication. Walther's reconceptualization of how the Internet can affect communication aids in examining how relationships can develop online. This summary will discuss the development of the hyperpersonal communication model, dimensions of hyperpersonal communication, situations in which communication functions hyperpersonally, and an evaluation of the hyperpersonal communication model.

Development of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

In Walther's (1996) article, which introduces the hyperpersonal communication model, he presents previous CMC research such as the cues-filtered out model. Culnan and Markus (1987) developed the cues-filtered out model, which states that because nonverbal cues are absent in CMC, communication is impersonal because individuals are not aware of nonverbal cues such as physical appearance and feedback (e.g., head nodding, facial expressions). Early research predicted that when individuals lacked nonverbal cues (such as in CMC), they would be less able to "alter the mood of a message, communicate a sense of individuality, or exercise dominance or charisma" (Kiesler, 1986, p. 48).

Previous research also explained that impersonal communication through CMC could be valuable in some communicative interactions. Dubrovsky (1985) explained that work-related computer conferencing allows individuals to filter "out affective components of communication and emphasiz[e] the content, minimiz[e] social influences (influence of status, interpersonal 'noise,' and so on)" (p. 381). Hence, individuals could focus more on the task at hand without being distracted by nonverbal cues or environmental factors. Also, Steiner (1972) explained that the impersonal nature of CMC could enhance group decision-making. CMC allows groups to filter out negative aspects of interaction such as domination by a member or members of the group, pressures to conform, and self-consciousness among lower level members (Walther, 1996). In dating relationships, the impersonal nature of CMC could also allow individuals to meet partners in a less stressful manner. For example, when individuals first communicate with a potential partner online, especially through text-based messages, they are not concerned with their appearance or

any nervous habits that may exist in similar FtF “first date” conversations (Heino et al., 2005).

Another approach in exploring differences between FtF and online communication is media richness theory, which was developed by Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987). Media richness theory assumes “that media have varying capabilities for resolving ambiguity, meeting interpretation needs, and transmitting data” (Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987, p. 557). Communication media, according to Trevino, Lengel, and Daft, can be classified as “rich” or “lean” based on four factors: 1) the availability of instant feedback, which aids individuals in reaching a mutual understanding; 2) the use of multiple cues to express interpretation and emotions; 3) the use of natural language; and 4) the personal focus of the medium. If media are in line with these factors, they are considered to be “rich.” Conversely, media that do not display these factors are considered “lean.” FtF communication is the richest medium because feedback automatically occurs, multiple cues exist, and natural language is used (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). The leanest media are written documents due to the lack of instant feedback and cues (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). CMC lies in between the leanest and richest of media. However, when CMC allows users to communicate through features such as video chat and synchronous instant messaging, it is considered richer than asynchronous, text-based CMC such as email.

Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) explain that efficient communication will take place when the complexity of a message is matched with the appropriate media richness. If a message is complex, rich media (such as FtF) should be utilized, and if a message is simple, lean media (such as a written letter or memo) can be utilized (Daft, Lengel, &

Trevino, 1987). Sheer (2010) explains that social interaction messages are not simple “because feelings, between-the-lines meanings, non-verbal expressions are all difficult to transmit efficiently via lean media” (p. 225). Therefore, the preferred medium for romantic relationships, according to media richness theory, is FtF interaction. However, Walther (1996) explains that social interactions via CMC, in some cases, can match or even exceed what individuals can accomplish in similar FtF interactions.

Walther (1992) argued that CMC could function more effectively and diversely than previously reported. He pointed out that early studies examined only short periods of time in individuals’ FtF and online communication. Also, as relationships via CMC progress, Walther (1992) explained that the quality of unchanging, impersonal characteristics of CMC could be related only to initial interactions among unacquainted individuals and that these conditions could dissolve as communication continues. Therefore, the cues-filtered out model may be related only to individuals in initial CMC interactions, especially individuals who have no intention of continuing the relationship (Walther, 1996). Walther (1996) explained that prior research only examined “one-time only, time-limited CMC groups;” therefore, these participants “are bound to appear more task oriented than are parallel FtF groups” (p. 11). Walther and Burgoon (1992) examined relationship development in FtF and CMC contexts over time. They found that individuals who interacted via CMC were less social at first, but “were more socially oriented than were FtF groups” at the conclusion of the study (Walther, 1996, p. 11).

After examining previous studies and conducting his own research, Walther (1996) offered a reconceptualization of how the Internet affects communication. First, Walther wanted to “integrate theories and research findings pertaining to impersonal and

interpersonal interactions in CMC, not by dismissing one in favor of the other but rather by specifying some conditions that favor each type of outcome, either of which may be desirable and useful in certain contexts” (p. 4). Second, Walther offered a new perspective by explaining that CMC could function hyperpersonally. Walther claims, “Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become ‘hyperpersonal,’ that is, to exceed FtF interpersonal communication” (p. 5). The Internet allows individuals to communicate interpersonally “in heightened” or specialized ways through CMC (Walther, 1996, p. 5).

Dimensions of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Based on previous research pertaining to online communication, Walther (1996) described three types of communication that could occur as a result of CMC. Walther explains that computer mediation alone does not “make communication either impersonal or hyperpersonal;” (p. 33) CMC allows users to more easily communicate in ways that will maximize each particular interaction (Walther, 1996). Three types of communication are utilized online: impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal communication.

Impersonal communication occurs as a result “of the lack of nonverbal cues and, at times, the reduced interactivity of e-mail and computer conferencing systems” (Walther, 1996, p. 7). Additionally, Walther explains that impersonal communication can occur when individuals’ communicative goals are not interpersonal, when individuals have restricted time frames in which to communicate, and also when individuals do not anticipate future communication.

Individuals can also communicate interpersonally through CMC. The social information processing (SIP) approach developed by Walther (1992) presumed that

individuals who communicate via CMC are wired to develop interpersonal relationships, much like individuals who communicate FtF. Walther (1996) explains that CMC is interpersonal when individuals “have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values” (p. 33). When individuals who interact via CMC feel that they will continue a relationship, “CMC is no less personal than FtF [interaction]” (Walther, 1996, p. 33).

Finally, Walther (1996) describes hyperpersonal communication as “CMC that is more socially desirable than [individuals] tend to experience in parallel FtF interaction” (p. 17). Hyperpersonal communication occurs when individuals “experience commonality and are self-aware, [are] physically separated, and [are] communicating via a limited-cues channel that allows them to selectively self-present and edit” (Walther, 1996, p. 33). CMC allows individuals to create and reciprocate representations of their partners and relationships without the intrusion of environmental reality (Walther, 1996). Hyperpersonal communication is more likely to occur when communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that partners share (Walther, 1996).

Several studies offer findings that are consistent with the hyperpersonal model. Hancock and Dunham (2001) compared FtF and CMC dyads' impression formation. Specifically, the participants rated one another's personality profiles (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). The “impressions formed in the CMC environment were less detailed, but more intense than those formed face-to-face” (Hancock & Dunham, 2001, p. 325). When hyperpersonal communication occurs, individuals' impressions of potential partners can be more exaggerated than similar FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). Oftentimes, individuals

who communicate through CMC have “a tendency to fill in the blanks optimistically when faced with limited information about a person” (Fiore et al., 2008, p. 798). Finally, Antheunis et al. (2009) found that the depth of self-disclosure in individuals who communicated through text-only CMC was higher than individuals who communicated FtF, which supports the hyperpersonal model. The hyperpersonal model suggests that CMC can lead to intimate information exchange; individuals share private information earlier than they would in FtF situations.

Implications of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Individuals can capitalize on the limited-cues afforded by CMC when they interact on the Internet. Walther (1996) explained that previous research illustrated that “CMC [allowed] participants in dyads and groups—even those who have never met before—[to] use cues available to them to manage relational development in normal (or perhaps supernormal) fashion” (p. 13). Baker (1998) surveyed 18 couples who met online and asked them about their relationships. Some of the participants revealed that it was easier to reveal more personal thoughts and feelings online through writing than through FtF interaction (Baker, 1998). When communication functions hyperpersonally, individuals can interact in heightened ways through CMC, and “conversation partners [can] disclose their inner feelings at an earlier stage than in face-to-face communication” (Antheunis et al., 2009, p. 5).

Walther (1996) explains that the main “difference between . . . CMC and FtF communication has not to do with the *amount* of social information exchanged but with the *rate* of social information exchange” (p. 10). Despite the slower rate in CMC, individuals who interact online to form romantic relationships can communicate meaningfully.

Participants in Baker's (1998) study of couples who date online revealed that they thought individuals who met online might get to know one another on a deeper level than those who met in FtF contexts. Heino et al. (2005) point out that "social etiquette might prevent discussion of topics such as personal income or political views on a first date, but online dating participants [have] access to this information before the first email [is] exchanged" (p. 14). Individuals who date online potentially know more about their partners at the beginning of their relationships than those who date FtF even though the rate of exchange can be slower online.

Although developing romantic relationships through CMC works well for some individuals, some research explains that deception can occur on the Internet. Hancock and Toma (2009) found that online daters struggle with pressures to enhance their physical attractiveness in photos, while maintaining their desire to avoid deception in the photos they choose. The researchers found that 1/3 of the photos used by online daters were not accurate, meaning that the photos were inconsistent with the individuals' actual appearance (e.g., retouched by a photographer, younger photos). Individuals who date online want to present themselves in a positive and attractive manner, but deception through photographs and social desirability bias prevents them from creating a profile that is as accurate as their FtF selves (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Evaluating the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

The hyperpersonal communication model is useful in many areas of research. The model has explained communication in various contexts including dyads and groups; and in educational, romantic, and group/leadership settings (Walther, 2007). For example, Walther examined how dyads communicate through CMC in order to understand "the

extent to which users employ the means suggested by the hyperpersonal model in electronic conversations” (p. 2540). Specifically, he “examined how CMC users managed message composing time, editing behaviors, personal language, sentence complexity, and relational tone in their initial messages to different presumed targets, and the cognitive awareness related to these processes” (p. 2538). The results were consistent with the hyperpersonal communication model. The model suggests that individuals spend time carefully drafting and editing messages, which was evidenced in this study; the participants processed their messages more mindfully, which led to more effort in message construction (Walther, 2007). Therefore, individuals who communicate via CMC carefully decide what to include or not to include in their messages.

Antheunis et al. (2009) also examined dyads. They compared dyads in FtF, visual CMC conditions, and text-based CMC conditions. Dyads who communicated via CMC (both visual and text-based) exchanged deeper self-disclosure (more intimate information) than FtF dyads, which is evidence of the hyperpersonal communication model in action (Antheunis et al., 2009). These researchers “conclude[d] that it is depth, and not amount, of self-disclosure that accounts for the increased liking in CMC interactions” (Antheunis et al., 2009). Therefore, hyperpersonal communication was occurring in that the depth of information shared by users generated more liking in both CMC conditions. If individuals communicate private or intimate details about themselves, levels of intimacy can increase (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Previous research has explained that higher levels of intimacy are common when individuals communicate online (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997).

The hyperpersonal communication model poses both positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships online. Individuals could have heightened expectations or “idealized notions” of their partner prior to a FtF date “based on limited cues in the absence of contradicting information” (Heino, et al., 2005, p. 8). These idealized notions of partners can lead to FtF letdowns; Brym and Lenton (2001) found that 38% of participants were disappointed upon meeting their partners FtF. Conversely, the idealized versions of individuals’ partners could strengthen their affinity to the relationships and partners once individuals meet in a FtF setting (Heino, et al., 2005). Hence, hyperpersonal communication in the beginning of online romantic relationships can increase or decrease the satisfaction one feels once a FtF date occurs.

Social Penetration Theory

Development of Social Penetration Theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) developed the social penetration theory based on research interests in the process of creating relationships as well as a history of observing the initiation and deterioration of social bonds. After evaluating previous research, Altman and Taylor created a task list. First, they wanted to produce a wide range of ideas that were connected to the development of interpersonal relationships. Second, they wanted to tackle a common sense phenomenon, meaning they wanted to describe how everyday relationships are formed. Lastly, they wanted to address social penetration issues in a way that could resonate with a wide variety of readers.

Social penetration theory focuses on “what people do, say, think, and feel about one another as they form, nurture, and disengage from interpersonal relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). *Social penetration* refers to 1. actual behaviors that take place

during interaction and 2. internal processes that precede, accompany, and follow social exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Events that occur within interpersonal relationships are collectively referred to as *social penetration processes*, which can “include verbal exchange, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3).

Dimensions of Social Penetration Theory

The social penetration process includes four stages: the orientation stage, the exploratory affective stage, the affective stage, and the stable exchange stage. Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that relationship development does not follow a straight course, but for heuristic reasons, providing a process for interaction is useful. In order to construct the social penetration stages, Altman and Taylor examined literature that explored nonverbal and environmental factors such as “richness, spontaneity, efficiency of exchange, pacing and synchrony, degree of stereotype-uniqueness of behavior, permeability of the self, behavioral equivalency or substitutability, and evaluation” (p. 142).

Stage one, orientation, tends to occur in public areas when individuals first meet at a party, social gathering, first date, or in varieties of other circumstances (Altman & Taylor, 1973). When someone enters the orientation stage, he or she only shares a small part of him or herself on a verbal, nonverbal, and environmental level (Altman & Taylor, 1973). His or her responses are socially desirable and are not extraordinarily unique. Interaction does not break through to the intermediate and private details of individuals' personalities, and basic information such as hometown, education, work, is shared. If very personal information (e.g., intimate details of a recent breakup) is shared, responses to that personal information are likely to be very restricted and people may even openly display

discomfort by exiting the conversation (e.g., "I have to use the restroom") (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor describe the tone of the orientation stage as one of "caution and tentativeness" because individuals only begin to feel comfortable at the end of this stage (p. 138).

Exploratory affective exchange is the second stage of the social penetration process. This stage is comparable to the types of "relationships between casual acquaintances or friendly neighbors" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 138). Hidden aspects of an individual's personality come to life and communication occurs more smoothly (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Individuals in the exploratory affective exchange may interact with the use catch phrases or inside jokes, displaying that they are becoming more comfortable communicating (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Both parties also interpret nonverbal cues (such as a wink) more easily. Typical relationships in this stage are relaxed, friendly, and casual, but commitments are limited and rare (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor noted that many relationships do not progress beyond this stage.

If individuals advance beyond the exploratory affective exchange, they reach the affective exchange stage. Close friendships or dating relationships in which people know each other well characterize this stage (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Both individuals are capable of initiating interaction and they also are willing to make positive or negative evaluations without worrying about threatening the relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Communication is spontaneous, voluntary, and unique to each dyad. Conversations dealing with private information (e.g., past relationships) increases; however, some hesitancy can exist when private information is shared (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In romantic relationships, couples' intimate affection such as verbal statements, touching, and kissing

increases (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The affective exchange stage is similar to a prolonged courtship before two people decide to declare themselves an "official" couple. Altman and Taylor explain that the affective exchange stage is very critical in terms of the decision to continue penetration or not because conversations are starting to uncover very intimate details of individuals' lives.

The final, and fairly rare, stage of the social penetration process is the stable exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In stable exchange, communication is efficient and individuals can predict feelings and behaviors (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Individuals will also show less restrictiveness in terms of facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and touching (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Because these dyads display a high comfort level, "they are more willing to allow each other to use, have access to, or know about very private apparel and belongings" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 141). Additionally, individuals will communicate private thoughts more effortlessly at this point.

Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that several factors can affect the penetration or depenetration (deterioration) of relationships. These factors are focused on three general areas: 1) personal characteristics; (e.g., Individuals' demographic properties, personality characteristics, and social needs characteristics will have an effect on how interpersonal relationships are managed); 2) outcomes of exchange (e.g., Do individuals "like" one another or feel that something can be gained from prospective relationships?); 3) situational context (e.g., Relationships can take place "within an environmental or situational context" and sometimes individuals can voluntarily continue or end a relationship, whereas at other times they may be forced to remain in a relationship) (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 4).

The first feature of an individual's personality includes breadth and depth dimensions (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Breadth includes two aspects: *breadth category* and *breadth frequency* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Breadth category* simply refers to the number of categories or topics (e.g., movies, hobbies, sex, and family) that are shared with another individual in the development of an interpersonal relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Breadth frequency* refers to the depth of discussion within each *breadth category* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). For example, if a person discussed family vacations, family characteristics, family holidays, family dynamics, and family issues within the *breadth category*, family, that person's *breadth frequency* would be considered high because of the variety of topics related to family. Utilizing breadth categories and frequencies is useful because many "social penetration profiles can be developed" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 16). Individuals at one end of the spectrum expose very little about their personalities (*low breadth category*) and do not go into much detail when exposing each category (*low breadth frequency*). On the other end of the spectrum are individuals who expose multiple facets of their personalities (*high breadth category*) and explain each facet in much detail (*high breadth frequency*). Previous research (e.g., Hancock & Dunham, 2001) indicated that impressions participants made through FtF interaction covered more topics (*high breadth category*), but were less intense than those formed through CMC (*high breadth frequency*). Individuals who communicated via CMC were left with more heightened impressions of their partners' personalities compared to those who communicated FtF (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

The second feature of individuals' personalities includes the concentric circles or "layers" of personalities (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 17). Social penetration theory

suggests that individuals' personalities are similar to onions in that there are multiple layers. These layers differ based on *depth dimension* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Depth dimension* suggests that more superficial and obvious items (e.g., biographical information such as sex and age) will exist within the outer (or peripheral) layers of personalities (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As an individual progresses into the central layers of another person's personality, "there are more fundamental core characteristics of personality which relate to and influence peripheral items" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 17). Altman and Taylor suggest that the deeper the characteristic, the more it will influence an individual's entire personality. For example, if individual A has a low level of trust toward others, someone could potentially predict individual A's opinion on peripheral issues such as views on topics like infidelity in a relationship.

Along with individual personality characteristics, *rewards* and *costs* drive the social penetration process. Altman and Taylor (1973) drew from Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) research, which explained rewards and costs. Thibaut and Kelley describe *rewards* as "pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications the person enjoys" (p. 12). *Costs* include those "factors that operate to inhibit or deter a performance of a sequence of behavior" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 13). A *cost* is considered high if a great deal of effort is required, when embarrassment or anxiety could occur, or when conflicting forces of any kind are present (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

After individuals interact for the first time, they categorize the "pros" (*rewards*) and "cons" (*costs*) of the exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Next, these individuals ask, "Were the immediate rewards greater than the costs?" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 36). Finally, individuals construct *forecasts*, meaning that they will question whether or not

they should interact with another person by predicting future rewards and costs.

Individuals also develop “a subjective model of the other person” by creating a mental picture of what the other person is like (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 37).

As individuals develop an interpersonal relationship, the significance of rewards and costs will change with increased penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The size and intensity of these rewards and costs will fluctuate based on peripheral or central layers of personality. Central layers of personality will include both greater costs and rewards in comparison to the peripheral layers. The amplified nature of rewards and costs within central layers of personality could cause individuals to approach the central layers with caution (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor speculate that the majority of people will not probe into the central layers initially and will discuss superficial issues at the beginning of an interpersonal relationship.

Altman and Taylor (1973) contributed to the research that revamped the former situational view of communication. The situational view of communication meant that individuals were communicating interpersonally FtF with immediate feedback and nothing (e.g., phones, computers) mediated their conversations (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Altman and Taylor provided a developmental approach to communication, which focused more on the partners themselves, who they are to one another, how they communicate, and what they communicate to one another (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).

Along with this new approach, Altman and Taylor (1973) explained that there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary relationships. *Voluntary relationships* are relationships that individuals decide to engage in because they *choose* to. On the other hand, *involuntary relationships* are relationships that exist no matter how inclined

individuals feel to continue or end the relationship. For example, a relationship with a parent is considered an involuntary relationship, whereas a relationship with a dating partner is considered a voluntary relationship. Involuntary and voluntary relationships involve different expectations, and Altman and Taylor explained that differentiating between these relationship types is important.

Implications of Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory has been supported in romantic relationship research. When examining online daters, Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) found that perceived online dating success is not predicted by honesty in self-presentation. The authors explain that this particular finding shows support for social penetration theory because individuals tend to withhold negative or very revealing information early on in relationships. Additionally, according to social penetration theory, negative facets of individuals' personalities oftentimes reside in the central layers of personalities and do not emerge until later in a relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Craig, Igiel, Wright, Cunningham, and Ploeger (2007) explain that breadth and depth are important to relationship development. As relationships progress, both breadth and depth continue to increase in a predictable fashion, which is evidence of the social penetration process (Craig et al., 2007). The researchers found that that greater breadth of self-disclosure predicted greater depth of self-disclosure, meaning that the more categories of information shared, the more likely individuals were to share very revealing information from the central layers of their personalities (Craig et al., 2007). Even though self-disclosure may not progress as quickly in CMC as FtF, it plays an important role in online relationships (Craig et al., 2007).

