

Framed by Flirtation: How A Person's Flirting Style Influences the Perception and Engagement of Messaging in Online Dating

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Abstract

This research utilized relational framing theory (RFT) to explore the role of flirting styles on peoples' decoding and encoding behaviors in online dating courtship. The first study addressed how flirting styles were related to frame interpretations of five textual interactions and introduced a new method of measuring the differential salience hypothesis. Results showed support for the differential salience hypothesis. It was also found that some flirting styles were significantly correlated with frame interpretations. The second study focused on how flirting styles were related to people's interpretation of their own behaviors in an online dating context and tested the general intensifier hypothesis. Results indicated that some flirting styles were significantly correlated with participants' perceptions of their own message behaviors and the general intensifier hypothesis was supported. The third study explored participants' online dating preferences and expectations – asking which sites they preferred using and which communicative behaviors constituted their interactions with other users. Analysis revealed significant relationships between some of the flirting styles and site preferences and thematic analysis provided insights on the perceived norms when using these sites. Taken together, these studies provide some support for RFT and highlight the significance of a person's flirting style when engaging in online courtship behaviors. This is a useful addition to previous scholarship as well as a helpful contribution for future scholars looking to explore communicative behaviors that occur in online dating. The results also provide practical advice for online daters according to their intentions and flirting styles.

Dedication

To all those searching for love, may you find the ones who make you feel flirty.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Online dating has become increasingly popular in the past two decades, with three in ten U.S. adults reporting that they have used a dating site (Vogels, 2020), this is a substantial increase from 2013 when only one in ten Americans reported having used a dating site (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Though the users of online dating sites decrease with each generation – 65% of never-married Millennials, 53% of never-married Gen Xers, and 29% of never-married Baby Boomers – the number of users has increased across all demographic groups overall (Vogels, 2020). Recent statistics indicate that 48% of 18–29-year-olds reported having used an online dating site (Vogels, 2020) and those that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual report they are much more likely to have met their significant other online compared to those that identify as straight (e.g., 28% compared to 11%; Brown, 2020). Additionally, this data was collected throughout 2021 and in the early months of 2022 with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; online dating is one of the only ways to safely engage in courtship during this time as COVID-19 rates were yet to stabilize.

For the purposes of this research, and to be consistent with previous research regarding online dating (Finkel et al., 2012; Gibbs et al., 2006), *online dating site* refers specifically to corporations that offer online services or smartphone apps that are used for the purposes of finding a romantic or sexual partner and *online dating* refers to the utilization of dating sites to form relationships. Born out of personal ads and telephone matchmaking, online dating officially entered the scene in 1995 when Match.com was established (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2017). Over the next decade, online dating became more commonly used and, by 2007, smartphones entered the scene and dating sites such as eHarmony and OkCupid started to create

mobile apps, eventually giving rise to several other dating sites including Grindr (in 2009) and Tinder (in 2012) (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2017).

Presently, there are many online dating sites. The current study is not focused on any one specific dating site. Rather, this dissertation will focus on one of the three basic components of online dating as a concept. According to Finkel et al. (2012), online dating sites offer three key services to their user base: access, communication, and matching. *Access* refers to users' ability to view – via user profiles – a pool of potential romantic partners online. *Communication* refers to the various forms of mediated communication that are available to users on the site. For example, most dating sites today include forms of mediated communication within the app or site itself such as the ability to like a person's profile or profile pictures and direct messaging between users typically if a mutual interest has been indicated. Lastly, *matching* refers to a site's function to pair users up, whether through an algorithm (e.g., Match.com) or by the choice of the users themselves (e.g., swiping right on Tinder). Depending on the site, each could offer more or less of these three key services, but the three general functions of online dating are common across all online dating sites.