However, Ji and Lieber (2008) found that the order of social penetration processes might be reversed in online dating. They found that “emotions . . . were disclosed more than factual information in [online dating] profiles” and that users tended to open up more quickly than they would through FtF interaction (p. 32). Ji and Lieber found that social penetration theory’s cost-reward framework was useful when examining online interactions. When individuals believe that rewards are high and costs are low, they “approach the core of the personality structure and share feelings, values, and needs” (Ji & Lieber, 2008, p. 33).

Evaluating Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory allows researchers to examine interactions among many types of dyadic relationships. Altman and Taylor (1973) argue that the exchange of information allows dyads to develop intimacy and evaluate the rewards and costs of continuing a particular relationship. The social penetration process occurs in both FtF and CMC contexts as romantic relationships develop; therefore, comparing variables related to social penetration theory, such as intimacy, is advantageous to this study. Social penetration theory helps researchers to explain a “common sense” issue, the initiation of dyadic relationships. Altman and Taylor’s explanation of social penetration processes provides researchers with many issues to consider when examining how romantic relationships develop. For example, the social penetration stages, personality layers, breadth, depth, cost/reward analysis, and involuntary/voluntary relationships are just a few of the concepts included in the social penetration theory; these concepts can assist researchers in examining many dimensions of romantic relationships.

Comparing relationships that begin through FtF interaction or through CMC with the use of social penetration theory allows researchers to uncover if and/or how different these romantic relationships are. For example, is intimacy stronger in CMC relationships because an individual learns a great deal about his or her partner by viewing an online dating or Facebook profile? Or is intimacy stronger in FtF relationships because the physical proximity allows an individual to experience all that his or her partner has to offer from the beginning of the relationship?

Relationship Satisfaction

Whether individuals meet their partners through FtF or online communication, relationship satisfaction is an important factor in relationship length and success (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Relationship satisfaction is “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Research has found that many predictors of relationship satisfaction (e.g., similarity in communication style, intimacy, commitment, trust, etc.) exist. Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s study examined “which predictors of FtF relationship satisfaction hold true for online romantic relationships” (p. 154). They tested similarity, commitment, intimacy, trust, attributional confidence, and communication satisfaction as predictor variables for relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships, and found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction.

A limitation associated with Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s (2006) study included “the lack of a FtF comparison group” (p. 168). The current study will seek to expand upon Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s findings by comparing the dating relationships of individuals who begin dating through FtF interaction or CMC.

Specifically, the three variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction (intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction) in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's research will be examined. This study will also include a new variable, physical attraction, because uncovering if differences in physical attraction exist between FtF and CMC relationships will provide insight into whether or not the medium in which individuals initially communicate relates to levels of physical attraction. Is physical proximity from the beginning of the relationship necessary for physical attraction? Understanding if intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction predict relationship satisfaction will provide further support for variables that predict relationship satisfaction in relationships that begin either FtF or online.

Relationship Satisfaction Among Romantic Partners

Relationship satisfaction "is a strong indicator of relationship length and success" (Anderson and Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Rusbult and Buunk (1993) determined that couples who had high levels of relationship satisfaction also indicated high levels of intimacy and commitment. Many other factors can determine how satisfied couples are in their relationships such as communication skills and conflict management (e.g., Halford et al., 2010). Understanding what factors contribute to relationship satisfaction is important for both those who are involved in romantic relationships as well as professionals who offer practical advice to individuals and couples who are seeking satisfying relationships.

Evaluating Relationship Satisfaction Among Romantic Partners

If individuals are in romantic relationships, they typically want to be satisfied in those relationships. Therefore, identifying the variables that predict relationship satisfaction is useful for couples who want to be satisfied with their relationships that begin

in both FtF and CMC contexts. However, two factors can hinder conducting research related to relationship satisfaction. First, relationship satisfaction is a construct that is often self-reported, which is subject to social desirability bias. Individuals do not always want to admit that they are dissatisfied with their relationships. Second, the amount and variety of variables that have predicted relationship satisfaction is considerably large. Condensing predictors of relationship satisfaction is difficult due to the diversity of relationships. For example, couple A may be satisfied, and have a high level of intimacy in their relationship, whereas couple B may also be just as satisfied, but have a low level of intimacy in their relationship.

Intimacy

This study will examine emotional intimacy, which is “a perception of closeness to another that is conducive to the sharing of personal feelings, accompanied by expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring” (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 194). Emotional intimacy is vital to both the emotional and physical health of individuals in relationships (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Hence, comparing the emotional intimacy of FtF and online relationships in this study is an important variable not only for the relationships, but also for the individuals themselves. Social penetration theory includes intimacy as one of the significant factors that can contribute to the development of satisfying relationships (Taylor & Altman, 1987). In a study that examined both FtF and CMC relationships, Scott, Mottarella, and Lavooy (2006) found that participants experienced a higher level of intimacy in FtF relationships than CMC relationships. However, previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997) has found that intimacy is higher in CMC relationships than

FtF relationships. Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) explained there is a connection between intimacy and trust: "Trust and intimacy are linked closely; as partners grow closer and depth increases, trust develops and as trust increases, so do levels of intimacy" (p. 166).

Trust

Trust is defined as "the degree of confidence [one] feels when [one] think[s] about a relationship" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). Larzelere and Huston (1980) found that trust was "associated with love and with intimacy of self-disclosure" (p. 595). Stinnett and Walters (1977) explain that trust can increase security in relationships and allows individuals to share personal feelings and dreams. On the contrary, individuals who lack trust "are inclined to react negatively to information about their partners that they perceive to be unfavorable" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 158). Hence, trust can heavily affect how one partner perceives the other in both positive and negative ways.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction is the positive emotion an individual feels after a successful and fulfilling communicative interaction (Hecht, 1978). When an individual's expectations for a particular "interaction are met and fulfilled," satisfying communication occurs (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 159). Individuals who initiate relationships through CMC must heavily rely on communication, especially in the beginning of the relationship, because "the online communication *is* the relationship" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166).

Physical Attraction

Dimensions of Attraction

Attraction relates to judgments about whether an individual “likes” someone and whether or not an individual “feels good” in his or her presence (McCroskey & McCain, 1972, p. 1). McCroskey and McCain explain two conclusions that relate to attraction and communication: 1) “The more people are attracted to one another, the more they will communicate with each other” and 2) “The more we are attracted to another person, the more influence that person has on us in interpersonal communication” (p. 1). Drawing from previous research related to attraction, McCroskey and McCain developed a three-dimensional construct of attraction: 1) social or liking dimension, 2) a task or respect dimension, and 3) a physical or appearance dimension.

The current study examined only the physical dimension of attraction. Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) examined physical attractiveness and found that both men and women predicted physically attractive people to be more likely than physically unattractive people to have positive characteristics including kindness, sociability, and sexual warmth. Additionally, the participants thought that physically attractive people would be more interesting to date (Dion et al., 1972). Reis, Nezlek, and Wheeler (1980) found that attractive people spend more time socializing than unattractive people. Therefore, physical attraction can play a vital role in how couples in romantic relationships communicate.

Attraction Among Romantic Partners

Examining physical attraction among individuals who initiate relationships through FtF interaction and CMC is important in exploring two types of romantic relationships.

Fiore and Donath (2004) explain that proximity and familiarity are powerful in determining attraction. Online dating provides individuals with effective tools to identify people who are not only close to them, but also who share similar interests (Fiore & Donath, 2004). However, dating on the Internet does not allow for all of the components of FtF attraction (e.g., specific smell of a partner) to enter a CMC dating relationship. Some of the participants in a study by Heino, et al. (2005) explained that dating online can be characterized by the “loss of excitement or ‘magic’ of just meeting someone FtF” (p. 19). Online daters much wait until their first FtF meeting with partners to gauge the “chemistry” in their relationships. FtF daters can experience this feeling, if it’s there, from the beginning of a relationship (Heino, et al., 2005).

However, Antheunis et al. (2009) explain that reduced nonverbal cues and the ability to be visually anonymous online can enhance interpersonal attraction. Therefore, individuals who communicate via CMC might not worry as much about how other people perceive them, and will disclose private information more freely than in a similar FtF interaction (Walther, 1996). Previous studies have also noted that the increase in self-disclosure can stimulate attraction (e.g., Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Walther 1996; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001).

Evaluating Attraction Among Romantic Partners

Individuals who initiate relationships through FtF interaction or CMC may experience physical attraction in different ways. If couples date online and begin to communicate hyperpersonally, their expectations could be very high before the first FtF interactions occur (Walther, 1996). Occasionally, individuals’ heightened expectations online can lead to disappointment in new FtF encounters (Walther, 1996; Brym & Lenton,

2001). On the other hand, FtF couples are not surprised or disappointed about their levels of physical attraction in that they have experienced their partners in a FtF situation from the beginning of the relationship. Comparing the levels of physical attraction between FtF and CMC couples is warranted in order to understand whether or not the media can play a role in the levels of physical attraction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to uncover potential differences that exist between individuals who begin their relationships FtF or online. Anderson and Emmers-Sommers' (2006) research, which examined CMC relationships, included variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction in FtF relationships. This study will examine the same variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's study (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction), along with a new variable, physical attraction. Including individuals who began their relationships through both FtF and CMC will allow this study to compare the two media that people use to initiate romantic relationships. Specifically, the study first examines potential differences that exist between levels of intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction between individuals who initiate relationships FtF or online.

Previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Hian et al., 2004; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997) has found that individuals who communicate through CMC adapt to the lack of nonverbal cues and report higher levels of intimacy than individuals who communicate through FtF interaction. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Individuals who met their partners online via CMC will report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners FtF.

The hyperpersonal model could account for high levels of trust in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's (2006) study. Individuals, who meet through CMC, when communicating hyperpersonally, create heightened impressions of their partners (Walther, 1996). Oftentimes, individuals who initiate relationships online will fill in the blanks with positive ideas of what their partners will be like in FtF settings (Fiore et al., 2008). However, when initiating relationships online, individuals still remain cautious when evaluating potential romantic partners' profile information (Ellison, et al., 2006; Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Due to inconsistent ideas about trust online, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Is there a difference in trust levels between individuals who met their partners through FtF interaction or CMC?

When individuals meet their romantic partners online, as Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) mentioned, CMC *is* the relationship, especially before individuals choose to meet in a FtF setting. Because of the heavy reliance on communication at the beginning of CMC relationships, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Individuals who met their partners online via CMC will report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF.

Craig et al. (2007) found that social attraction was high in individuals who communicated via CMC; however, physical attraction was not examined in the study. Previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007) has examined interpersonal attraction in CMC, but these studies

have not focused on physical attraction levels reported by individuals in romantic relationships. Hence, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: Is there a difference in physical attraction levels between individuals who met their partners through FtF interaction or CMC?

Relationship satisfaction “is a strong indicator of relationship length and success in traditional FtF intimate relationships” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155).

Therefore, relationship satisfaction is of interest to individuals who desire lasting and satisfying relationships, no matter which context in which the relationship begins.

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer explored relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships, but did not include a FtF comparison group. Understanding if initiating relationships in person or online can lead to higher levels of relationship satisfaction is warranted. Hence:

RQ3: Is there a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online?

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships. However, as mentioned previously, their study did not include a FtF comparison group. Therefore, the present study examines relationship satisfaction and whether or not intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction are predictors of relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF:

RQ4: To what extent do intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction predict relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that began FtF?

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s (2006) study found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction predicted relationship satisfaction in CMC romantic

relationships. Therefore, this study predicts that these variables and physical attraction will relate to relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that begin via CMC. Physical attraction is added to the three predictor variables in confidence that it could help to explain more of the variance related to relationship satisfaction in CMC romantic relationships:

H3: Intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will predict relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that began online.

Conclusion

This review of literature examined the scholarship related to FtF and CMC romantic relationships. The hyperpersonal communication model, social penetration theory, relationship satisfaction, and physical attraction were defined and explained in detail. Additionally, current and previous research related to these variables aided in guiding the argument for this study. Finally, the proposed research questions and hypotheses address the exploration of relationship satisfaction and physical attraction in individuals who initiate relationships in person or online through CMC.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

This chapter outlines the methodology for the current study. A description of the participants, procedures, and measures is presented. This study's data was collected in one phase; this chapter explains all of the details related to the method.

Participants

The target population included individuals currently involved in romantic relationships that began in person (FtF) or online (CMC). Two hundred seventy-six participants completed an online survey. One hundred ninety-six (71%) participants reported that they initiated their relationships in person, and 80 (29%) participants reported that they initiated their relationships online. The sample included 124 (44.9%) men and 152 (55.1%) women, with ages ranging from 18 to 83 ($M = 37.84$, $SD = 13.12$). Two hundred thirty-six (86.4%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and 37 (13.6%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the same sex. Three participants neglected to indicate the type of relationship in which they were involved. Participants were asked about the exclusivity of their relationships. Two hundred seven (75%) participants indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 47 (17%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and 22 (8%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Sixty-six (23.9%) of participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, 17 (6.2%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, 10 (3.6%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, six (2.2%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, 12 (4.3%) participants were in their relationships

for nine to ten months, and 165 (59.8%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

The FtF sample consisted of 82 (41.8%) men and 114 (58.2%) women, with ages ranging from 18 to 81 ($M = 37.43$, $SD = 12.79$). One hundred seventy-two (87.8%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, 21 (10.7%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the same sex, and three (1.5%) participants neglected to indicate whether they were in a same or opposite sex relationship. Fifty-eight (29.6%) of these individuals met their partners through a friend, 56 (28.6%) met their partners in a public place, 48 (24.5%) met their partners at work, 16 (8.2%) met their partners at school, and 18 (9.1%) met their partners through other circumstances (e.g., church). One hundred fifty (76.5%) indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 33 (16.8%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and 13 (6.6%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Forty-two (21.4%) participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, nine (4.6%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, five (2.6%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, three (1.5%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, 10 (5.1%) participants were in their relationships for nine to ten months, and 125 (63.8%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

The CMC sample consisted of 42 (52.5%) men and 38 (47.5%) women, with ages ranging from 19 to 83 ($M = 38.85$, $SD = 13.94$). Sixty-four (80%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and 16 (20%) participants were in a

relationship with someone of the same sex. Forty-three (53.75%) of these individuals met their partners on an online dating website, 21 (26.25%) met their partners on a social networking website, 11 (13.75%) met their partners in a chat room, and five (6.25%) met their partners on another type of website (e.g., personal blog). Fifty-seven (71.25%) participants indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 14 (17.5%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and nine (11.25%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Seventy-one (88.75%) of the CMC participants had met their partners in a FtF setting, whereas nine (11.25%) participants had not met their partners in a FtF setting. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Twenty-four (30%) participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, eight (10%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, five (6.25%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, three (3.75%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, two (2.5%) participants were in their relationships for nine to 10 months, and 38 (47.5%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

Procedures

Participants for this study were recruited through the use of Zoomerang.com, an online data collection service. Zoomerang.com retains a panel of more than two million people who answer questions related to demographics, lifestyle, and occupational attitudes (Market Tools, 2010). This service allowed the researcher to generate a purposive sample for this study based on “pre-screen” questions such as, “Are you currently in a dating relationship?” and “How did you initially meet the person you’re dating?” If individuals met the initial criteria for the study (in a romantic relationship that began in person or

online), they continued to complete the survey, whereas those who did not meet the study's criteria were screened out.

Individuals who met their partners FtF or online completed a 35-item online survey and answered questions or responded to statements that pertained to relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Upon completing the survey, participants earned 75 "Zoompoints" as compensation for their time. Zoompoints are accumulated by the panelists and can be redeemed for various prizes on the Zoomerang.com website.

Measures

Relationship Satisfaction

In order to measure relationship satisfaction, Busby, Crane, Larson, and Christensen's (1995) Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) was utilized. The RDAS is a revised version of the previous Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), which was originally developed by Spanier (1976). Busby et al. (1995) explain that the RDAS displays good content, criterion-related, and construct validity. In previous research, the RDAS Cronbach's alpha scores of each subscale have been at least .80. The full RDAS Cronbach's alpha score have ranged from .69 to .90 (e.g., Erwin, 2008; Busby et al., 1995). Questions in this measure include three subscales: consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. The satisfaction subscale was the only subscale used in this study.

The consensus subscale includes items related to agreement on affection, major decisions, and sex relations (Busby et al., 1995). If individuals (both FtF and online) were in newer relationships or if online daters have not met their partners FtF, they may not have discussed some of the items related to consensus, meaning they may not know if they

agree with their partners on these issues. The cohesion subscale includes items related to engaging in outside activities and working on projects with partners (Busby et al., 1995). As previously mentioned, if online daters have not met their partners FtF, they would not have any relevant experiences related to these scale items.

In the satisfaction subscale, responses range from “extremely dissatisfied” (1) to “extremely satisfied” (7). The RDAS (satisfaction subscale) contains four questions, which were included in the online survey in order to measure participants’ relationship satisfaction; this scale specifically measures issues related to conflict and stability of relationships (Busby et al., 1995). For example, “How often do you and the person you’re dating ‘get on each other’s nerves?’” (Busby et al., 1995, p. 307). The RDAS (satisfaction subscale) yielded a Cronbach’s alpha = .89. In the FtF sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was .89 and the CMC sample’s alpha was .88.

Intimacy

Sinclair and Dowdy (2005) explain emotional intimacy in their development of the Emotional Intimacy Scale (EIS) as a “perception of closeness to another that allows sharing of personal feelings, accompanied by expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring” (p. 193). Previous research has yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 (e.g., Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Sinclair and Dowdy found support for construct and criterion-related validity when developing this scale. Additionally, the EIS is distinguishable from other intimacy scales based on its brevity and its “focus on perceived emotional intimacy in one close relationship” (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 195). The EIS includes five items, which are measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale. Responses for the statements range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Example survey

items include, "This person completely accepts me as I am" and "This person cares deeply for me" (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 196). Cronbach's alpha for the EIS = .92. Cronbach's alpha was .91 for the FtF sample, and .93 for the CMC sample.

Trust

To measure the level of trust individuals felt toward their partners, the current study applied Rempel and Holmes' (1986) Trust Scale, which is designed for both dating and married relationships. The Trust Scale includes three dimensions of trust: predictability, dependability, and faith. This study applied the dependability dimension of trust, which asked the participants to reflect on whether or not their partners could be relied upon.

The predictability dimension of trust was not utilized because dating partners may not have established any sort of routine or understanding of how their significant other would behave in certain situations: "I know how my partner is going to act" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). The faith dimension of trust was not utilized because many of the items include statements related to the future of the relationship; the faith dimension seems more appropriate to use if a study examines relationships that are quite established: "Though times may change and the future is uncertain, I have faith that my partner will always be ready and willing to offer me strength, come what may" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 31).

The dependability subscale focuses on the qualities of the partner which measure confidence in the face of risk and potential hurt (Rempel & Holmes, 1986); relationships, no matter how serious, involve some level of risk in that each partner is always "taking a chance" on a relationship. Research has reported a Cronbach's alpha score of .72 for the dependability subscale (e.g., Rempel & Holmes, 1986). The dependability dimension of

the Trust Scale includes statements such as, "I have found that the person I'm dating is a thoroughly dependable person, especially when it comes to things that are important" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 32). Questions in the six-item dependability dimension of the Trust Scale asked participants to rate on a seven-point, Likert-type scale how dependable their partners were. The Trust Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .83 for the entire sample, $\alpha = .83$ for the FtF sample, and $\alpha = .81$ for the CMC sample.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction was measured using an abridged version of Hecht's (1978) communication satisfaction scale (e.g., Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; VanLear, 1988, 1991). Previous research has yielded Cronbach's alphas ranging from .93 to .96 with the shortened version of the scale (e.g., VanLear, 1988, 1991; Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). The eight item, seven-point, Likert-type scale measures individuals' feelings about communicative interactions (e.g., "The person I'm dating expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say"). The abridged communication satisfaction scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .96 for the full, FtF, and CMC sample.

Physical Attraction

To operationalize physical attraction, McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond's (2006) updated measurement of interpersonal attraction was utilized. The instrument can measure three dimensions of attraction: task, social, and physical. (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). For the purpose of this study, only physical attraction was measured. Because this study's focus was on romantic relationships, the author wanted to focus on variables that were most relevant to individuals who were in dating relationships. The task dimension of this measure includes items such as, "I could rely on her/him to get the job done"

(McCroskey et al., 2006, p. 20); individuals in dating relationships might not have established task-related expectations for their partners. The social dimension of this measure includes items such as, "He/she is sociable with me" (McCroskey et al., 2006, p. 20). McCroskey and McCain (1974) explain that social attraction is related to the extent to which individuals are perceived as members of the participants' social network. This study focused on variables that dealt specifically with explaining how one romantic partner evaluated his or her partner and their relationship. Antheunis et al. (2009) explained that reduced nonverbal cues and the ability to be visually anonymous online can enhance interpersonal attraction, so this study sought to find out whether or not physical attraction levels differed between FtF and online participants. Previous research (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong 2008; Walther, 1997) has yielded Cronbach's alphas ranging from .86 to .95 for the physical dimension of attraction. The 12-item physical attraction component of the measure includes statements such as "I find him/her very attractive physically" and responses range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7) on a seven-point, Likert-type scale (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006, p. 21). The scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .95. The Cronbach's alpha for the FtF sample was .95 and .93 for the CMC sample.

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences, if any, between individuals who initiated romantic relationships through FtF interaction or CMC. First, one-way ANOVAs were run to analyze differences in intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction, and relationship satisfaction of individuals who began their relationships through FtF or CMC. In order to understand whether or not intimacy,

trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction relate to relationship satisfaction in FtF and CMC romantic relationships, linear regression analyses were performed. Finally, the study utilized one-way ANOVAs (post-hoc tests) in order to test for potential effects of sample characteristics (e.g., sex, exclusivity of relationships, etc.) on the relational variables.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodology used in order to conduct a study of relationship satisfaction and physical attraction in individuals who begin dating FtF or online through CMC. A full description of the participants, procedures, measures, and analysis for this study was provided. The next chapter will report the results of this study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the study. This goal of the study was to uncover potential differences between individuals who initiated relationships in person or online. Also, this study sought to find predictor variables of relationship satisfaction in both types of relationships.

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.20$) would report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.73, SD = 1.18$). To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The data were not consistent with this hypothesis [$F(1, 272) = .016, p = .899$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$].

The first research question asked if there was a difference in the levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.32$) or online ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.24$). The research question was tested by performing a one-way ANOVA, and no significant difference was found in the levels of trust [$F(1, 272) = .558, p = .46$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$].

The second hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.10$) would report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.11$). To test this hypothesis a one-way ANOVA was performed; the data were not consistent with this hypothesis [$F(1, 272) = .217, p = .64$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$].

The second research question asked if a difference in physical attraction levels existed between individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.91, SD = 1.14$) or through CMC ($M = 5.87, SD = 1.07$). To test this research question, the researcher conducted a

one-way ANOVA. Results indicated that there was no significant difference in the levels of attraction [$F(1, 271) = .065, p = .799, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000$].

Research question three asked if there was a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online. A one-way ANOVA was conducted, and results indicated no significant difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF ($M = 1.43, SD = 1.04$) and online ($M = 1.33, SD = 1.08$), [$F(1, 272) = .459, p = .498, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$].

The fourth research question asked what variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction) predicted relationship satisfaction for individuals in relationships that began FtF. In order to test this research question, a linear regression was performed. Results indicated that the predictor variables accounted for 38% of the variance in FtF relationship satisfaction, $R^2 = .38, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .37, [F(4, 189) = 29.19, p < .001]$. Results of the regression model indicated that two predictor variables, trust and communication satisfaction, were significant at an alpha of less than .001. Standardized beta coefficients, t -values, and partial correlations for the regression model are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Linear Regression of Predictor Variables of Relationship Satisfaction in Individuals who Begin Dating in Person

| Variable | β | t value | Sig. | Partial r | B |
|----------|---------|-----------|------|-------------|-------|
| Intimacy | -.152 | -1.635 | .104 | -.118 | -.134 |
| Trust* | .340 | 4.394 | .000 | .304 | .270 |
| ComSat* | .429 | 4.982 | .000 | .341 | .404 |
| PhysAtt | .099 | 1.475 | .142 | .107 | .091 |

Note: * Statistically significant at $p < .001$.

The third hypothesis predicted that intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction would predict relationship satisfaction in relationships that began via CMC. A linear regression was performed in order to find predictor variables of relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that the predictor variables accounted for 51% of the variance in CMC relationship satisfaction, $R^2 = .51$, adjusted $R^2 = .48$, [$F(4, 74) = 19.16, p < .001$]. Results of the regression model indicated that two predictor variables, communication satisfaction and physical attraction, were significant at an alpha of less than .01. Standardized beta coefficients, t -values, and partial correlations for the regression model are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Linear Regression of Predictor Variables of Relationship Satisfaction in Individuals who Begin Dating Online

| Variable | β | t value | Sig. | Partial r | B |
|-----------|---------|-----------|------|-------------|-------|
| Intimacy | -.145 | -1.066 | .290 | -.123 | -.130 |
| Trust | .200 | 1.927 | .058 | .219 | .174 |
| ComSat** | .474 | 3.524 | .001 | .379 | .465 |
| PhysAtt** | .319 | 3.251 | .002 | .354 | .322 |

Note: ** Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

After testing the research questions and hypotheses, post-hoc tests (one-way ANOVAs) were performed to test for effects of the sample characteristics on the relational variables of interest. Sample characteristics that were tested include: sex, exclusivity of relationships, same/opposite sex relationships, whether or not individuals who met online had met in a FtF setting, and the length of dating relationships. Several significant differences were found.

Individuals' sex played a role in how physically attracted they were to their dating partners [$F(1, 269) = 6.92, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .025$]. Specific to relationships that began FtF, females ($M = 6.10, SD = .982$) were significantly more attracted to their partners than males were ($M = 5.66, SD = 1.28$), [$F(1, 192) = 7.28, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .037$]. In terms of online daters, males ($M = 6.03, SD = 1.04$), were more attracted to their partners than females ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.08$) were, but the difference was not significant ($p = .161$).

Exclusivity was another sample characteristic that was tested. First, the relationship between intimacy and exclusivity of relationships was examined [$F(2, 271) = 13.60, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .091$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began through both FtF and CMC had a significantly higher level of intimacy ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.14$) than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.05$). More specifically, individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began FtF reported a significantly higher level of intimacy ($M = 5.96, SD = 1.12$) than individuals who were in relationships that were non-exclusive ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.29$) or undefined ($M = 4.90, SD = .964$), [$F(2, 192) = 14.67, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .133$].

Additionally, the exclusivity of relationships affected the level of trust in relationships that began FtF [$F(2, 192) = 11.45, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .107$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships had significantly higher levels of trust ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.29$) than individuals who were relationships that were non-exclusive ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.46$) or undefined ($M = 4.53, SD = .965$).

The exclusivity of relationships also affected the levels of physical attraction in FtF relationships [$F(2, 191) = 4.25, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .043$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships were more physically attracted ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.05$) to their

partners than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.34$). Exclusivity related to more variables of interest (intimacy, trust, and physical attraction) than other sample characteristics in this study.

Levels of intimacy varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met online had met in a FtF setting [$F(1, 77) = 5.40$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .066$]. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting ($M = 6.6$, $SD = .40$) reported significantly higher levels of intimacy than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* met them in a FtF setting ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.23$).

Additionally, levels of communication satisfaction varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met online had met in a FtF setting [$F(1, 77) = 4.53$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .056$]. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting ($M = 6.53$, $SD = .52$) reported significantly higher levels of communication satisfaction than individuals who initially met their partners online and had met them in a FtF setting ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.12$).

Same sex and opposite sex relationships were also tested. Specific to relationships that began online, individuals who were in same sex relationships reported nearly significant higher levels of trust ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.07$) than individuals who were in opposite sex relationships ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.26$), [$F(1, 77) = 3.42$, $p = .068$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$].

The length of relationships was the final sample characteristic that was tested with the variables of interest. The length (specifically the number of months) of individuals' relationships that began both in person and online interacted with the levels of intimacy that were reported [$F(5, 268) = 3.38$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$]. Individuals who met

their partners in person and who dated them for a longer period of time (11 months or longer) ($M = 5.87, SD = 1.14$) reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who dated their partners for two months or less ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.27$), [$F(5, 189) = 2.23, p = .053, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .056$]. Individuals who met their partners online and who dated them for a longer period of time (11 months or longer) ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.10$) reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who dated their partners between three and four months ($M = 4.99, SD = 1.02$), [$F(5, 73) = 2.35, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .139$].

The length of relationships also affected levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person [$F(5, 268) = 3.10, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .055$]. Trust levels reported by individuals who met their partners FtF and who had been dating them for two months or less ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.19$) were lower than the trust levels reported by individuals who had been dating their partners for 11 months or more ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.35$), [$F(5, 189) = 2.47, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .061$].

Conclusion

This chapter explained the results of the study. The variables in the study were analyzed and relationships were reported. The final chapter will discuss the implications of the results that were presented in this chapter. Additionally, the chapter will address limitations of the study and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to uncover potential differences between individuals who began romantic relationships FtF or online. Specifically, the study examined relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. The following section explains implications of the results, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research in the area of FtF and CMC romantic relationships.

Effects of Meeting FtF or via CMC on Relational Variables

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online would report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners in person, but the data were not consistent with this assumption. As mentioned previously, individuals who met their partners online and had *not* met their partners in person reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who met their partners online and had met them FtF. Once individuals who meet their partners online do meet them in person, the levels of intimacy are relatively the same as individuals who meet their partners FtF. The effects of hyperpersonal communication appear to wear off once individuals who initially met online do meet in person. The fact that there is no difference in intimacy levels between individuals who met FtF or online suggests that the higher levels of intimacy are more prevalent when individuals are communicating strictly through CMC, which is consistent with Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model.

The first research question explored whether or not there was a difference in the levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person or online and no significant difference was found. In this study, the majority of individuals who initially met their

partners online *had* met their partners in a FtF setting. As previously mentioned, the effects of hyperpersonal communication (e.g., heightened impressions of partners) could wear off once a FtF meeting takes place, especially because most individuals believe that someone's online profile is not a total accurate portrayal of his or her offline identity (Gibbs et al., 2006). Research has found that high levels of trust could be facilitated by CMC (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Hardey, 2004). Therefore, once CMC is less essential in online relationships that have moved to FtF relationships, levels of trust could be more comparable to individuals who initially met FtF.

The second hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC would report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF; the data were not consistent with this proposition. Communication satisfaction was higher in individuals who began their relationships via CMC and who had *not* met their partners in person than individuals who began their relationships via CMC and who *had* met their partners in person. The hyperpersonal communication model could account for this difference. In CMC, both partners are practicing selective self-presentation, which means that both parties are carefully editing their messages to maximize their potential as dating partners; therefore, hyperpersonal communication can lead to heightened views of partners and the communication they share (Walther, 1996). Communication is important to both FtF and CMC relationships; however, there might only be differences in communication satisfaction when researchers compare *strictly* CMC relationships (in which partners are potentially communicating hyperpersonally) and FtF relationships.

Research question two explored whether or not there was a difference in physical attraction levels existed between individuals who met their partners FtF or via CMC. The levels of physical attraction did not vary based on how individuals met. Physical attractiveness is oftentimes one of the most important qualities to individuals when they decide whom they would like to date (e.g., Woll, 1986; Woll & Cozby, 1987). Hence, individuals in both FtF and CMC contexts most likely decide to pursue partners whom they find attractive from the beginning of the relationship.

The third research question explored whether or not there was a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online and no significant difference was found. This finding, or lack thereof, could be encouraging for individuals who are skeptical, but curious about online dating. According to the results of this study, there is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction levels in individuals who met in person or online.

Research question four tested for variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction) that related to relationship satisfaction reported by individuals who initially met their partners FtF. Results indicated that two predictor variables, trust and communication satisfaction, related to relationship satisfaction. Hecht (1978) explains, "Communication is satisfying to the degree to which it removes uncertainty" (p. 52). This explanation relates to trust. A vital part of trust is a partner's behavioral and relationship predictability; therefore, a person in a romantic relationship will utilize uncertainty-reducing tactics in order to understand more about a partner (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Hence, communication is used in order to reduce uncertainty, which can lead to deeper trust in a relationship. If the communication

successfully reduces the uncertainty, it will be more satisfying and trust will be enhanced since partners are more familiar and secure with relationship behaviors.

Finally, the third hypothesis predicted that intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction would relate to relationship satisfaction for individuals in relationships that began via CMC. Physical attraction and communication satisfaction related to relationship satisfaction. Previous research has found a link between communication satisfaction and physical attraction. Duran and Kelly (1988) explained that perceptions of physical attractiveness “can be somewhat influenced by a competent social performance” (p. 48). If individuals believe that their partners are communicating effectively, their perceptions of their partners’ physical attractiveness could increase. As mentioned previously, Brym and Lenton (2001) explained that 38% of participants who initially met their partners via CMC were disappointed by their FtF meetings. If individuals are pleasantly surprised by their partners’ physical attractiveness when they meet FtF, this could increase their physical attraction and relate to their relationship satisfaction.

Relationships that begin through CMC require steady communication by both individuals involved. If communication ceases, the relationship will inevitably come to an end (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), so engaging in communication that is satisfying is important for the continuation and progression of a CMC relationship. Of additional importance is the finding that communication satisfaction related to relationship satisfaction in relationships that began through FtF interaction as well. This finding supports one of Walther’s (1996) claims: a medium is not inherently impersonal, interpersonal, or hypersonal; it depends on how individuals use that particular medium.

Communication is vital in initiating, maintaining, and developing relationships (Duck & Pittman, 1994) both in person and online. Hence, research that identifies successful communication practices and strategies in romantic relationships, no matter the context, can help in producing satisfying relationships.

Post-hoc tests indicated that the sample characteristics proved to have effects on some of the relational variables included in this study. This study's goal was to uncover potential differences between initiating relationships FtF or online; therefore, testing to examine if the sample characteristics (e.g., sex, exclusivity, etc.) affected the relational variables was also useful in understanding more about these relationships. In the following section, the sample characteristics and their relationships with the variables will be discussed. Theoretical explanations and implications will also be included.

Females who began romantic relationships FtF were more physically attracted to their partners than males who began romantic relationships FtF. Although the findings were not statistically significant, the opposite was true for online daters. Males who began romantic relationships online were more physically attracted to their partners than females who began romantic relationships online. Men and women are inclined to be attracted to different qualities in romantic partners (Heino et al., 2005); men tend to look for partners who are younger and who are physically attractive, whereas women tend to look for partners who are financially stable and who have high social status (e.g., well-educated, successful career) (Lance, 1998; Woll & Cozby, 1987). Hence, perhaps the ability for men to filter through potential partners to instantly find out the age and physical attractiveness (according to pictures) is a useful tool when searching for partners to whom they will be physically attracted. Conversely, if females are looking for financial support and social

status, they might not trust what men post online and desire to experience their potential partners in FtF situations from the beginning of their relationships. Additionally, some women are intimidated by well-written profiles on online dating sites. If a man is educated and has an impressive profile, a potential partner might be “blown away” and decide not to respond (Heino et al., 2005, p. 14).

Other sex differences could account for this difference as well. Givertz and Segrin (2005) found that men’s desire to interact with partners was related to perceptions of power, and women’s desire to interact with partners was related to perceptions of quality relationships. Given these findings, perhaps men appreciate the ability to initiate relationships online and choose whether or not to contact or respond to potential partners based on the qualities that are important to them. On the other hand, perhaps women appreciate the ability to initiate relationships in person based on the fact that “chemistry” is a feeling that is stronger FtF than online (Heino et al., 2005). Finally, Cross and Madson (1997) found that males are more oriented toward independence, and females are more oriented toward interdependence. If males want independence, they could appreciate the opportunity to initiate a relationship online in that they can spend as much or as little time as they want responding to messages or searching for potential partners. Conversely, if females feel the need for interdependence, they could want to find partners who are close in proximity so that they can establish emotional, mental, and physical bonds from the beginning of relationships.

Both men and women initiate relationships in person and online. Strictly explaining that men should date online and women should date in person because they would find their partners more physically attractive would not allow for heterosexual relationships to

form. Therefore, future research should examine sex along with other variables (e.g., attachment styles) in order to uncover other factors that influence men and women to date in person or online. Also, how exactly does FtF interaction or CMC relate to perceived physical attraction? Other forms of attraction (e.g., social, task) should be examined further in comparative FtF and online romantic relationship research. Perhaps one of these other forms of attraction plays a larger role in individuals' levels of attraction.

Individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began through both FtF and CMC reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined. More specifically, individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began FtF reported a significantly higher level of intimacy than individuals who were in relationships that were non-exclusive or undefined. Anderson (2009) found that individuals described the exclusivity discussion or "the talk" as stressful and/or unexpected. Once the tension from finishing the exclusivity conversation is relieved, individuals might feel more comfortable sharing intimate details with someone who they know will be in their lives for an extended period of time, which is consistent with social penetration theory. When individuals begin a relationship, they probably will not discuss the state of the relationship in the first week of dating; they will discuss this issue as the relationship progresses and when/if they decide to be committed to one another.

Individuals in relationships that are non-exclusive have the option to engage in romantic connections with other people. Therefore, they might not feel the need to share or listen to intimate disclosures with their partners. Finally, individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity is undefined could be in new relationships in which

neither party has brought to up the uncomfortable topic of engaging in an exclusive relationship. In this situation, individuals potentially have not engaged in the uncertainty reducing strategy (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) of defining the states of their relationships. On the other hand, some of the individuals in undefined relationships may not have intentions of defining their relationships. The fact that the relationships are neither exclusive nor non-exclusive could leave one or both of the partners in relationship "limbo" in which he or she/they is/are not comfortable sharing intimate information if the relationship does not have a direction. Future research could examine the effects of exclusivity on romantic relationships as well as how individuals decide whether their relationships should be exclusive, non-exclusive, or undefined.

Additionally, the exclusivity of relationships affected the level of trust in FtF relationships. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships had significantly higher levels of trust than individuals who were relationships that were non-exclusive or undefined. Trust is closely connected with intimacy; "as partners grow closer and depth increases, trust develops and as trust increases, so do levels of intimacy" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2005, p. 166). Hence, the fact that individuals in FtF exclusive relationships had higher levels of both trust and intimacy than individuals in FtF undefined and non-exclusive relationships makes sense. Individuals who are in exclusive relationships have discussed their relationships and know that their partners will be involved in their lives for some period of time, whereas individuals in non-exclusive or undefined relationships are less certain about the state of their relationships. Trust could develop in exclusive relationships because individuals have grown closer and they have discussed the state of their relationships, which is an intimate topic. Once exclusivity is

established, individuals could feel that they can truly trust their partners, and that they can share private, intimate information with them, thus increasing levels of intimacy.

A relationship also exists between exclusivity and physical attraction in FtF relationships. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships were more physically attracted to their partners than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined. Individuals in exclusive relationships could have reported higher levels of physical attraction because they feel that an important factor involved with “being exclusive” is finding their partners physically attractive. Additionally, the level of physical attractiveness of individuals’ partners could have played into why they decided to declare their relationships exclusive in the first place.

Exclusivity related to more of the relational variables than any of the other sample characteristics. When reflecting upon the exclusivity of romantic relationships, it is also important to consider new relationship forms that are present today such as friends with benefits, “cougars” seeking younger men, sleepover relationships, and so on. These types of relationships could change individuals’ views on what the ideal relationship encompasses and how exclusive relationships need to be. This study did not ask specific questions related to the exclusivity of participants’ relationships; however, future research should examine the relationship between exclusivity and how/why individuals choose to define their romantic relationships as exclusive, non-exclusive, or undefined. Additionally, understanding that individuals will interpret exclusivity in different ways depending on their previous or current relationships is an important factor to consider.

Levels of intimacy varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met their partners online had met in a FtF setting. Individuals who had *not* yet met their

partners in a FtF setting reported significantly higher levels of intimacy than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* since met them in a FtF setting. This finding is consistent with the hyperpersonal communication model in that CMC can lead to higher levels of intimacy than similar FtF interactions (Walther, 1996); individuals who communicate strictly via CMC have been found to report higher levels of intimacy than individuals who communicate FtF in previous research as well (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). When individuals communicate strictly online with their romantic partners, they have “a tendency to fill in the blanks optimistically when faced with limited information about a person” (Fiore et al., 2008, p. 798). Hence, when individuals communicate strictly online with their dating partners, they may report a higher level of intimacy because they have heightened impressions of these partners due to communication functioning hyperpersonally. Also, when individuals communicate online, they oftentimes feel more comfortable sharing private details that could be more difficult to share in FtF interactions, which could lead to higher levels of intimacy (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

Communication satisfaction also varied according to whether or not individuals who met online had met in person. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting reported higher levels of communication satisfaction than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* met them in a FtF setting. In strictly CMC romantic relationships, “the online communication *is* the relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166). Hence, individuals in CMC romantic relationships who have not met FtF could heavily value online communication because of their “inability to ‘go out,’ have physical contact, or experience other components related to physical presence that are

enmeshed in FtF romantic unions” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166). Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) who developed media richness theory would assume the preferred medium for initiating romantic relationships is a rich medium such as FtF interaction; however, Walther (1996) explains that social interactions via CMC, in some cases, can match or even exceed what individuals can accomplish in similar FtF interactions. Walther’s explanation could be true for the participants in this study. If romantic partners are communicating hyperpersonally, they could have heightened views of their partners as well as their abilities to skillfully communicate (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Walther, 1996).