Using relational framing theory (Dillard et al., 1996), this study will look at how online daters engage with and perceive the communication of other users. RFT suggests that people interpret their relationships based on how they perceive their relational interactions using frames. A frame is a mental tool that people use to help organize and make meaning out of the interactions they have with others (McLaren & Solomon, 2015). In RFT, there are three frames: dominance, affiliation, and involvement, explained in more detail later. This research deals with the inherently affiliative realm of online dating, thus, the three social-sexual frames (i.e.,

seductive, flirtatious, friendly) proposed by Hall (2016) are used to examine online dating users' perceptions of the messages they exchange with potential partners.

RFT posits that there are five factors that contribute to frame activation: the features of an utterance, the episodic goal, the relational context, personal qualities of the interactants, and social/cultural norms surrounding the interaction (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015). These five contextual factors are important to keep in mind when using RFT as they all play a role in determining which frame a person is using to interpret an interaction. The current investigation will report on three studies mostly centering on the personal quality of flirting style. The first study will focus on perceptions of an interaction between two users of an online dating site. The overarching question for Study One asks: How will a person's flirting style their perception of textual interactions during courtship? Participants will serve as third-party observers of five interactions (i.e., characterized in a pre-test survey as 1) super friendly, a little flirty, 2) very flirty, a little seductive, a little friendly, 3) very flirty, not much of anything else, 4) very seductive, a little friendly, a little flirty, and 5) very friendly, somewhat seductive). Participants' perceptions will be correlated with their self-reported flirting styles. While Study One focuses on perception, Study Two, Part A will focus on how a person's flirting style might bias their behavior in an interaction. The main question for Study Two asks: Does a person's flirting style influence how people engage in interactions or compose mediated messages in addition to how they perceive those interactions? In other words, do people act according to the expectations of their predominant flirting style? Lastly, Study Two will include a qualitative element, from now on referred to as Study Two, Part B. Thematic analysis will be utilized to gain a deeper understanding of how a person's flirting style informs their decisions about which

online dating sites to use, and how they expect interactions to look with other users on their preferred site.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Relational Framing Theory

Relational framing theory (RFT) (Dillard et al., 1996) explains how we make sense of messages beyond the surface-level transaction of information. It is a useful theory for understanding how people determine their perceptions of an interaction, especially for interactions that occur between two people in the earlier stages of a relationship. According to McLaren and Solomon (2015), there are two main reasons for using the theory. First, RFT addresses the nature of relational judgments. In other words, RFT looks at what evaluations are being made when people make inferences about the communication in their relationships. Secondly, RFT focuses on the processes that guide relational judgments. It explores how contextual characteristics and the cognitive processes of the interactants jointly contribute to judgments about the relationship.

Central to RFT is the idea that people make inferences about communication using relational frames which are “mental structures that consist of organized knowledge about social relationships” (McLaren & Solomon, 2015, p. 117). McLaren and Solomon (2015) note that the concept of relational frames is similar to the idea of social schema and mental models of relationships (see Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1985) “in that they contain assumptions about interpersonal associations derived from prior experience” (p. 117). Relational frames determine what social cues people are most likely to pay attention to in a given interaction and are especially useful when the interaction is more ambiguous (McLaren & Solomon, 2015).

There are five overarching components of relational information that serve to activate relational frames. Moving from the micro to macro levels of interpreting meaning, the

components are as follows: the features of an utterance, the episodic goal, the relational context, personal qualities of the interactants, and social/cultural norms surrounding the interaction (McLaren & Solomon, 2015). The features of utterances are useful for clarifying what interactions are about. For example, the message “If you do not follow my rules, you cannot live in my house” is clearly a message about social control while “I am so glad that we are friends” is clearly about social closeness. The episodic goal, which refers to the function of the social interaction, can present more clues about a relationship (e.g., attending someone’s birthday party is typically indicative of affiliation with that person whereas meeting with someone for a performance review at work indicates social power). In the context of courtship, an episodic goal, or what the interactants hope to get out of an interaction, might be “exploring the personality of, establishing a connection with, and gauging the level of interest conveyed by the other person” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 368). Relational context refers to the relational history people have with one another that provide a deeper understanding of how to situate the interactions they have. If people have a history of interactions that follow a particular pattern – affiliation or dominance – this could shed light on their relational context, which would help make more accurate inferences about their relationship.