Practical implications exist for the higher levels of intimacy and communication satisfaction reported by individuals who have not met their partners in a FtF setting. Individuals who begin their relationships online should approach their FtF meetings with caution; the results of this study suggest that individuals could have romanticized visions of their partners before they meet them in person. Therefore, if individuals choose to date online with intentions of meeting FtF eventually, they should strive to have realistic expectations of their partners prior to meeting them in person.

Individuals who were in same sex relationships that began online reported higher levels of trust than individuals who were in opposite sex relationships. Haas and Stafford (2005) compared same/opposite sex relationships and relational maintenance behaviors. Individuals in both types of relationships reported shared tasks (e.g., paying bills, doing laundry, cleaning) as the most common way that they maintained their relationships. However, the results varied in the second most common way relationships were maintained. Same sex couples reported that meta-relational communication (e.g.,

discussions about the relationship) was the second most common relational maintenance strategy, whereas opposite sex couples indicated that proactive prosocial behavior (e.g., humor) was the second most common relational maintenance strategy.

Haas and Stafford's findings could indicate that same sex couples need to discuss their relationships more often due to that fact that their relationships can lack legal bonds (depending on where they live) or can lack societal/familial support. Emotional commitment is very important to same sex relationships, especially if a legal bond/support is lacking; therefore, same sex couples could discuss the state of their relationships more often to ensure that both partners are committed to the relationship. Through this communication about commitment to the relationship, partners could be building trust in one another.

Although same and opposite sex couples reported the same most common relational maintenance strategy in the previously mentioned study, same sex couples have other sources of turmoil to face. Aylor (2008) explains that "individuals in same sex relationships face unique challenges because of internalized discrimination, lack of institutional recognition, fewer 'role model' relationships, and lack of social support from families of origin" (p. 3). Previous work (Cabaj & Klinger, 1996; Lynch, 1987; Slater, 1995) has explained that individuals who are pursuing or who are in same sex relationships deal with oppression that can lead to low self-esteem, low self-disclosure, lack of support, and lack of openness and comfort in romantic relationships. All of these challenges could lead to a lack of trust in individuals' FtF lives, and they might seek solace through dating online instead of FtF. If individuals who are pursuing same sex relationships have not yet "come out" in their FtF lives, dating online could be ideal due to the relative anonymity

(Walther, 1996) that CMC allows. Additionally, looking for a partner online could be easier than meeting a partner FtF. Potential partners most likely list their sexual orientation on their profiles, whereas in FtF situations individuals' sexual orientation is not evident at first glance. Hence, individuals seeking same sex partners could find online dating to be a safe, comfortable, and efficient way to meet someone. However, this study did not obtain details about the nature of individuals' same sex relationships (e.g., Were the participants "out of the closet?" Do the participants' families support their sexual preference?). Future research should investigate same sex relationships more in depth in order to uncover what differences exist between same sex and opposite sex relationships that begin in person or online. Also, distinctions need to be made in terms of what type of same sex relationships are examined (gay men or lesbians). Previous research has found differences among same sex relationships. For example, gay men and lesbians commonly practice monogamy; however, lesbians tend to place more significance on monogamy than do gay men (Fitzpatrick, Jandt, Myrick, & Edgar, 1994; Green, Bettinger, & Zachs, 1996; Mendola, 1980).

Finally, the length of relationships was the last sample characteristic that was tested with the study's variables. The length (the number of months) of individuals' relationships that began both in person and online significantly interacted with intimacy. Also, the length of individuals' relationships that began FtF significantly interacted with trust. In other words, individuals who met their partners in person and who dated them for a longer period of time reported higher levels of intimacy and trust than individuals who dated their partners for a shorter period of time. In their study of CMC relationships, Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) also found that participants reported higher levels of trust and

intimacy the longer they had dated. These findings concerning relationship length are consistent with Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's findings, but also extend their work with the addition of the FtF participants. Additionally, these findings are consistent with social penetration theory, which explains that individuals' levels of intimacy will increase as relationships develop over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The results of this study and Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's study suggest that intimacy and trust are two relationship dimensions that increase as a relationship progresses.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

When research is conducted, limitations are important to acknowledge. The current study consists of several limitations including the uneven sample size, the broad sample characteristics, and the concerns associated with self-reported data.

This study's goal was to compare and contrast relationships that began through FtF interaction and via CMC. Because two groups were compared, having close to 50 % of each group would be ideal. Surveying individuals who meet their partners online is more difficult than surveying individuals who meet their partners FtF; however, future researchers should strive to include close to an equal amount of participants in each group if they are comparing individuals in two types of relationships.

The qualifications for individuals to participate in this study were fairly broad. Individuals had to be in a dating relationship in which they met their partners either in person or online. To participate, individuals could be any age and their relationships could be fairly new or well established. Future research could compare more specialized characteristics (e.g., individuals who are 50 or older who are in FtF and CMC long-term

relationships longer than one year) to uncover details that are generalizable to a certain dating population.

Finally, this study included measures that analyzed individuals' self-reported perceptions of their relationships. Individuals were prompted to answer questions as honestly as possible, but caution should be used when forming generalizations based on self-report data. Specifically, in this study, individuals most likely would not want to report negative perceptions of their relationships due to social desirability.

This study provided a glance into relationships that begin FtF or online. Future research can build off of this study's results in order to expand knowledge in the arena of comparing FtF and CMC romantic relationships. For example, longitudinal research that compares individuals who began their relationships FtF or online could aid in uncovering how and if these relationships progress differently. Studying FtF and CMC relationships through longitudinal methods would allow for comparisons to be made at multiple stages of romantic relationships.

Additionally, research that involves qualitative methods, such as interviews, could improve scholarship that compares FtF and CMC romantic relationships. Understanding how these relationships are formed, maintained, and dissolved in participants' own words could foster more comprehension of how and if these relationships differ.

This study only included one partner in a dating relationship. Including *couples* who are in dating relationships could modify the outcome of this study and other studies that have examined individuals in romantic relationships. For example, perhaps one partner in a romantic relationship is highly satisfied, whereas the other partner is contemplating ending the relationship. Future research should consider involving both partners in studies

that investigate romantic relationships in order to get a more complete representation of dating relationships.

Finally, scholars should research participants who have met dating partners through both FtF interaction and CMC. These participants could help to shed light on the experiences of beginning romantic relationships in two contexts as well as how and why the progression or the relational variables involved in these relationships differ in any way.

Conclusion

This study provided a glimpse into differences that exist between romantic relationships that are initiated in person and online. From this study's results it is evident that individuals in FtF and CMC relationships (especially CMC relationships that have evolved into FtF relationships) are not that different in terms of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Perhaps the "heightened" effects of hyperpersonal communication gradually wear off once individuals meet FtF. Understanding that relationships that begin both in person and online are fairly similar is important from both a scholarly and practical standpoint. Researchers can use the results of this study to further explore these two types of relationships, and use different methods (e.g., interviews) in order to reveal detailed accounts of what challenges, advantages, and/or experiences can exist in either or both types of dating relationships. For example, regarding individuals who began their relationships online and then meet their partners FtF, when do levels of intimacy taper off? Practically, individuals who are interested in beginning romantic relationships should feel encouraged that neither way of initiating relationships seems to be superior over the other. According to this study,

initiating a romantic relationship FtF or online does not offer notable advantages or disadvantages.

Although significant differences were not found between individuals who began their relationships in person or online, results of this study suggest that individuals who met their partners online and had *not* them in person could have had romanticized views of the person they are dating. The initial stages of FtF and CMC relationships are quite different. Initiating a romantic relationship in person allows for a realistic impression of a dating partner. For example, individuals can see, from the beginning of relationships, partners' physical inadequacies (e.g., acne), their awkward choices of conversation topics (e.g., recent breakup), their odd nonverbal cues (e.g., nervous twitch), and so on. Initiating a romantic relationship via CMC allows for individuals to generate a romanticized or exaggerated illustration of what they anticipate their partners will be like due to the lack of physical proximity, the relative anonymity, and the ability to carefully edit messages (Walther, 1996). The romanticized views of partners in the beginning of CMC relationships and how these views interact with long-term CMC-turned-FtF relationships could have interesting implications for couples who meet online. Because of CMC's ability to foster heightened impressions of potential romantic partners, further examination of how romantic relationships progress differently in FtF and online contexts is warranted.

Several differences existed when testing the sample characteristics and the variables that were included in this study. Examining these significant characteristics (e.g., exclusivity of relationships, sex, same sex/opposite sex relationships, length of relationships) more closely could lead to fruitful research related to romantic relationships in FtF and CMC contexts.

Additionally, predictors of relationship satisfaction in relationships that began in person (communication satisfaction, trust) and online (communication satisfaction, physical attraction) were uncovered. Both types of relationships shared the predictor variable, communication satisfaction. In order to initiate relationships, partners communicate in order for relationships to progress. Individuals in dating relationships should strive to communicate in effective ways with their partners; satisfying communication is not only important to a relationship's progression, but also is important to how satisfied individuals are in their relationships. Researchers should continue to study what it means to communicate effectively in romantic relationships.

No matter the context in which a dating relationship begins, it can evolve into a lifetime partnership. Hence, understanding relational variables involved in dating relationships that begin through FtF interaction or CMC is very important. The results of this study help to showcase the fact that relationships that begin FtF or via CMC are not that different in regards to the relational variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction, relationship satisfaction) that were examined. Future research can use this study as a springboard for insight pertaining to what sample characteristics and/or relational variables can affect dating relationships.

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ONLINE OR FACE-TO-FACE? RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND
ATTRACTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS TWO MEDIA

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
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of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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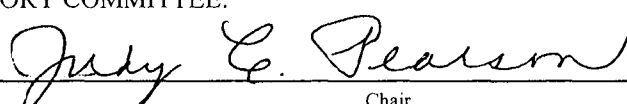
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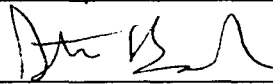
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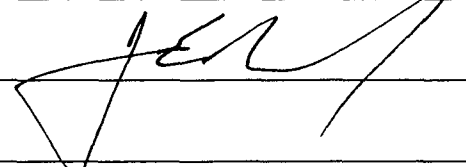
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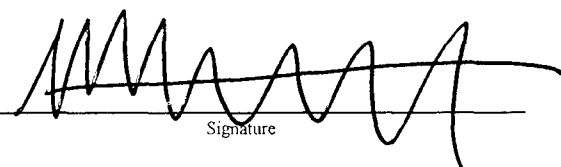




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ABSTRACT

Zmyslinski, Anne Nicole, M.S., Department of Communication, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, August 2011. Online or Face-to-Face? Relationship Satisfaction and Attraction in Romantic Relationships Across Two Media. Major Professor: Dr. Judy C. Pearson.

The purpose of this study was to examine romantic relationships that began through face-to-face (FtF) interaction or computer-mediated communication (CMC). Two hundred seventy-six participants who were currently in romantic relationships that began in person (196) or online (80) completed an online questionnaire. The study explored several relational variables (relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction) and tested for differences in the two types of relationships; however, the data were not consistent with the hypotheses and research questions. Post-hoc tests revealed that sample characteristics (including sex, exclusivity of relationships, same/opposite sex relationships, and length of relationships) accounted for several differences when tested with the relational variables. Finally, the study sought to find which of these variables related to relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF and online. Trust and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF, and physical attraction and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in relationships that began online.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Communication; Relationship; Online; Face-to-Face; Satisfaction; Attraction; Hyperpersonal; Social Penetration

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, individuals initiated romantic relationships through face-to-face (FtF) interaction. In FtF romantic relationships, partners can develop initial impressions based on physical appearance and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or bodily movement. Today, many romantic relationships begin on the Internet (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Seventy-four percent of the 10 million single American Internet users have accessed the Internet in some way for romantic pursuits (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Since its' advent decades ago, the Internet has revolutionized how people communicate and connect with romantic partners.

Beginning relationships on the Internet is now viewed as an acceptable "mainstream social practice" (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 416). According to Online Dating Magazine (2010), more than 280,000 marriages a year occur as a result of people meeting through an Internet dating service. Additionally, the majority of people who date online are not embarrassed to search for companionship on the Internet; the popularity of online dating continues to increase. Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) found that 70% of the participants in their study informed their families and friends they were involved with online dating.

Despite individuals' increasing openness about dating on the Internet, online dating poses some concerns as well. Madden and Lenhart (2006) found that 66% of "Internet users agree with the statement that online dating is a dangerous activity because it puts personal information on the Internet" (p. i). Additionally, online daters must carefully evaluate their potential partners, especially in the beginning of a relationship, to determine whether or not they are presenting their true selves (Ellison, et al., 2006). People who date

online must also monitor the information they choose to share on their own profiles. When online daters evaluate their own profiles they attempt to “balance their desire for self-promotion with their need for accurate self-presentation” (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 430). The prospect of meeting romantic partners FtF compels individuals to maintain accuracy in their profile information and photos online (Ellison, et al., 2006).

Individuals who date online believe that there are positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships through CMC (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2005). Many individuals appreciate the opportunity to “obtrusively gain information about others earlier than would be appropriate in a traditional face-to-face setting” (Heino et al., 2005, p. 14). For example, online profiles could include political views, religious beliefs, etc., and these topics normally would not be discussed on a first date in a FtF setting. Additionally, many people felt that the ability to search through potential partners to filter out “deal-breaker” qualities was an effective way to increase their odds of finding a long-term relationship (Heino et al., 2005).

However, the participants explained that “shopping” for the perfect partner online had downsides as well. Searching through so many potential partners caused them to make judgments more easily than in FtF interaction (Heino et al., 2005). Secondly, participants acknowledged they could have eliminated good matches based on search criteria (e.g., They miss out on someone who is one year older than their search criteria allows) (Heino et al., 2005). Finally, participants felt as if the filtering ability caused less excitement than a similar FtF encounter (Heino, et al., 2005). Once participants met their partners in person they explained that there was a need for a positive social interaction as well as “chemistry” in a FtF setting, which is more difficult to experience online (Heino, et al., 2005).

Therefore, FtF interaction is a vital component for two types of relationships, those that begin in person (e.g., meet at a party) and those that begin online (e.g., meet through a social networking website, such as Facebook). Exploring the characteristics of romantic relationships that begin through FtF interaction or CMC will aid researchers in understanding what differences, if any, exist between two common ways of initiating romantic relationships.

This chapter will first address the theoretical implications of the hyperpersonal communication model and the social penetration process on relationship satisfaction and attraction of couples who begin dating online or FtF. Specifically, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be discussed as potential predictors of relationship satisfaction. Second, the chapter will address the rationale of the study. Third, the definitions of key terms will be presented. Finally, a brief overview of the remaining chapters in the study will be offered.

Theoretical Background

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

To guide this study's explanation of potential differences between initiating FtF and CMC relationships, Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model is utilized. Walther argues, "Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become 'hyperpersonal,' that is to exceed FtF interpersonal communication" (p. 5). Oftentimes, CMC communication is more satisfying than FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). For example, if an individual is usually nervous when meeting new people, he or she may choose to communicate through CMC to initiate

a romantic relationship, which allows for more anonymity and less pressure in terms of nonverbal cues, physical appearance, clothing choice, and so on (Walther, 1996).

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model offers "a fully integrated view of CMC taking into account the sender, receiver, channel, and feedback as each contributes to hyperpersonal interaction in CMC" (p. 28). Senders can formulate their messages in terms of their ultimate social goals and receivers can formulate an equally idealized message back to their partners. Through CMC interaction, individuals do not have to communicate in real time and are released from added pressure to respond immediately as in FtF interaction (Walther, 1996). Partners respond independently and "time is frozen" until the other responds to a message (Walther, 1996, p. 29). CMC allows online daters to contemplate their messages (and even edit messages) for a longer period of time, whereas FtF communication forces an immediate response.

According to Walther (1996), CMC can function in three different ways. First, CMC can function impersonally especially when future interaction is not anticipated (Walther, 1996). Impersonal communication occurs when "anonymity and thick layers of software-imposed interaction structures" exist (Walther, 1996, p. 32). Secondly, CMC can function interpersonally "when users have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther explains that when individuals expect to have a long-term relationship, CMC is no less personal than FtF interaction. Finally, CMC is hyperpersonal "when users create impressions and manage relationships in ways more positively than they might be able to conduct [in] FtF [settings]" (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Walther points out that CMC is more likely to function

hyperpersonally when the communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that individuals share.

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration processes include “the range of interpersonal events occurring in growing relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). These processes include verbal communication, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions that occur before, during, and after interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Verbal exchanges “include information exchanges” such as, “I’m an accountant” or “I’m originally from Minnesota” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). Nonverbal cues include bodily movement such as postures, gestures, and limb movement. Additionally, facial expressions such as smiling, gazing, and frowning can also be identified as nonverbal cues. Finally, “environmentally oriented behaviors” are characterized by “spatial and personal distance between people and [the] use of physical objects and areas” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). As verbal, nonverbal, and environmental behaviors occur, individuals conduct a series of internal processes before, during, and after contact with others. These internal processes include developing ideas as to what another person is like as well as positive and negative impressions of the person (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5).

Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that *social penetration processes* are most likely never complete because of the unpredictable nature of humans. Also, they point out that the process is not smooth: “There may be spurts and slowdowns, plateaus and sudden new upward cycles, [and] long periods of stability” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 141). Even if a relationship is considered close, both individuals still remain independent entities. For this

reason, Altman and Taylor clarify that a person cannot be fully understood by his or her partner and interaction is fairly unpredictable.

Rationale

This study builds upon the growing literature within the arena of romantic relationships and also examines if any differences exist between levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction in romantic relationships that were initiated through FtF interaction or CMC. This research provides useful additions to the hyperpersonal communication model as well as to social penetration theory. Social penetration theory was developed as a framework that helped to explain how individuals' FtF interactions unfold, and the hyperpersonal communication model was developed in order to explain the types of communication that occur online. Therefore, both theories are important in guiding research that examines two types of relationships, those that begin in person and online. Although this study benefits theory, practical implications exist as well. Individuals who specialize in relationship therapy can benefit from this research in order to offer useful advice to both groups of individuals who began their relationships in either FtF or CMC contexts. Finally, individuals who are seeking new romantic relationships could find the results of this study useful when choosing between initiating relationships FtF or through CMC.

Definition of Terms

Face-to-Face (FtF) Relationships

For the purpose of this study, individuals in FtF relationships are defined as people who initially met the person they are dating in a face-to-face situation such as in a class, at work, or through a mutual friend at a social encounter. According to Antheunis, Schouten,

Valkenburg, and Peter (2009), FtF communication allows individuals to use many cues, physical appearance and nonverbal behaviors, in order “to develop an impression of the other” (p. 4). Individuals who interact in FtF situations are in the same physical and social settings; they not only view and interpret each other’s behavior, but they can also witness the same objects and events happening near their conversations. FtF communication allows for both parties to experience all aspects of the communication process, even something as simple as the temperature of a particular environment.

Previous research has compared communication in FtF and CMC contexts. Chan and Cheng (2004) compared individuals’ online and offline friendships. FtF (offline) friendships allowed “more interdependence, breadth, depth, code change, understanding, commitment, and network convergence than online friendships” (Chan & Cheng, 2004, p. 305). Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn, and Hearst (2008) explain that FtF contexts allow individuals to convey information intentionally, but oftentimes unintentional nonverbal cues such as body language, expressions, or tone of voice can “provide a great deal of information about other people” (p. 798). Initiating relationships through FtF interaction allows individuals to experience all of the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, whereas initiating relationships through (CMC) leaves much more opportunity for interpretation.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Relationships

Individuals in CMC relationships are defined as people who initially met their partners on the Internet through an online dating website, social networking website, or another website or chat service that allows individuals to communicate through CMC. This study includes individuals who have met their partners in person and also those who have

not met their partners FtF. Walther (1996) argues that, in some cases, CMC interactions can also be defined as hyperpersonal or “forms of interaction that exceed what we may accomplish FtF, in terms of our impression-generating and relational goals” (p. 28). Online dating, especially through dating websites, is an effective example of communicative interaction functioning hyperpersonally. Individuals access an online dating website in order to find the proper “match” for them, while also attempting to present the most attractive versions of themselves (Ellison, et al., 2006). Therefore, dating is a well-planned process on the Internet. CMC provides a unique opportunity to individuals who date online in that they can carefully construct messages before sending them, whereas in FtF relationships communication occurs synchronously, meaning response rates are instant.

Other CMC perspectives exist as well. Online relationships lack spatial relations, physical appearance, and individuals’ nonverbal communication habits (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). CMC is often referred to as impersonal and some scholars have defined communication on the Internet to fall within the “cues filtered out” perspective (e.g., Culnan & Markus, 1987). Cues filtered out means that communication in CMC allows for more anonymity and communicators observe less individuality (e.g., choice in clothes) in others with whom they interact (Walther, 1996). These perspectives expect CMC “to be less socially oriented and less personal than FtF communication” (Walther, 1996, p. 8).

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Couples who report spending more time interacting with each other are more satisfied than those couples who spend less time together (e.g., Kirchner, 1989; Johnson, Amoloza, &

Booth, 1992; Dickson-Markman & Markman, 1988). Anderson and Emmers-Sommer found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction among CMC couples. Guerrero (1994) found that relationship satisfaction affects individuals' perceptions of their partner in terms of communication skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, not only are there multiple variables that are associated with relationship satisfaction, but an individual's level of relationship satisfaction also can greatly influence how one partner views the other.

Intimacy

Emotional intimacy is a perception of closeness to a romantic partner that allows sharing of feelings, along with expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Mitchell et al. (2008) explain that "an intimate relationship is hypothesized to result from repeated intimate interactions as well as such influences as the relationship history, the commitment of the two persons, and public recognition of the relationship" (p. 21). Depending on the medium in which relationships begin (FtF or CMC), couples may experience different types of intimacy. Walther (1997) found that people who communicated through FtF interaction achieved lower intimacy levels than those who communicated through CMC. Hian, Chuan, Trevor, and Detenber (2004) also found that intimacy developed more quickly in CMC than FtF.

Trust

Trust is "the degree of confidence [one] feels when [one] think[s] about a relationship" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). Along with the degree of confidence in individuals' relationships, Berger and Calabrese (1975) explain that people will desire to gain new information about their partners in order to reduce their uncertainty about them.

A central part of an individual's level of trust includes his or her ability to predict his or her partner's behavior (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Because individuals want to predict how their partner will behave, they will utilize uncertainty-reducing strategies (e.g., asking detailed questions) in order to trust their partners. Trust is especially important for online couples before a FtF meeting occurs because both partners need to trust that accurate information (e. g., photos, description of values, career) is presented on the Internet.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication is satisfying "when one's expectations for the interaction are met and fulfilled" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 159). Cahn (1983) explains that when individuals feel understood by their partners, they feel more content in their communication and relationships. Hecht (1978) points out that context can play a key role in communication skills. For example, an individual may successfully communicate with his or her boss, but may struggle to successfully communicate with his or her partner or vice versa. Since context plays a role in how individuals communicate, the medium could play a role as well. If an individual who is typically shy in person decides to date online, he or she may feel far more comfortable communicating with a potential partner online than in a FtF setting.

Physical Attraction

McCroskey and McCain (1974) conceptualized interpersonal attraction as a three-dimensional construct: 1) a social dimension: "She would fit into my family;" 2) a task dimension: "She works on projects very efficiently;" and 3) a physical dimension: "He is very handsome." For the purpose of this study, physical attraction will be the only

dimension examined. Individuals' attraction to one another may increase depending on proximity (Knapp, 1978). If individuals live close to one another or share an office, they are able to learn a great deal about a potential partner through repetitive everyday conversation (Knapp, 1978). Online daters may feel attracted to their partners in different ways than FtF daters due to the lack of physical proximity. FtF daters can literally see, smell, and touch their partners; online daters must rely on the textual information, pictures, and videos provided on the Internet until, and if, they decide to pursue FtF relationships.

Overview of Study

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter provided a brief overview of related research and a rationale for the study. Chapter Two will contain a review of literature related to the variables within the study (e.g., face-to-face relationships, computer-mediated communication relationships, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction). Chapter Three will discuss the methodology for the study. Chapter Four will highlight the results of the study. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the results of the study in further detail, and will address limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will examine the literature and concepts related to romantic relationships that begin FtF or online. Scholarship that explains and defines the hyperpersonal communication model, social penetration theory, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will be introduced. Additionally, research that examines these particular variables will be included in order to shape the argument of this study. The inclusion of literature specific to these variables will seek to support the reasoning for uncovering the potential differences in relationships that begin FtF or online. In particular, the research questions and hypotheses will address if individuals who initiate FtF or CMC romantic relationships have different levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Finally, predictors of relationship satisfaction for both types of relationships will be explored.

Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model examines how computer-mediated communication (CMC) functions. The model stems from Walther's examination of previous research that explored how the Internet affected communication. Walther's reconceptualization of how the Internet can affect communication aids in examining how relationships can develop online. This summary will discuss the development of the hyperpersonal communication model, dimensions of hyperpersonal communication, situations in which communication functions hyperpersonally, and an evaluation of the hyperpersonal communication model.

Development of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

In Walther's (1996) article, which introduces the hyperpersonal communication model, he presents previous CMC research such as the cues-filtered out model. Culnan and Markus (1987) developed the cues-filtered out model, which states that because nonverbal cues are absent in CMC, communication is impersonal because individuals are not aware of nonverbal cues such as physical appearance and feedback (e.g., head nodding, facial expressions). Early research predicted that when individuals lacked nonverbal cues (such as in CMC), they would be less able to "alter the mood of a message, communicate a sense of individuality, or exercise dominance or charisma" (Kiesler, 1986, p. 48).

Previous research also explained that impersonal communication through CMC could be valuable in some communicative interactions. Dubrovsky (1985) explained that work-related computer conferencing allows individuals to filter "out affective components of communication and emphasiz[e] the content, minimiz[e] social influences (influence of status, interpersonal 'noise,' and so on)" (p. 381). Hence, individuals could focus more on the task at hand without being distracted by nonverbal cues or environmental factors. Also, Steiner (1972) explained that the impersonal nature of CMC could enhance group decision-making. CMC allows groups to filter out negative aspects of interaction such as domination by a member or members of the group, pressures to conform, and self-consciousness among lower level members (Walther, 1996). In dating relationships, the impersonal nature of CMC could also allow individuals to meet partners in a less stressful manner. For example, when individuals first communicate with a potential partner online, especially through text-based messages, they are not concerned with their appearance or

any nervous habits that may exist in similar FtF “first date” conversations (Heino et al., 2005).

Another approach in exploring differences between FtF and online communication is media richness theory, which was developed by Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987). Media richness theory assumes “that media have varying capabilities for resolving ambiguity, meeting interpretation needs, and transmitting data” (Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987, p. 557). Communication media, according to Trevino, Lengel, and Daft, can be classified as “rich” or “lean” based on four factors: 1) the availability of instant feedback, which aids individuals in reaching a mutual understanding; 2) the use of multiple cues to express interpretation and emotions; 3) the use of natural language; and 4) the personal focus of the medium. If media are in line with these factors, they are considered to be “rich.” Conversely, media that do not display these factors are considered “lean.” FtF communication is the richest medium because feedback automatically occurs, multiple cues exist, and natural language is used (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). The leanest media are written documents due to the lack of instant feedback and cues (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). CMC lies in between the leanest and richest of media. However, when CMC allows users to communicate through features such as video chat and synchronous instant messaging, it is considered richer than asynchronous, text-based CMC such as email.

Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) explain that efficient communication will take place when the complexity of a message is matched with the appropriate media richness. If a message is complex, rich media (such as FtF) should be utilized, and if a message is simple, lean media (such as a written letter or memo) can be utilized (Daft, Lengel, &

Trevino, 1987). Sheer (2010) explains that social interaction messages are not simple “because feelings, between-the-lines meanings, non-verbal expressions are all difficult to transmit efficiently via lean media” (p. 225). Therefore, the preferred medium for romantic relationships, according to media richness theory, is FtF interaction. However, Walther (1996) explains that social interactions via CMC, in some cases, can match or even exceed what individuals can accomplish in similar FtF interactions.

Walther (1992) argued that CMC could function more effectively and diversely than previously reported. He pointed out that early studies examined only short periods of time in individuals’ FtF and online communication. Also, as relationships via CMC progress, Walther (1992) explained that the quality of unchanging, impersonal characteristics of CMC could be related only to initial interactions among unacquainted individuals and that these conditions could dissolve as communication continues. Therefore, the cues-filtered out model may be related only to individuals in initial CMC interactions, especially individuals who have no intention of continuing the relationship (Walther, 1996). Walther (1996) explained that prior research only examined “one-time only, time-limited CMC groups;” therefore, these participants “are bound to appear more task oriented than are parallel FtF groups” (p. 11). Walther and Burgoon (1992) examined relationship development in FtF and CMC contexts over time. They found that individuals who interacted via CMC were less social at first, but “were more socially oriented than were FtF groups” at the conclusion of the study (Walther, 1996, p. 11).

After examining previous studies and conducting his own research, Walther (1996) offered a reconceptualization of how the Internet affects communication. First, Walther wanted to “integrate theories and research findings pertaining to impersonal and

interpersonal interactions in CMC, not by dismissing one in favor of the other but rather by specifying some conditions that favor each type of outcome, either of which may be desirable and useful in certain contexts” (p. 4). Second, Walther offered a new perspective by explaining that CMC could function hyperpersonally. Walther claims, “Combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead CMC to become ‘hyperpersonal,’ that is, to exceed FtF interpersonal communication” (p. 5). The Internet allows individuals to communicate interpersonally “in heightened” or specialized ways through CMC (Walther, 1996, p. 5).

Dimensions of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Based on previous research pertaining to online communication, Walther (1996) described three types of communication that could occur as a result of CMC. Walther explains that computer mediation alone does not “make communication either impersonal or hyperpersonal;” (p. 33) CMC allows users to more easily communicate in ways that will maximize each particular interaction (Walther, 1996). Three types of communication are utilized online: impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal communication.

Impersonal communication occurs as a result “of the lack of nonverbal cues and, at times, the reduced interactivity of e-mail and computer conferencing systems” (Walther, 1996, p. 7). Additionally, Walther explains that impersonal communication can occur when individuals’ communicative goals are not interpersonal, when individuals have restricted time frames in which to communicate, and also when individuals do not anticipate future communication.

Individuals can also communicate interpersonally through CMC. The social information processing (SIP) approach developed by Walther (1992) presumed that

individuals who communicate via CMC are wired to develop interpersonal relationships, much like individuals who communicate FtF. Walther (1996) explains that CMC is interpersonal when individuals “have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values” (p. 33). When individuals who interact via CMC feel that they will continue a relationship, “CMC is no less personal than FtF [interaction]” (Walther, 1996, p. 33).

Finally, Walther (1996) describes hyperpersonal communication as “CMC that is more socially desirable than [individuals] tend to experience in parallel FtF interaction” (p. 17). Hyperpersonal communication occurs when individuals “experience commonality and are self-aware, [are] physically separated, and [are] communicating via a limited-cues channel that allows them to selectively self-present and edit” (Walther, 1996, p. 33). CMC allows individuals to create and reciprocate representations of their partners and relationships without the intrusion of environmental reality (Walther, 1996). Hyperpersonal communication is more likely to occur when communication is asynchronous or when CMC is the only type of communication that partners share (Walther, 1996).

Several studies offer findings that are consistent with the hyperpersonal model. Hancock and Dunham (2001) compared FtF and CMC dyads' impression formation. Specifically, the participants rated one another's personality profiles (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). The “impressions formed in the CMC environment were less detailed, but more intense than those formed face-to-face” (Hancock & Dunham, 2001, p. 325). When hyperpersonal communication occurs, individuals' impressions of potential partners can be more exaggerated than similar FtF interactions (Walther, 1996). Oftentimes, individuals

who communicate through CMC have “a tendency to fill in the blanks optimistically when faced with limited information about a person” (Fiore et al., 2008, p. 798). Finally, Antheunis et al. (2009) found that the depth of self-disclosure in individuals who communicated through text-only CMC was higher than individuals who communicated FtF, which supports the hyperpersonal model. The hyperpersonal model suggests that CMC can lead to intimate information exchange; individuals share private information earlier than they would in FtF situations.

Implications of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

Individuals can capitalize on the limited-cues afforded by CMC when they interact on the Internet. Walther (1996) explained that previous research illustrated that “CMC [allowed] participants in dyads and groups—even those who have never met before—[to] use cues available to them to manage relational development in normal (or perhaps supernormal) fashion” (p. 13). Baker (1998) surveyed 18 couples who met online and asked them about their relationships. Some of the participants revealed that it was easier to reveal more personal thoughts and feelings online through writing than through FtF interaction (Baker, 1998). When communication functions hyperpersonally, individuals can interact in heightened ways through CMC, and “conversation partners [can] disclose their inner feelings at an earlier stage than in face-to-face communication” (Antheunis et al., 2009, p. 5).

Walther (1996) explains that the main “difference between . . . CMC and FtF communication has not to do with the *amount* of social information exchanged but with the *rate* of social information exchange” (p. 10). Despite the slower rate in CMC, individuals who interact online to form romantic relationships can communicate meaningfully.

Participants in Baker's (1998) study of couples who date online revealed that they thought individuals who met online might get to know one another on a deeper level than those who met in FtF contexts. Heino et al. (2005) point out that "social etiquette might prevent discussion of topics such as personal income or political views on a first date, but online dating participants [have] access to this information before the first email [is] exchanged" (p. 14). Individuals who date online potentially know more about their partners at the beginning of their relationships than those who date FtF even though the rate of exchange can be slower online.

Although developing romantic relationships through CMC works well for some individuals, some research explains that deception can occur on the Internet. Hancock and Toma (2009) found that online daters struggle with pressures to enhance their physical attractiveness in photos, while maintaining their desire to avoid deception in the photos they choose. The researchers found that 1/3 of the photos used by online daters were not accurate, meaning that the photos were inconsistent with the individuals' actual appearance (e.g., retouched by a photographer, younger photos). Individuals who date online want to present themselves in a positive and attractive manner, but deception through photographs and social desirability bias prevents them from creating a profile that is as accurate as their FtF selves (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

Evaluating the Hyperpersonal Communication Model

The hyperpersonal communication model is useful in many areas of research. The model has explained communication in various contexts including dyads and groups; and in educational, romantic, and group/leadership settings (Walther, 2007). For example, Walther examined how dyads communicate through CMC in order to understand "the

extent to which users employ the means suggested by the hyperpersonal model in electronic conversations” (p. 2540). Specifically, he “examined how CMC users managed message composing time, editing behaviors, personal language, sentence complexity, and relational tone in their initial messages to different presumed targets, and the cognitive awareness related to these processes” (p. 2538). The results were consistent with the hyperpersonal communication model. The model suggests that individuals spend time carefully drafting and editing messages, which was evidenced in this study; the participants processed their messages more mindfully, which led to more effort in message construction (Walther, 2007). Therefore, individuals who communicate via CMC carefully decide what to include or not to include in their messages.

Antheunis et al. (2009) also examined dyads. They compared dyads in FtF, visual CMC conditions, and text-based CMC conditions. Dyads who communicated via CMC (both visual and text-based) exchanged deeper self-disclosure (more intimate information) than FtF dyads, which is evidence of the hyperpersonal communication model in action (Antheunis et al., 2009). These researchers “conclude[d] that it is depth, and not amount, of self-disclosure that accounts for the increased liking in CMC interactions” (Antheunis et al., 2009). Therefore, hyperpersonal communication was occurring in that the depth of information shared by users generated more liking in both CMC conditions. If individuals communicate private or intimate details about themselves, levels of intimacy can increase (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Previous research has explained that higher levels of intimacy are common when individuals communicate online (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997).

The hyperpersonal communication model poses both positives and negatives to beginning romantic relationships online. Individuals could have heightened expectations or “idealized notions” of their partner prior to a FtF date “based on limited cues in the absence of contradicting information” (Heino, et al., 2005, p. 8). These idealized notions of partners can lead to FtF letdowns; Brym and Lenton (2001) found that 38% of participants were disappointed upon meeting their partners FtF. Conversely, the idealized versions of individuals’ partners could strengthen their affinity to the relationships and partners once individuals meet in a FtF setting (Heino, et al., 2005). Hence, hyperpersonal communication in the beginning of online romantic relationships can increase or decrease the satisfaction one feels once a FtF date occurs.

Social Penetration Theory

Development of Social Penetration Theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) developed the social penetration theory based on research interests in the process of creating relationships as well as a history of observing the initiation and deterioration of social bonds. After evaluating previous research, Altman and Taylor created a task list. First, they wanted to produce a wide range of ideas that were connected to the development of interpersonal relationships. Second, they wanted to tackle a common sense phenomenon, meaning they wanted to describe how everyday relationships are formed. Lastly, they wanted to address social penetration issues in a way that could resonate with a wide variety of readers.

Social penetration theory focuses on “what people do, say, think, and feel about one another as they form, nurture, and disengage from interpersonal relationships” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3). *Social penetration* refers to 1. actual behaviors that take place

during interaction and 2. internal processes that precede, accompany, and follow social exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Events that occur within interpersonal relationships are collectively referred to as *social penetration processes*, which can “include verbal exchange, nonverbal use of the body, use of the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 3).

Dimensions of Social Penetration Theory

The social penetration process includes four stages: the orientation stage, the exploratory affective stage, the affective stage, and the stable exchange stage. Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that relationship development does not follow a straight course, but for heuristic reasons, providing a process for interaction is useful. In order to construct the social penetration stages, Altman and Taylor examined literature that explored nonverbal and environmental factors such as “richness, spontaneity, efficiency of exchange, pacing and synchrony, degree of stereotype-uniqueness of behavior, permeability of the self, behavioral equivalency or substitutability, and evaluation” (p. 142).

Stage one, orientation, tends to occur in public areas when individuals first meet at a party, social gathering, first date, or in varieties of other circumstances (Altman & Taylor, 1973). When someone enters the orientation stage, he or she only shares a small part of him or herself on a verbal, nonverbal, and environmental level (Altman & Taylor, 1973). His or her responses are socially desirable and are not extraordinarily unique. Interaction does not break through to the intermediate and private details of individuals' personalities, and basic information such as hometown, education, work, is shared. If very personal information (e.g., intimate details of a recent breakup) is shared, responses to that personal information are likely to be very restricted and people may even openly display

discomfort by exiting the conversation (e.g., "I have to use the restroom") (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor describe the tone of the orientation stage as one of "caution and tentativeness" because individuals only begin to feel comfortable at the end of this stage (p. 138).

Exploratory affective exchange is the second stage of the social penetration process. This stage is comparable to the types of "relationships between casual acquaintances or friendly neighbors" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 138). Hidden aspects of an individual's personality come to life and communication occurs more smoothly (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Individuals in the exploratory affective exchange may interact with the use catch phrases or inside jokes, displaying that they are becoming more comfortable communicating (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Both parties also interpret nonverbal cues (such as a wink) more easily. Typical relationships in this stage are relaxed, friendly, and casual, but commitments are limited and rare (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor noted that many relationships do not progress beyond this stage.

If individuals advance beyond the exploratory affective exchange, they reach the affective exchange stage. Close friendships or dating relationships in which people know each other well characterize this stage (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Both individuals are capable of initiating interaction and they also are willing to make positive or negative evaluations without worrying about threatening the relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Communication is spontaneous, voluntary, and unique to each dyad. Conversations dealing with private information (e.g., past relationships) increases; however, some hesitancy can exist when private information is shared (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In romantic relationships, couples' intimate affection such as verbal statements, touching, and kissing

increases (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The affective exchange stage is similar to a prolonged courtship before two people decide to declare themselves an "official" couple. Altman and Taylor explain that the affective exchange stage is very critical in terms of the decision to continue penetration or not because conversations are starting to uncover very intimate details of individuals' lives.

The final, and fairly rare, stage of the social penetration process is the stable exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In stable exchange, communication is efficient and individuals can predict feelings and behaviors (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Individuals will also show less restrictiveness in terms of facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and touching (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Because these dyads display a high comfort level, "they are more willing to allow each other to use, have access to, or know about very private apparel and belongings" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 141). Additionally, individuals will communicate private thoughts more effortlessly at this point.

Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that several factors can affect the penetration or depenetration (deterioration) of relationships. These factors are focused on three general areas: 1) personal characteristics; (e.g., Individuals' demographic properties, personality characteristics, and social needs characteristics will have an effect on how interpersonal relationships are managed); 2) outcomes of exchange (e.g., Do individuals "like" one another or feel that something can be gained from prospective relationships?); 3) situational context (e.g., Relationships can take place "within an environmental or situational context" and sometimes individuals can voluntarily continue or end a relationship, whereas at other times they may be forced to remain in a relationship) (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 4).

The first feature of an individual's personality includes breadth and depth dimensions (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Breadth includes two aspects: *breadth category* and *breadth frequency* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Breadth category* simply refers to the number of categories or topics (e.g., movies, hobbies, sex, and family) that are shared with another individual in the development of an interpersonal relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Breadth frequency* refers to the depth of discussion within each *breadth category* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). For example, if a person discussed family vacations, family characteristics, family holidays, family dynamics, and family issues within the *breadth category*, family, that person's *breadth frequency* would be considered high because of the variety of topics related to family. Utilizing breadth categories and frequencies is useful because many "social penetration profiles can be developed" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 16). Individuals at one end of the spectrum expose very little about their personalities (*low breadth category*) and do not go into much detail when exposing each category (*low breadth frequency*). On the other end of the spectrum are individuals who expose multiple facets of their personalities (*high breadth category*) and explain each facet in much detail (*high breadth frequency*). Previous research (e.g., Hancock & Dunham, 2001) indicated that impressions participants made through FtF interaction covered more topics (*high breadth category*), but were less intense than those formed through CMC (*high breadth frequency*). Individuals who communicated via CMC were left with more heightened impressions of their partners' personalities compared to those who communicated FtF (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

The second feature of individuals' personalities includes the concentric circles or "layers" of personalities (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 17). Social penetration theory

suggests that individuals' personalities are similar to onions in that there are multiple layers. These layers differ based on *depth dimension* (Altman & Taylor, 1973). *Depth dimension* suggests that more superficial and obvious items (e.g., biographical information such as sex and age) will exist within the outer (or peripheral) layers of personalities (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As an individual progresses into the central layers of another person's personality, "there are more fundamental core characteristics of personality which relate to and influence peripheral items" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 17). Altman and Taylor suggest that the deeper the characteristic, the more it will influence an individual's entire personality. For example, if individual A has a low level of trust toward others, someone could potentially predict individual A's opinion on peripheral issues such as views on topics like infidelity in a relationship.

Along with individual personality characteristics, *rewards* and *costs* drive the social penetration process. Altman and Taylor (1973) drew from Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) research, which explained rewards and costs. Thibaut and Kelley describe *rewards* as "pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications the person enjoys" (p. 12). *Costs* include those "factors that operate to inhibit or deter a performance of a sequence of behavior" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 13). A *cost* is considered high if a great deal of effort is required, when embarrassment or anxiety could occur, or when conflicting forces of any kind are present (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

After individuals interact for the first time, they categorize the "pros" (*rewards*) and "cons" (*costs*) of the exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Next, these individuals ask, "Were the immediate rewards greater than the costs?" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 36). Finally, individuals construct *forecasts*, meaning that they will question whether or not

they should interact with another person by predicting future rewards and costs.

Individuals also develop “a subjective model of the other person” by creating a mental picture of what the other person is like (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 37).

As individuals develop an interpersonal relationship, the significance of rewards and costs will change with increased penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The size and intensity of these rewards and costs will fluctuate based on peripheral or central layers of personality. Central layers of personality will include both greater costs and rewards in comparison to the peripheral layers. The amplified nature of rewards and costs within central layers of personality could cause individuals to approach the central layers with caution (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor speculate that the majority of people will not probe into the central layers initially and will discuss superficial issues at the beginning of an interpersonal relationship.

Altman and Taylor (1973) contributed to the research that revamped the former situational view of communication. The situational view of communication meant that individuals were communicating interpersonally FtF with immediate feedback and nothing (e.g., phones, computers) mediated their conversations (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Altman and Taylor provided a developmental approach to communication, which focused more on the partners themselves, who they are to one another, how they communicate, and what they communicate to one another (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).

Along with this new approach, Altman and Taylor (1973) explained that there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary relationships. *Voluntary relationships* are relationships that individuals decide to engage in because they *choose* to. On the other hand, *involuntary relationships* are relationships that exist no matter how inclined

individuals feel to continue or end the relationship. For example, a relationship with a parent is considered an involuntary relationship, whereas a relationship with a dating partner is considered a voluntary relationship. Involuntary and voluntary relationships involve different expectations, and Altman and Taylor explained that differentiating between these relationship types is important.

Implications of Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory has been supported in romantic relationship research. When examining online daters, Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) found that perceived online dating success is not predicted by honesty in self-presentation. The authors explain that this particular finding shows support for social penetration theory because individuals tend to withhold negative or very revealing information early on in relationships. Additionally, according to social penetration theory, negative facets of individuals' personalities oftentimes reside in the central layers of personalities and do not emerge until later in a relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Craig, Igiel, Wright, Cunningham, and Ploeger (2007) explain that breadth and depth are important to relationship development. As relationships progress, both breadth and depth continue to increase in a predictable fashion, which is evidence of the social penetration process (Craig et al., 2007). The researchers found that that greater breadth of self-disclosure predicted greater depth of self-disclosure, meaning that the more categories of information shared, the more likely individuals were to share very revealing information from the central layers of their personalities (Craig et al., 2007). Even though self-disclosure may not progress as quickly in CMC as FtF, it plays an important role in online relationships (Craig et al., 2007).

However, Ji and Lieber (2008) found that the order of social penetration processes might be reversed in online dating. They found that “emotions . . . were disclosed more than factual information in [online dating] profiles” and that users tended to open up more quickly than they would through FtF interaction (p. 32). Ji and Lieber found that social penetration theory’s cost-reward framework was useful when examining online interactions. When individuals believe that rewards are high and costs are low, they “approach the core of the personality structure and share feelings, values, and needs” (Ji & Lieber, 2008, p. 33).

Evaluating Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory allows researchers to examine interactions among many types of dyadic relationships. Altman and Taylor (1973) argue that the exchange of information allows dyads to develop intimacy and evaluate the rewards and costs of continuing a particular relationship. The social penetration process occurs in both FtF and CMC contexts as romantic relationships develop; therefore, comparing variables related to social penetration theory, such as intimacy, is advantageous to this study. Social penetration theory helps researchers to explain a “common sense” issue, the initiation of dyadic relationships. Altman and Taylor’s explanation of social penetration processes provides researchers with many issues to consider when examining how romantic relationships develop. For example, the social penetration stages, personality layers, breadth, depth, cost/reward analysis, and involuntary/voluntary relationships are just a few of the concepts included in the social penetration theory; these concepts can assist researchers in examining many dimensions of romantic relationships.

Comparing relationships that begin through FtF interaction or through CMC with the use of social penetration theory allows researchers to uncover if and/or how different these romantic relationships are. For example, is intimacy stronger in CMC relationships because an individual learns a great deal about his or her partner by viewing an online dating or Facebook profile? Or is intimacy stronger in FtF relationships because the physical proximity allows an individual to experience all that his or her partner has to offer from the beginning of the relationship?

Relationship Satisfaction

Whether individuals meet their partners through FtF or online communication, relationship satisfaction is an important factor in relationship length and success (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Relationship satisfaction is “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Research has found that many predictors of relationship satisfaction (e.g., similarity in communication style, intimacy, commitment, trust, etc.) exist. Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s study examined “which predictors of FtF relationship satisfaction hold true for online romantic relationships” (p. 154). They tested similarity, commitment, intimacy, trust, attributional confidence, and communication satisfaction as predictor variables for relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships, and found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction.

A limitation associated with Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s (2006) study included “the lack of a FtF comparison group” (p. 168). The current study will seek to expand upon Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s findings by comparing the dating relationships of individuals who begin dating through FtF interaction or CMC.

Specifically, the three variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction (intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction) in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's research will be examined. This study will also include a new variable, physical attraction, because uncovering if differences in physical attraction exist between FtF and CMC relationships will provide insight into whether or not the medium in which individuals initially communicate relates to levels of physical attraction. Is physical proximity from the beginning of the relationship necessary for physical attraction? Understanding if intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction predict relationship satisfaction will provide further support for variables that predict relationship satisfaction in relationships that begin either FtF or online.

Relationship Satisfaction Among Romantic Partners

Relationship satisfaction "is a strong indicator of relationship length and success" (Anderson and Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). Rusbult and Buunk (1993) determined that couples who had high levels of relationship satisfaction also indicated high levels of intimacy and commitment. Many other factors can determine how satisfied couples are in their relationships such as communication skills and conflict management (e.g., Halford et al., 2010). Understanding what factors contribute to relationship satisfaction is important for both those who are involved in romantic relationships as well as professionals who offer practical advice to individuals and couples who are seeking satisfying relationships.

Evaluating Relationship Satisfaction Among Romantic Partners

If individuals are in romantic relationships, they typically want to be satisfied in those relationships. Therefore, identifying the variables that predict relationship satisfaction is useful for couples who want to be satisfied with their relationships that begin

in both FtF and CMC contexts. However, two factors can hinder conducting research related to relationship satisfaction. First, relationship satisfaction is a construct that is often self-reported, which is subject to social desirability bias. Individuals do not always want to admit that they are dissatisfied with their relationships. Second, the amount and variety of variables that have predicted relationship satisfaction is considerably large. Condensing predictors of relationship satisfaction is difficult due to the diversity of relationships. For example, couple A may be satisfied, and have a high level of intimacy in their relationship, whereas couple B may also be just as satisfied, but have a low level of intimacy in their relationship.

Intimacy

This study will examine emotional intimacy, which is “a perception of closeness to another that is conducive to the sharing of personal feelings, accompanied by expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring” (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 194). Emotional intimacy is vital to both the emotional and physical health of individuals in relationships (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Hence, comparing the emotional intimacy of FtF and online relationships in this study is an important variable not only for the relationships, but also for the individuals themselves. Social penetration theory includes intimacy as one of the significant factors that can contribute to the development of satisfying relationships (Taylor & Altman, 1987). In a study that examined both FtF and CMC relationships, Scott, Mottarella, and Lavooy (2006) found that participants experienced a higher level of intimacy in FtF relationships than CMC relationships. However, previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997) has found that intimacy is higher in CMC relationships than

FtF relationships. Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) explained there is a connection between intimacy and trust: "Trust and intimacy are linked closely; as partners grow closer and depth increases, trust develops and as trust increases, so do levels of intimacy" (p. 166).

Trust

Trust is defined as "the degree of confidence [one] feels when [one] think[s] about a relationship" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). Larzelere and Huston (1980) found that trust was "associated with love and with intimacy of self-disclosure" (p. 595). Stinnett and Walters (1977) explain that trust can increase security in relationships and allows individuals to share personal feelings and dreams. On the contrary, individuals who lack trust "are inclined to react negatively to information about their partners that they perceive to be unfavorable" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 158). Hence, trust can heavily affect how one partner perceives the other in both positive and negative ways.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction is the positive emotion an individual feels after a successful and fulfilling communicative interaction (Hecht, 1978). When an individual's expectations for a particular "interaction are met and fulfilled," satisfying communication occurs (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 159). Individuals who initiate relationships through CMC must heavily rely on communication, especially in the beginning of the relationship, because "the online communication *is* the relationship" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166).

Physical Attraction

Dimensions of Attraction

Attraction relates to judgments about whether an individual “likes” someone and whether or not an individual “feels good” in his or her presence (McCroskey & McCain, 1972, p. 1). McCroskey and McCain explain two conclusions that relate to attraction and communication: 1) “The more people are attracted to one another, the more they will communicate with each other” and 2) “The more we are attracted to another person, the more influence that person has on us in interpersonal communication” (p. 1). Drawing from previous research related to attraction, McCroskey and McCain developed a three-dimensional construct of attraction: 1) social or liking dimension, 2) a task or respect dimension, and 3) a physical or appearance dimension.

The current study examined only the physical dimension of attraction. Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) examined physical attractiveness and found that both men and women predicted physically attractive people to be more likely than physically unattractive people to have positive characteristics including kindness, sociability, and sexual warmth. Additionally, the participants thought that physically attractive people would be more interesting to date (Dion et al., 1972). Reis, Nezlek, and Wheeler (1980) found that attractive people spend more time socializing than unattractive people. Therefore, physical attraction can play a vital role in how couples in romantic relationships communicate.

Attraction Among Romantic Partners

Examining physical attraction among individuals who initiate relationships through FtF interaction and CMC is important in exploring two types of romantic relationships.

Fiore and Donath (2004) explain that proximity and familiarity are powerful in determining attraction. Online dating provides individuals with effective tools to identify people who are not only close to them, but also who share similar interests (Fiore & Donath, 2004). However, dating on the Internet does not allow for all of the components of FtF attraction (e.g., specific smell of a partner) to enter a CMC dating relationship. Some of the participants in a study by Heino, et al. (2005) explained that dating online can be characterized by the “loss of excitement or ‘magic’ of just meeting someone FtF” (p. 19). Online daters much wait until their first FtF meeting with partners to gauge the “chemistry” in their relationships. FtF daters can experience this feeling, if it’s there, from the beginning of a relationship (Heino, et al., 2005).

However, Antheunis et al. (2009) explain that reduced nonverbal cues and the ability to be visually anonymous online can enhance interpersonal attraction. Therefore, individuals who communicate via CMC might not worry as much about how other people perceive them, and will disclose private information more freely than in a similar FtF interaction (Walther, 1996). Previous studies have also noted that the increase in self-disclosure can stimulate attraction (e.g., Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Walther 1996; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001).

Evaluating Attraction Among Romantic Partners

Individuals who initiate relationships through FtF interaction or CMC may experience physical attraction in different ways. If couples date online and begin to communicate hyperpersonally, their expectations could be very high before the first FtF interactions occur (Walther, 1996). Occasionally, individuals’ heightened expectations online can lead to disappointment in new FtF encounters (Walther, 1996; Brym & Lenton,

2001). On the other hand, FtF couples are not surprised or disappointed about their levels of physical attraction in that they have experienced their partners in a FtF situation from the beginning of the relationship. Comparing the levels of physical attraction between FtF and CMC couples is warranted in order to understand whether or not the media can play a role in the levels of physical attraction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to uncover potential differences that exist between individuals who begin their relationships FtF or online. Anderson and Emmers-Sommers' (2006) research, which examined CMC relationships, included variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction in FtF relationships. This study will examine the same variables that were found to predict relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's study (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction), along with a new variable, physical attraction. Including individuals who began their relationships through both FtF and CMC will allow this study to compare the two media that people use to initiate romantic relationships. Specifically, the study first examines potential differences that exist between levels of intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction between individuals who initiate relationships FtF or online.

Previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Hian et al., 2004; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther, 1996; Walther, 1997) has found that individuals who communicate through CMC adapt to the lack of nonverbal cues and report higher levels of intimacy than individuals who communicate through FtF interaction. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Individuals who met their partners online via CMC will report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners FtF.

The hyperpersonal model could account for high levels of trust in Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's (2006) study. Individuals, who meet through CMC, when communicating hyperpersonally, create heightened impressions of their partners (Walther, 1996). Oftentimes, individuals who initiate relationships online will fill in the blanks with positive ideas of what their partners will be like in FtF settings (Fiore et al., 2008). However, when initiating relationships online, individuals still remain cautious when evaluating potential romantic partners' profile information (Ellison, et al., 2006; Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Due to inconsistent ideas about trust online, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Is there a difference in trust levels between individuals who met their partners through FtF interaction or CMC?

When individuals meet their romantic partners online, as Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) mentioned, CMC *is* the relationship, especially before individuals choose to meet in a FtF setting. Because of the heavy reliance on communication at the beginning of CMC relationships, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Individuals who met their partners online via CMC will report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF.

Craig et al. (2007) found that social attraction was high in individuals who communicated via CMC; however, physical attraction was not examined in the study. Previous research (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007) has examined interpersonal attraction in CMC, but these studies

have not focused on physical attraction levels reported by individuals in romantic relationships. Hence, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: Is there a difference in physical attraction levels between individuals who met their partners through FtF interaction or CMC?

Relationship satisfaction “is a strong indicator of relationship length and success in traditional FtF intimate relationships” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155).

Therefore, relationship satisfaction is of interest to individuals who desire lasting and satisfying relationships, no matter which context in which the relationship begins.

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer explored relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships, but did not include a FtF comparison group. Understanding if initiating relationships in person or online can lead to higher levels of relationship satisfaction is warranted. Hence:

RQ3: Is there a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online?

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction significantly predicted relationship satisfaction in CMC relationships. However, as mentioned previously, their study did not include a FtF comparison group. Therefore, the present study examines relationship satisfaction and whether or not intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction are predictors of relationship satisfaction in relationships that began FtF:

RQ4: To what extent do intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction predict relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that began FtF?

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer’s (2006) study found that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction predicted relationship satisfaction in CMC romantic

relationships. Therefore, this study predicts that these variables and physical attraction will relate to relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that begin via CMC. Physical attraction is added to the three predictor variables in confidence that it could help to explain more of the variance related to relationship satisfaction in CMC romantic relationships:

H3: Intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction will predict relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships that began online.

Conclusion

This review of literature examined the scholarship related to FtF and CMC romantic relationships. The hyperpersonal communication model, social penetration theory, relationship satisfaction, and physical attraction were defined and explained in detail. Additionally, current and previous research related to these variables aided in guiding the argument for this study. Finally, the proposed research questions and hypotheses address the exploration of relationship satisfaction and physical attraction in individuals who initiate relationships in person or online through CMC.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

This chapter outlines the methodology for the current study. A description of the participants, procedures, and measures is presented. This study's data was collected in one phase; this chapter explains all of the details related to the method.

Participants

The target population included individuals currently involved in romantic relationships that began in person (FtF) or online (CMC). Two hundred seventy-six participants completed an online survey. One hundred ninety-six (71%) participants reported that they initiated their relationships in person, and 80 (29%) participants reported that they initiated their relationships online. The sample included 124 (44.9%) men and 152 (55.1%) women, with ages ranging from 18 to 83 ($M = 37.84$, $SD = 13.12$). Two hundred thirty-six (86.4%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and 37 (13.6%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the same sex. Three participants neglected to indicate the type of relationship in which they were involved. Participants were asked about the exclusivity of their relationships. Two hundred seven (75%) participants indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 47 (17%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and 22 (8%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Sixty-six (23.9%) of participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, 17 (6.2%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, 10 (3.6%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, six (2.2%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, 12 (4.3%) participants were in their relationships

for nine to ten months, and 165 (59.8%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

The FtF sample consisted of 82 (41.8%) men and 114 (58.2%) women, with ages ranging from 18 to 81 ($M = 37.43$, $SD = 12.79$). One hundred seventy-two (87.8%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, 21 (10.7%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the same sex, and three (1.5%) participants neglected to indicate whether they were in a same or opposite sex relationship. Fifty-eight (29.6%) of these individuals met their partners through a friend, 56 (28.6%) met their partners in a public place, 48 (24.5%) met their partners at work, 16 (8.2%) met their partners at school, and 18 (9.1%) met their partners through other circumstances (e.g., church). One hundred fifty (76.5%) indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 33 (16.8%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and 13 (6.6%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Forty-two (21.4%) participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, nine (4.6%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, five (2.6%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, three (1.5%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, 10 (5.1%) participants were in their relationships for nine to ten months, and 125 (63.8%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

The CMC sample consisted of 42 (52.5%) men and 38 (47.5%) women, with ages ranging from 19 to 83 ($M = 38.85$, $SD = 13.94$). Sixty-four (80%) participants were in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and 16 (20%) participants were in a

relationship with someone of the same sex. Forty-three (53.75%) of these individuals met their partners on an online dating website, 21 (26.25%) met their partners on a social networking website, 11 (13.75%) met their partners in a chat room, and five (6.25%) met their partners on another type of website (e.g., personal blog). Fifty-seven (71.25%) participants indicated that they were in exclusive relationships, 14 (17.5%) indicated that the exclusivity of their relationships was undefined, and nine (11.25%) indicated that they were in non-exclusive relationships. Seventy-one (88.75%) of the CMC participants had met their partners in a FtF setting, whereas nine (11.25%) participants had not met their partners in a FtF setting. Participants were also asked how long they have been in their current romantic relationships. Twenty-four (30%) participants indicated that they had been in their relationships for two months or less, eight (10%) participants were in their relationships for three to four months, five (6.25%) participants were in their relationships for five to six months, three (3.75%) participants were in their relationships for seven to eight months, two (2.5%) participants were in their relationships for nine to 10 months, and 38 (47.5%) participants were in their relationships for 11 months or longer.

Procedures

Participants for this study were recruited through the use of Zoomerang.com, an online data collection service. Zoomerang.com retains a panel of more than two million people who answer questions related to demographics, lifestyle, and occupational attitudes (Market Tools, 2010). This service allowed the researcher to generate a purposive sample for this study based on “pre-screen” questions such as, “Are you currently in a dating relationship?” and “How did you initially meet the person you’re dating?” If individuals met the initial criteria for the study (in a romantic relationship that began in person or

online), they continued to complete the survey, whereas those who did not meet the study's criteria were screened out.

Individuals who met their partners FtF or online completed a 35-item online survey and answered questions or responded to statements that pertained to relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Upon completing the survey, participants earned 75 "Zoompoints" as compensation for their time. Zoompoints are accumulated by the panelists and can be redeemed for various prizes on the Zoomerang.com website.

Measures

Relationship Satisfaction

In order to measure relationship satisfaction, Busby, Crane, Larson, and Christensen's (1995) Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) was utilized. The RDAS is a revised version of the previous Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), which was originally developed by Spanier (1976). Busby et al. (1995) explain that the RDAS displays good content, criterion-related, and construct validity. In previous research, the RDAS Cronbach's alpha scores of each subscale have been at least .80. The full RDAS Cronbach's alpha score have ranged from .69 to .90 (e.g., Erwin, 2008; Busby et al., 1995). Questions in this measure include three subscales: consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. The satisfaction subscale was the only subscale used in this study.

The consensus subscale includes items related to agreement on affection, major decisions, and sex relations (Busby et al., 1995). If individuals (both FtF and online) were in newer relationships or if online daters have not met their partners FtF, they may not have discussed some of the items related to consensus, meaning they may not know if they

agree with their partners on these issues. The cohesion subscale includes items related to engaging in outside activities and working on projects with partners (Busby et al., 1995). As previously mentioned, if online daters have not met their partners FtF, they would not have any relevant experiences related to these scale items.

In the satisfaction subscale, responses range from “extremely dissatisfied” (1) to “extremely satisfied” (7). The RDAS (satisfaction subscale) contains four questions, which were included in the online survey in order to measure participants’ relationship satisfaction; this scale specifically measures issues related to conflict and stability of relationships (Busby et al., 1995). For example, “How often do you and the person you’re dating ‘get on each other’s nerves?’” (Busby et al., 1995, p. 307). The RDAS (satisfaction subscale) yielded a Cronbach’s alpha = .89. In the FtF sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was .89 and the CMC sample’s alpha was .88.

Intimacy

Sinclair and Dowdy (2005) explain emotional intimacy in their development of the Emotional Intimacy Scale (EIS) as a “perception of closeness to another that allows sharing of personal feelings, accompanied by expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstrations of caring” (p. 193). Previous research has yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 (e.g., Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005). Sinclair and Dowdy found support for construct and criterion-related validity when developing this scale. Additionally, the EIS is distinguishable from other intimacy scales based on its brevity and its “focus on perceived emotional intimacy in one close relationship” (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 195). The EIS includes five items, which are measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale. Responses for the statements range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Example survey

items include, "This person completely accepts me as I am" and "This person cares deeply for me" (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005, p. 196). Cronbach's alpha for the EIS = .92. Cronbach's alpha was .91 for the FtF sample, and .93 for the CMC sample.

Trust

To measure the level of trust individuals felt toward their partners, the current study applied Rempel and Holmes' (1986) Trust Scale, which is designed for both dating and married relationships. The Trust Scale includes three dimensions of trust: predictability, dependability, and faith. This study applied the dependability dimension of trust, which asked the participants to reflect on whether or not their partners could be relied upon.

The predictability dimension of trust was not utilized because dating partners may not have established any sort of routine or understanding of how their significant other would behave in certain situations: "I know how my partner is going to act" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 28). The faith dimension of trust was not utilized because many of the items include statements related to the future of the relationship; the faith dimension seems more appropriate to use if a study examines relationships that are quite established: "Though times may change and the future is uncertain, I have faith that my partner will always be ready and willing to offer me strength, come what may" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 31).

The dependability subscale focuses on the qualities of the partner which measure confidence in the face of risk and potential hurt (Rempel & Holmes, 1986); relationships, no matter how serious, involve some level of risk in that each partner is always "taking a chance" on a relationship. Research has reported a Cronbach's alpha score of .72 for the dependability subscale (e.g., Rempel & Holmes, 1986). The dependability dimension of

the Trust Scale includes statements such as, "I have found that the person I'm dating is a thoroughly dependable person, especially when it comes to things that are important" (Rempel & Holmes, 1986, p. 32). Questions in the six-item dependability dimension of the Trust Scale asked participants to rate on a seven-point, Likert-type scale how dependable their partners were. The Trust Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .83 for the entire sample, $\alpha = .83$ for the FtF sample, and $\alpha = .81$ for the CMC sample.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction was measured using an abridged version of Hecht's (1978) communication satisfaction scale (e.g., Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; VanLear, 1988, 1991). Previous research has yielded Cronbach's alphas ranging from .93 to .96 with the shortened version of the scale (e.g., VanLear, 1988, 1991; Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). The eight item, seven-point, Likert-type scale measures individuals' feelings about communicative interactions (e.g., "The person I'm dating expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say"). The abridged communication satisfaction scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .96 for the full, FtF, and CMC sample.

Physical Attraction

To operationalize physical attraction, McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond's (2006) updated measurement of interpersonal attraction was utilized. The instrument can measure three dimensions of attraction: task, social, and physical. (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). For the purpose of this study, only physical attraction was measured. Because this study's focus was on romantic relationships, the author wanted to focus on variables that were most relevant to individuals who were in dating relationships. The task dimension of this measure includes items such as, "I could rely on her/him to get the job done"

(McCroskey et al., 2006, p. 20); individuals in dating relationships might not have established task-related expectations for their partners. The social dimension of this measure includes items such as, "He/she is sociable with me" (McCroskey et al., 2006, p. 20). McCroskey and McCain (1974) explain that social attraction is related to the extent to which individuals are perceived as members of the participants' social network. This study focused on variables that dealt specifically with explaining how one romantic partner evaluated his or her partner and their relationship. Antheunis et al. (2009) explained that reduced nonverbal cues and the ability to be visually anonymous online can enhance interpersonal attraction, so this study sought to find out whether or not physical attraction levels differed between FtF and online participants. Previous research (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong 2008; Walther, 1997) has yielded Cronbach's alphas ranging from .86 to .95 for the physical dimension of attraction. The 12-item physical attraction component of the measure includes statements such as "I find him/her very attractive physically" and responses range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7) on a seven-point, Likert-type scale (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006, p. 21). The scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha = .95. The Cronbach's alpha for the FtF sample was .95 and .93 for the CMC sample.

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences, if any, between individuals who initiated romantic relationships through FtF interaction or CMC. First, one-way ANOVAs were run to analyze differences in intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction, and relationship satisfaction of individuals who began their relationships through FtF or CMC. In order to understand whether or not intimacy,

trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction relate to relationship satisfaction in FtF and CMC romantic relationships, linear regression analyses were performed. Finally, the study utilized one-way ANOVAs (post-hoc tests) in order to test for potential effects of sample characteristics (e.g., sex, exclusivity of relationships, etc.) on the relational variables.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodology used in order to conduct a study of relationship satisfaction and physical attraction in individuals who begin dating FtF or online through CMC. A full description of the participants, procedures, measures, and analysis for this study was provided. The next chapter will report the results of this study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the study. This goal of the study was to uncover potential differences between individuals who initiated relationships in person or online. Also, this study sought to find predictor variables of relationship satisfaction in both types of relationships.

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.20$) would report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.18$). To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The data were not consistent with this hypothesis [$F(1, 272) = .016$, $p = .899$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$].

The first research question asked if there was a difference in the levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.32$) or online ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.24$). The research question was tested by performing a one-way ANOVA, and no significant difference was found in the levels of trust [$F(1, 272) = .558$, $p = .46$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$].

The second hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.10$) would report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.11$). To test this hypothesis a one-way ANOVA was performed; the data were not consistent with this hypothesis [$F(1, 272) = .217$, $p = .64$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$].

The second research question asked if a difference in physical attraction levels existed between individuals who met their partners FtF ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.14$) or through CMC ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 1.07$). To test this research question, the researcher conducted a

one-way ANOVA. Results indicated that there was no significant difference in the levels of attraction [$F(1, 271) = .065, p = .799, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000$].

Research question three asked if there was a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online. A one-way ANOVA was conducted, and results indicated no significant difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF ($M = 1.43, SD = 1.04$) and online ($M = 1.33, SD = 1.08$), [$F(1, 272) = .459, p = .498, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$].

The fourth research question asked what variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction) predicted relationship satisfaction for individuals in relationships that began FtF. In order to test this research question, a linear regression was performed. Results indicated that the predictor variables accounted for 38% of the variance in FtF relationship satisfaction, $R^2 = .38$, adjusted $R^2 = .37$, [$F(4, 189) = 29.19, p < .001$]. Results of the regression model indicated that two predictor variables, trust and communication satisfaction, were significant at an alpha of less than .001. Standardized beta coefficients, t -values, and partial correlations for the regression model are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Linear Regression of Predictor Variables of Relationship Satisfaction in Individuals who Begin Dating in Person

| Variable | β | t value | Sig. | Partial r | B |
|----------|---------|-----------|------|-------------|-------|
| Intimacy | -.152 | -1.635 | .104 | -.118 | -.134 |
| Trust* | .340 | 4.394 | .000 | .304 | .270 |
| ComSat* | .429 | 4.982 | .000 | .341 | .404 |
| PhysAtt | .099 | 1.475 | .142 | .107 | .091 |

Note: * Statistically significant at $p < .001$.

The third hypothesis predicted that intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction would predict relationship satisfaction in relationships that began via CMC. A linear regression was performed in order to find predictor variables of relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that the predictor variables accounted for 51% of the variance in CMC relationship satisfaction, $R^2 = .51$, adjusted $R^2 = .48$, [$F(4, 74) = 19.16, p < .001$]. Results of the regression model indicated that two predictor variables, communication satisfaction and physical attraction, were significant at an alpha of less than .01. Standardized beta coefficients, *t*-values, and partial correlations for the regression model are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Linear Regression of Predictor Variables of Relationship Satisfaction in Individuals who Begin Dating Online

| Variable | β | <i>t</i> value | Sig. | Partial <i>r</i> | <i>B</i> |
|-----------|---------|----------------|------|------------------|----------|
| Intimacy | -.145 | -1.066 | .290 | -.123 | -.130 |
| Trust | .200 | 1.927 | .058 | .219 | .174 |
| ComSat** | .474 | 3.524 | .001 | .379 | .465 |
| PhysAtt** | .319 | 3.251 | .002 | .354 | .322 |

Note: ** Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

After testing the research questions and hypotheses, post-hoc tests (one-way ANOVAs) were performed to test for effects of the sample characteristics on the relational variables of interest. Sample characteristics that were tested include: sex, exclusivity of relationships, same/opposite sex relationships, whether or not individuals who met online had met in a FtF setting, and the length of dating relationships. Several significant differences were found.

Individuals' sex played a role in how physically attracted they were to their dating partners [$F(1, 269) = 6.92, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .025$]. Specific to relationships that began FtF, females ($M = 6.10, SD = .982$) were significantly more attracted to their partners than males were ($M = 5.66, SD = 1.28$), [$F(1, 192) = 7.28, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .037$]. In terms of online daters, males ($M = 6.03, SD = 1.04$), were more attracted to their partners than females ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.08$) were, but the difference was not significant ($p = .161$).

Exclusivity was another sample characteristic that was tested. First, the relationship between intimacy and exclusivity of relationships was examined [$F(2, 271) = 13.60, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .091$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began through both FtF and CMC had a significantly higher level of intimacy ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.14$) than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.05$). More specifically, individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began FtF reported a significantly higher level of intimacy ($M = 5.96, SD = 1.12$) than individuals who were in relationships that were non-exclusive ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.29$) or undefined ($M = 4.90, SD = .964$), [$F(2, 192) = 14.67, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .133$].

Additionally, the exclusivity of relationships affected the level of trust in relationships that began FtF [$F(2, 192) = 11.45, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .107$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships had significantly higher levels of trust ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.29$) than individuals who were relationships that were non-exclusive ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.46$) or undefined ($M = 4.53, SD = .965$).

The exclusivity of relationships also affected the levels of physical attraction in FtF relationships [$F(2, 191) = 4.25, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .043$]. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships were more physically attracted ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.05$) to their

partners than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.34$). Exclusivity related to more variables of interest (intimacy, trust, and physical attraction) than other sample characteristics in this study.

Levels of intimacy varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met online had met in a FtF setting [$F(1, 77) = 5.40, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .066$]. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting ($M = 6.6, SD = .40$) reported significantly higher levels of intimacy than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* met them in a FtF setting ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.23$).

Additionally, levels of communication satisfaction varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met online had met in a FtF setting [$F(1, 77) = 4.53, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .056$]. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting ($M = 6.53, SD = .52$) reported significantly higher levels of communication satisfaction than individuals who initially met their partners online and had met them in a FtF setting ($M = 5.72, SD = 1.12$).

Same sex and opposite sex relationships were also tested. Specific to relationships that began online, individuals who were in same sex relationships reported nearly significant higher levels of trust ($M = 5.90, SD = 1.07$) than individuals who were in opposite sex relationships ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.26$), [$F(1, 77) = 3.42, p = .068$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$].

The length of relationships was the final sample characteristic that was tested with the variables of interest. The length (specifically the number of months) of individuals' relationships that began both in person and online interacted with the levels of intimacy that were reported [$F(5, 268) = 3.38, p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$]. Individuals who met

their partners in person and who dated them for a longer period of time (11 months or longer) ($M = 5.87, SD = 1.14$) reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who dated their partners for two months or less ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.27$), [$F(5, 189) = 2.23, p = .053$, partial $\eta^2 = .056$]. Individuals who met their partners online and who dated them for a longer period of time (11 months or longer) ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.10$) reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who dated their partners between three and four months ($M = 4.99, SD = 1.02$), [$F(5, 73) = 2.35, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .139$].

The length of relationships also affected levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person [$F(5, 268) = 3.10, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .055$]. Trust levels reported by individuals who met their partners FtF and who had been dating them for two months or less ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.19$) were lower than the trust levels reported by individuals who had been dating their partners for 11 months or more ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.35$), [$F(5, 189) = 2.47, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .061$].

Conclusion

This chapter explained the results of the study. The variables in the study were analyzed and relationships were reported. The final chapter will discuss the implications of the results that were presented in this chapter. Additionally, the chapter will address limitations of the study and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to uncover potential differences between individuals who began romantic relationships FtF or online. Specifically, the study examined relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. The following section explains implications of the results, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research in the area of FtF and CMC romantic relationships.

Effects of Meeting FtF or via CMC on Relational Variables

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online would report higher intimacy levels than individuals who met their partners in person, but the data were not consistent with this assumption. As mentioned previously, individuals who met their partners online and had *not* met their partners in person reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who met their partners online and had met them FtF. Once individuals who meet their partners online do meet them in person, the levels of intimacy are relatively the same as individuals who meet their partners FtF. The effects of hyperpersonal communication appear to wear off once individuals who initially met online do meet in person. The fact that there is no difference in intimacy levels between individuals who met FtF or online suggests that the higher levels of intimacy are more prevalent when individuals are communicating strictly through CMC, which is consistent with Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model.

The first research question explored whether or not there was a difference in the levels of trust in individuals who met their partners in person or online and no significant difference was found. In this study, the majority of individuals who initially met their

partners online *had* met their partners in a FtF setting. As previously mentioned, the effects of hyperpersonal communication (e.g., heightened impressions of partners) could wear off once a FtF meeting takes place, especially because most individuals believe that someone's online profile is not a total accurate portrayal of his or her offline identity (Gibbs et al., 2006). Research has found that high levels of trust could be facilitated by CMC (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Hardey, 2004). Therefore, once CMC is less essential in online relationships that have moved to FtF relationships, levels of trust could be more comparable to individuals who initially met FtF.

The second hypothesis predicted that individuals who met their partners online via CMC would report higher communication satisfaction levels than individuals who met their partners FtF; the data were not consistent with this proposition. Communication satisfaction was higher in individuals who began their relationships via CMC and who had *not* met their partners in person than individuals who began their relationships via CMC and who *had* met their partners in person. The hyperpersonal communication model could account for this difference. In CMC, both partners are practicing selective self-presentation, which means that both parties are carefully editing their messages to maximize their potential as dating partners; therefore, hyperpersonal communication can lead to heightened views of partners and the communication they share (Walther, 1996). Communication is important to both FtF and CMC relationships; however, there might only be differences in communication satisfaction when researchers compare *strictly* CMC relationships (in which partners are potentially communicating hyperpersonally) and FtF relationships.

Research question two explored whether or not there was a difference in physical attraction levels existed between individuals who met their partners FtF or via CMC. The levels of physical attraction did not vary based on how individuals met. Physical attractiveness is oftentimes one of the most important qualities to individuals when they decide whom they would like to date (e.g., Woll, 1986; Woll & Cozby, 1987). Hence, individuals in both FtF and CMC contexts most likely decide to pursue partners whom they find attractive from the beginning of the relationship.

The third research question explored whether or not there was a difference in relationship satisfaction levels between individuals who begin dating FtF or online and no significant difference was found. This finding, or lack thereof, could be encouraging for individuals who are skeptical, but curious about online dating. According to the results of this study, there is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction levels in individuals who met in person or online.

Research question four tested for variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction) that related to relationship satisfaction reported by individuals who initially met their partners FtF. Results indicated that two predictor variables, trust and communication satisfaction, related to relationship satisfaction. Hecht (1978) explains, "Communication is satisfying to the degree to which it removes uncertainty" (p. 52). This explanation relates to trust. A vital part of trust is a partner's behavioral and relationship predictability; therefore, a person in a romantic relationship will utilize uncertainty-reducing tactics in order to understand more about a partner (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Hence, communication is used in order to reduce uncertainty, which can lead to deeper trust in a relationship. If the communication

successfully reduces the uncertainty, it will be more satisfying and trust will be enhanced since partners are more familiar and secure with relationship behaviors.

Finally, the third hypothesis predicted that intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction would relate to relationship satisfaction for individuals in relationships that began via CMC. Physical attraction and communication satisfaction related to relationship satisfaction. Previous research has found a link between communication satisfaction and physical attraction. Duran and Kelly (1988) explained that perceptions of physical attractiveness “can be somewhat influenced by a competent social performance” (p. 48). If individuals believe that their partners are communicating effectively, their perceptions of their partners’ physical attractiveness could increase. As mentioned previously, Brym and Lenton (2001) explained that 38% of participants who initially met their partners via CMC were disappointed by their FtF meetings. If individuals are pleasantly surprised by their partners’ physical attractiveness when they meet FtF, this could increase their physical attraction and relate to their relationship satisfaction.

Relationships that begin through CMC require steady communication by both individuals involved. If communication ceases, the relationship will inevitably come to an end (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), so engaging in communication that is satisfying is important for the continuation and progression of a CMC relationship. Of additional importance is the finding that communication satisfaction related to relationship satisfaction in relationships that began through FtF interaction as well. This finding supports one of Walther’s (1996) claims: a medium is not inherently impersonal, interpersonal, or hypersonal; it depends on how individuals use that particular medium.

Communication is vital in initiating, maintaining, and developing relationships (Duck & Pittman, 1994) both in person and online. Hence, research that identifies successful communication practices and strategies in romantic relationships, no matter the context, can help in producing satisfying relationships.

Post-hoc tests indicated that the sample characteristics proved to have effects on some of the relational variables included in this study. This study's goal was to uncover potential differences between initiating relationships FtF or online; therefore, testing to examine if the sample characteristics (e.g., sex, exclusivity, etc.) affected the relational variables was also useful in understanding more about these relationships. In the following section, the sample characteristics and their relationships with the variables will be discussed. Theoretical explanations and implications will also be included.

Females who began romantic relationships FtF were more physically attracted to their partners than males who began romantic relationships FtF. Although the findings were not statistically significant, the opposite was true for online daters. Males who began romantic relationships online were more physically attracted to their partners than females who began romantic relationships online. Men and women are inclined to be attracted to different qualities in romantic partners (Heino et al., 2005); men tend to look for partners who are younger and who are physically attractive, whereas women tend to look for partners who are financially stable and who have high social status (e.g., well-educated, successful career) (Lance, 1998; Woll & Cozby, 1987). Hence, perhaps the ability for men to filter through potential partners to instantly find out the age and physical attractiveness (according to pictures) is a useful tool when searching for partners to whom they will be physically attracted. Conversely, if females are looking for financial support and social

status, they might not trust what men post online and desire to experience their potential partners in FtF situations from the beginning of their relationships. Additionally, some women are intimidated by well-written profiles on online dating sites. If a man is educated and has an impressive profile, a potential partner might be “blown away” and decide not to respond (Heino et al., 2005, p. 14).

Other sex differences could account for this difference as well. Givertz and Segrin (2005) found that men’s desire to interact with partners was related to perceptions of power, and women’s desire to interact with partners was related to perceptions of quality relationships. Given these findings, perhaps men appreciate the ability to initiate relationships online and choose whether or not to contact or respond to potential partners based on the qualities that are important to them. On the other hand, perhaps women appreciate the ability to initiate relationships in person based on the fact that “chemistry” is a feeling that is stronger FtF than online (Heino et al., 2005). Finally, Cross and Madson (1997) found that males are more oriented toward independence, and females are more oriented toward interdependence. If males want independence, they could appreciate the opportunity to initiate a relationship online in that they can spend as much or as little time as they want responding to messages or searching for potential partners. Conversely, if females feel the need for interdependence, they could want to find partners who are close in proximity so that they can establish emotional, mental, and physical bonds from the beginning of relationships.

Both men and women initiate relationships in person and online. Strictly explaining that men should date online and women should date in person because they would find their partners more physically attractive would not allow for heterosexual relationships to

form. Therefore, future research should examine sex along with other variables (e.g., attachment styles) in order to uncover other factors that influence men and women to date in person or online. Also, how exactly does FtF interaction or CMC relate to perceived physical attraction? Other forms of attraction (e.g., social, task) should be examined further in comparative FtF and online romantic relationship research. Perhaps one of these other forms of attraction plays a larger role in individuals' levels of attraction.

Individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began through both FtF and CMC reported higher levels of intimacy than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined. More specifically, individuals who were in exclusive relationships that began FtF reported a significantly higher level of intimacy than individuals who were in relationships that were non-exclusive or undefined. Anderson (2009) found that individuals described the exclusivity discussion or "the talk" as stressful and/or unexpected. Once the tension from finishing the exclusivity conversation is relieved, individuals might feel more comfortable sharing intimate details with someone who they know will be in their lives for an extended period of time, which is consistent with social penetration theory. When individuals begin a relationship, they probably will not discuss the state of the relationship in the first week of dating; they will discuss this issue as the relationship progresses and when/if they decide to be committed to one another.

Individuals in relationships that are non-exclusive have the option to engage in romantic connections with other people. Therefore, they might not feel the need to share or listen to intimate disclosures with their partners. Finally, individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity is undefined could be in new relationships in which

neither party has brought to up the uncomfortable topic of engaging in an exclusive relationship. In this situation, individuals potentially have not engaged in the uncertainty reducing strategy (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) of defining the states of their relationships. On the other hand, some of the individuals in undefined relationships may not have intentions of defining their relationships. The fact that the relationships are neither exclusive nor non-exclusive could leave one or both of the partners in relationship "limbo" in which he or she/they is/are not comfortable sharing intimate information if the relationship does not have a direction. Future research could examine the effects of exclusivity on romantic relationships as well as how individuals decide whether their relationships should be exclusive, non-exclusive, or undefined.

Additionally, the exclusivity of relationships affected the level of trust in FtF relationships. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships had significantly higher levels of trust than individuals who were relationships that were non-exclusive or undefined. Trust is closely connected with intimacy; "as partners grow closer and depth increases, trust develops and as trust increases, so do levels of intimacy" (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2005, p. 166). Hence, the fact that individuals in FtF exclusive relationships had higher levels of both trust and intimacy than individuals in FtF undefined and non-exclusive relationships makes sense. Individuals who are in exclusive relationships have discussed their relationships and know that their partners will be involved in their lives for some period of time, whereas individuals in non-exclusive or undefined relationships are less certain about the state of their relationships. Trust could develop in exclusive relationships because individuals have grown closer and they have discussed the state of their relationships, which is an intimate topic. Once exclusivity is

established, individuals could feel that they can truly trust their partners, and that they can share private, intimate information with them, thus increasing levels of intimacy.

A relationship also exists between exclusivity and physical attraction in FtF relationships. Individuals who were in exclusive relationships were more physically attracted to their partners than individuals who were in relationships in which exclusivity was undefined. Individuals in exclusive relationships could have reported higher levels of physical attraction because they feel that an important factor involved with “being exclusive” is finding their partners physically attractive. Additionally, the level of physical attractiveness of individuals’ partners could have played into why they decided to declare their relationships exclusive in the first place.

Exclusivity related to more of the relational variables than any of the other sample characteristics. When reflecting upon the exclusivity of romantic relationships, it is also important to consider new relationship forms that are present today such as friends with benefits, “cougars” seeking younger men, sleepover relationships, and so on. These types of relationships could change individuals’ views on what the ideal relationship encompasses and how exclusive relationships need to be. This study did not ask specific questions related to the exclusivity of participants’ relationships; however, future research should examine the relationship between exclusivity and how/why individuals choose to define their romantic relationships as exclusive, non-exclusive, or undefined. Additionally, understanding that individuals will interpret exclusivity in different ways depending on their previous or current relationships is an important factor to consider.

Levels of intimacy varied according to whether or not individuals who initially met their partners online had met in a FtF setting. Individuals who had *not* yet met their

partners in a FtF setting reported significantly higher levels of intimacy than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* since met them in a FtF setting. This finding is consistent with the hyperpersonal communication model in that CMC can lead to higher levels of intimacy than similar FtF interactions (Walther, 1996); individuals who communicate strictly via CMC have been found to report higher levels of intimacy than individuals who communicate FtF in previous research as well (e.g., Antheunis et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). When individuals communicate strictly online with their romantic partners, they have “a tendency to fill in the blanks optimistically when faced with limited information about a person” (Fiore et al., 2008, p. 798). Hence, when individuals communicate strictly online with their dating partners, they may report a higher level of intimacy because they have heightened impressions of these partners due to communication functioning hyperpersonally. Also, when individuals communicate online, they oftentimes feel more comfortable sharing private details that could be more difficult to share in FtF interactions, which could lead to higher levels of intimacy (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

Communication satisfaction also varied according to whether or not individuals who met online had met in person. Individuals who had *not* met their partners in a FtF setting reported higher levels of communication satisfaction than individuals who initially met their partners online and *had* met them in a FtF setting. In strictly CMC romantic relationships, “the online communication *is* the relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166). Hence, individuals in CMC romantic relationships who have not met FtF could heavily value online communication because of their “inability to ‘go out,’ have physical contact, or experience other components related to physical presence that are

enmeshed in FtF romantic unions” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 166). Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) who developed media richness theory would assume the preferred medium for initiating romantic relationships is a rich medium such as FtF interaction; however, Walther (1996) explains that social interactions via CMC, in some cases, can match or even exceed what individuals can accomplish in similar FtF interactions. Walther’s explanation could be true for the participants in this study. If romantic partners are communicating hyperpersonally, they could have heightened views of their partners as well as their abilities to skillfully communicate (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Walther, 1996).

Practical implications exist for the higher levels of intimacy and communication satisfaction reported by individuals who have not met their partners in a FtF setting. Individuals who begin their relationships online should approach their FtF meetings with caution; the results of this study suggest that individuals could have romanticized visions of their partners before they meet them in person. Therefore, if individuals choose to date online with intentions of meeting FtF eventually, they should strive to have realistic expectations of their partners prior to meeting them in person.

Individuals who were in same sex relationships that began online reported higher levels of trust than individuals who were in opposite sex relationships. Haas and Stafford (2005) compared same/opposite sex relationships and relational maintenance behaviors. Individuals in both types of relationships reported shared tasks (e.g., paying bills, doing laundry, cleaning) as the most common way that they maintained their relationships. However, the results varied in the second most common way relationships were maintained. Same sex couples reported that meta-relational communication (e.g.,

discussions about the relationship) was the second most common relational maintenance strategy, whereas opposite sex couples indicated that proactive prosocial behavior (e.g., humor) was the second most common relational maintenance strategy.

Haas and Stafford's findings could indicate that same sex couples need to discuss their relationships more often due to that fact that their relationships can lack legal bonds (depending on where they live) or can lack societal/familial support. Emotional commitment is very important to same sex relationships, especially if a legal bond/support is lacking; therefore, same sex couples could discuss the state of their relationships more often to ensure that both partners are committed to the relationship. Through this communication about commitment to the relationship, partners could be building trust in one another.

Although same and opposite sex couples reported the same most common relational maintenance strategy in the previously mentioned study, same sex couples have other sources of turmoil to face. Aylor (2008) explains that "individuals in same sex relationships face unique challenges because of internalized discrimination, lack of institutional recognition, fewer 'role model' relationships, and lack of social support from families of origin" (p. 3). Previous work (Cabaj & Klinger, 1996; Lynch, 1987; Slater, 1995) has explained that individuals who are pursuing or who are in same sex relationships deal with oppression that can lead to low self-esteem, low self-disclosure, lack of support, and lack of openness and comfort in romantic relationships. All of these challenges could lead to a lack of trust in individuals' FtF lives, and they might seek solace through dating online instead of FtF. If individuals who are pursuing same sex relationships have not yet "come out" in their FtF lives, dating online could be ideal due to the relative anonymity

(Walther, 1996) that CMC allows. Additionally, looking for a partner online could be easier than meeting a partner FtF. Potential partners most likely list their sexual orientation on their profiles, whereas in FtF situations individuals' sexual orientation is not evident at first glance. Hence, individuals seeking same sex partners could find online dating to be a safe, comfortable, and efficient way to meet someone. However, this study did not obtain details about the nature of individuals' same sex relationships (e.g., Were the participants "out of the closet?" Do the participants' families support their sexual preference?). Future research should investigate same sex relationships more in depth in order to uncover what differences exist between same sex and opposite sex relationships that begin in person or online. Also, distinctions need to be made in terms of what type of same sex relationships are examined (gay men or lesbians). Previous research has found differences among same sex relationships. For example, gay men and lesbians commonly practice monogamy; however, lesbians tend to place more significance on monogamy than do gay men (Fitzpatrick, Jandt, Myrick, & Edgar, 1994; Green, Bettinger, & Zachs, 1996; Mendola, 1980).

Finally, the length of relationships was the last sample characteristic that was tested with the study's variables. The length (the number of months) of individuals' relationships that began both in person and online significantly interacted with intimacy. Also, the length of individuals' relationships that began FtF significantly interacted with trust. In other words, individuals who met their partners in person and who dated them for a longer period of time reported higher levels of intimacy and trust than individuals who dated their partners for a shorter period of time. In their study of CMC relationships, Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) also found that participants reported higher levels of trust and

intimacy the longer they had dated. These findings concerning relationship length are consistent with Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's findings, but also extend their work with the addition of the FtF participants. Additionally, these findings are consistent with social penetration theory, which explains that individuals' levels of intimacy will increase as relationships develop over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The results of this study and Anderson and Emmers-Sommer's study suggest that intimacy and trust are two relationship dimensions that increase as a relationship progresses.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

When research is conducted, limitations are important to acknowledge. The current study consists of several limitations including the uneven sample size, the broad sample characteristics, and the concerns associated with self-reported data.

This study's goal was to compare and contrast relationships that began through FtF interaction and via CMC. Because two groups were compared, having close to 50 % of each group would be ideal. Surveying individuals who meet their partners online is more difficult than surveying individuals who meet their partners FtF; however, future researchers should strive to include close to an equal amount of participants in each group if they are comparing individuals in two types of relationships.

The qualifications for individuals to participate in this study were fairly broad. Individuals had to be in a dating relationship in which they met their partners either in person or online. To participate, individuals could be any age and their relationships could be fairly new or well established. Future research could compare more specialized characteristics (e.g., individuals who are 50 or older who are in FtF and CMC long-term

relationships longer than one year) to uncover details that are generalizable to a certain dating population.

Finally, this study included measures that analyzed individuals' self-reported perceptions of their relationships. Individuals were prompted to answer questions as honestly as possible, but caution should be used when forming generalizations based on self-report data. Specifically, in this study, individuals most likely would not want to report negative perceptions of their relationships due to social desirability.

This study provided a glance into relationships that begin FtF or online. Future research can build off of this study's results in order to expand knowledge in the arena of comparing FtF and CMC romantic relationships. For example, longitudinal research that compares individuals who began their relationships FtF or online could aid in uncovering how and if these relationships progress differently. Studying FtF and CMC relationships through longitudinal methods would allow for comparisons to be made at multiple stages of romantic relationships.

Additionally, research that involves qualitative methods, such as interviews, could improve scholarship that compares FtF and CMC romantic relationships. Understanding how these relationships are formed, maintained, and dissolved in participants' own words could foster more comprehension of how and if these relationships differ.

This study only included one partner in a dating relationship. Including *couples* who are in dating relationships could modify the outcome of this study and other studies that have examined individuals in romantic relationships. For example, perhaps one partner in a romantic relationship is highly satisfied, whereas the other partner is contemplating ending the relationship. Future research should consider involving both partners in studies

that investigate romantic relationships in order to get a more complete representation of dating relationships.

Finally, scholars should research participants who have met dating partners through both FtF interaction and CMC. These participants could help to shed light on the experiences of beginning romantic relationships in two contexts as well as how and why the progression or the relational variables involved in these relationships differ in any way.

Conclusion

This study provided a glimpse into differences that exist between romantic relationships that are initiated in person and online. From this study's results it is evident that individuals in FtF and CMC relationships (especially CMC relationships that have evolved into FtF relationships) are not that different in terms of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and physical attraction. Perhaps the "heightened" effects of hyperpersonal communication gradually wear off once individuals meet FtF. Understanding that relationships that begin both in person and online are fairly similar is important from both a scholarly and practical standpoint. Researchers can use the results of this study to further explore these two types of relationships, and use different methods (e.g., interviews) in order to reveal detailed accounts of what challenges, advantages, and/or experiences can exist in either or both types of dating relationships. For example, regarding individuals who began their relationships online and then meet their partners FtF, when do levels of intimacy taper off? Practically, individuals who are interested in beginning romantic relationships should feel encouraged that neither way of initiating relationships seems to be superior over the other. According to this study,

initiating a romantic relationship FtF or online does not offer notable advantages or disadvantages.

Although significant differences were not found between individuals who began their relationships in person or online, results of this study suggest that individuals who met their partners online and had *not* them in person could have had romanticized views of the person they are dating. The initial stages of FtF and CMC relationships are quite different. Initiating a romantic relationship in person allows for a realistic impression of a dating partner. For example, individuals can see, from the beginning of relationships, partners' physical inadequacies (e.g., acne), their awkward choices of conversation topics (e.g., recent breakup), their odd nonverbal cues (e.g., nervous twitch), and so on. Initiating a romantic relationship via CMC allows for individuals to generate a romanticized or exaggerated illustration of what they anticipate their partners will be like due to the lack of physical proximity, the relative anonymity, and the ability to carefully edit messages (Walther, 1996). The romanticized views of partners in the beginning of CMC relationships and how these views interact with long-term CMC-turned-FtF relationships could have interesting implications for couples who meet online. Because of CMC's ability to foster heightened impressions of potential romantic partners, further examination of how romantic relationships progress differently in FtF and online contexts is warranted.

Several differences existed when testing the sample characteristics and the variables that were included in this study. Examining these significant characteristics (e.g., exclusivity of relationships, sex, same sex/opposite sex relationships, length of relationships) more closely could lead to fruitful research related to romantic relationships in FtF and CMC contexts.

Additionally, predictors of relationship satisfaction in relationships that began in person (communication satisfaction, trust) and online (communication satisfaction, physical attraction) were uncovered. Both types of relationships shared the predictor variable, communication satisfaction. In order to initiate relationships, partners communicate in order for relationships to progress. Individuals in dating relationships should strive to communicate in effective ways with their partners; satisfying communication is not only important to a relationship's progression, but also is important to how satisfied individuals are in their relationships. Researchers should continue to study what it means to communicate effectively in romantic relationships.

No matter the context in which a dating relationship begins, it can evolve into a lifetime partnership. Hence, understanding relational variables involved in dating relationships that begin through FtF interaction or CMC is very important. The results of this study help to showcase the fact that relationships that begin FtF or via CMC are not that different in regards to the relational variables (intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, physical attraction, relationship satisfaction) that were examined. Future research can use this study as a springboard for insight pertaining to what sample characteristics and/or relational variables can affect dating relationships.

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APPENDIX A. PRE-SCREEN SURVEY QUESTIONS

Directions: This survey will ask you to reflect on your current dating relationship. Think about the person you're dating and the time you've spent with this person so far. Also, reflect upon specific characteristics that define your relationship. For example, do you have great conversations with this person? Do you enjoy this person's company no matter what you're doing? Do you disclose very personal information to this person? Keep this person and your relationship in mind as you complete this survey.

The following questions will first ask you for basic information about yourself. Next, the questions will ask you to reflect upon the person you're dating. Think about when you met this person, how you met this person, and how you currently communicate with this person.

1. What is your age?

2. What is your biological sex?

Male

Female

3. Are you currently dating anyone?

Yes

No

4. Are you in a relationship with someone of the same sex or the opposite sex?

Same sex

Opposite sex

5. Approximately how long have you been in your current relationship?

2 months or less

3 months

4 months

5 months

6 months

7 months

8 months

9 months

10 months

11 months

12 months or more

6. How did you first meet the person you are dating?

In person

Online

CMC Survey

7. More specifically, how did you meet the person you're dating on the Internet?

Online dating website

Social networking website

Chat room

Other _____

8. Have you met the person you're dating in person?

Yes

No

10. If yes, how long did you wait until you met this person? (Specify days or weeks).

_____ Days; _____ Weeks

11. If no, when would you like to meet this person in a face-to-face setting?

Less than 1 month

In 1 month

In 2 months

Longer than 2 months

Not sure

Never

12. How exclusive is your relationship?

Exclusive

Undefined

Not exclusive

FtF Survey

7. How did you meet the person you're dating?

Through a friend

At a public place

At work

Other _____

8. How exclusive is your relationship?

Exclusive

Undefined

Not exclusive

APPENDIX B. INTIMACY SCALE

Directions: The following questions will ask you about the closeness in your current romantic relationship. Think about how you spend time with the person you're dating, how close you feel to him/her, and how affectionate you are toward this person. Your response options will range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. The person I'm dating completely accepts me as I am.
2. I can openly share my deepest thoughts and feelings with this person.
3. This person cares deeply for me.
4. This person would willingly help me in any way.
5. My thoughts and feelings are understood and affirmed by this person.

APPENDIX C. TRUST SCALE

Directions: The next few statements will ask you to reflect about how honest and trustworthy the person you're dating has been throughout the course of your relationship. Think about this person and how open he/she has been with you up until this point. You will also need to reflect on the likely future behavior of the person you're dating. Response options will range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. I have found that the person I'm dating is a thoroughly dependable person, especially when it comes to things that are important.
2. Based on past experience, I cannot with complete confidence rely on this person to keep promises made to me.
3. This person is very honest, and even if he/she were to make unbelievable statements, people should feel confident that what they are hearing is the truth.
4. This person has proven to be faithful. No matter whom this person was married to, he/she would never be unfaithful, even if there were absolutely no chance of being caught.
5. This person is not necessarily someone others always consider reliable. I can think of times when this person could not be counted on.
6. This person has not always proven to be trustworthy in the past, and there are times when I am hesitant to let this person engage in activities that make me feel vulnerable.

APPENDIX D. COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION SCALE

Directions: The next statements are related to conversations between you and your partner. Think about how you communicate with the person you're dating. Reflect on the conversations that you have with this person and how you feel after you've interacted with him/her. Your response options will range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. I enjoy conversations with the person I'm dating.
2. We each get to say what we want.
3. I feel that this person values what I have to say.
4. We are attentive to each other's comments.
5. I feel accepted and respected during our conversations.
6. This person shows me that he/she understands what I say.
7. Our conversations flow smoothly.
8. This person expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say.

APPENDIX E. RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION SCALE

Directions: The following questions will ask you about the overall quality of your relationship and the person you're dating. Reflect upon how you feel about the current status of your relationship and how you feel about the person you're dating.

Please indicate below your responses to the following questions about the state of your relationship. Your response options will range from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time).

0 (Never); 1 (Rarely); 2 (Occasionally); 3 (More Often Than Not);
4 (Most of the Time); 5 (All the Time)

1. How often do you consider ending your relationship?
2. How often do you and the person you're dating fight?
3. Do you ever regret that you began your relationship?
4. How often do you and the person you're dating "get on each other's nerves?"

APPENDIX F. PHYSICAL ATTRACTION SCALE

Directions: The following statements will ask for your opinions related to the physical attraction you feel toward the person you're dating. Think about this person's physical attractiveness including physical appearance and clothing. Your response options will range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

1. I think the person I'm dating is quite handsome/pretty.
2. This person is very sexy looking.
3. I don't like the way this person looks.
4. This person is ugly.
5. I find this person attractive physically.
6. This person is not good looking.
7. This person looks appealing.
8. I don't like the way this person looks.
9. This person is nice looking.
10. This person has an attractive face.
11. This person is not physically attractive.
12. This person is good looking.