Peoples’ personal qualities also influence how they communicate with others and, depending on their attitudes, whether they act more dominant or affiliative in any given situation. For example, Solomon and Williams (1997) found the initiator’s position of power and Lannutti and Monahan (2002) found that the level of alcohol consumption both have an impact in which frame is triggered. Solomon et al. (2002) incorporated attachment orientation of their participants when testing RFT and found that attachment anxiety was positively related to both the dominance and affiliation frames across scenarios of affinity. Participant who were more

comfortable relying on others, an indicator of secure attachment, were more likely to find the affiliation frame relevant in their interpretations (Solomon et al., 2002). These findings indicate that personal qualities are important to include when using a relational framing approach.

Lastly, at the most general level of understanding, peoples' cultural or societal norms play a role in whether they find dominance or affiliation more salient within an interaction. For example, in Western culture, it is typical to socialize men as the pursuer in a heterosexual romantic relationship whereas women are more likely to be socialized as gatekeepers, assuming a more passive role in a courtship scenario (Abbey, 1982; Koepfel et al., 1993). Within a RFT framework, these broad cultural assumptions about courtship are gender-informed and are not driven by biology (i.e., courtship as it is taught in society cannot be reduced to a person's biological sex). As Dillard et al. (1996) found, "the results [of their multi-study investigation of RFT] run counter to authors who assert that males and females occupy distinct social realities" (p. 718). These norms in how men and women are socialized in affiliation-based interactions could provide some insight as to the personal qualities that develop, such as the traditional flirting style (Hall et al., 2010; Koepfel et al., 1993).

According to RFT, people interpret messages based on three primary dimensions: 1) dominance, 2) affiliation, and 3) involvement (Dillard et al., 1996). These three core constructs of the theory are considered umbrella constructs and any additional dimensions proposed by other scholars (e.g., Burgoon & Hale, 1984; Hall, 2016) are considered to fit within these three dimensions (Dillard et al., 1999). The *dominance-submissiveness dimension* refers to the degree to which one person controls, influences, or has status over the other (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015). The *affiliation-disaffiliation dimension* refers to the degree to

which a message is perceived as a signal of appreciation, esteem, or solidarity one person has for the other (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015).

The *involvement dimension* refers to the extent to which people are engaged in the interaction (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015). Though involvement is also a dimension (like dominance and affiliation), it serves a different purpose for understanding the inferences people make. As explained by Dillard et al. (1996), “Partners that are more involved and active communicate both more liking for each other and more effort to influence each other. In this way, involvement is a modifier of the two substantive dimensions and does not have its own experiential component” (p. 117). Dillard et al. (1996) explained involvement as a metaphorical volume knob that increases or decreases the likelihood of interpreting a given frame. For example, if a person seems to be engaging in behaviors that imply a greater degree of engagement during a friendly conversation (e.g., turning toward the other person as they speak, frequently indicating agreement, making eye contact, etc.), it is more likely that the affiliative frame is activated in that interaction.

Frames are often in competition with one another, but simultaneous operation of both frames would undermine the way humans process information. This is the *differential salience hypothesis* (Dillard et al., 1996), which suggests that people process information through whichever frame they perceive as most salient. This is not to say that both frames cannot be present in a single interaction, rather one will always be more salient than the other. To illustrate this point, McLaren and Solomon (2015) use the example of reading something that is hard to decipher – when you come across a word that you are having trouble interpreting, you turn to contextual cues to help you out. This same thinking can be applied to relational frames in that the overall interpretation of an interaction will be based on how salient a given dimension is using

the contextual factors at play. McLaren and Solomon (2015) assert that “human evolution may have promoted cognitive systems that facilitate sense-making” (p. 120). Because of this, the activation of one frame works to suppress the other to maintain fluid and efficient processing of the social cues presented. This hypothesis has been supported in several studies using RFT (Dillard et al., 1999; Dillard et al., 1996; Henningsen et al., 2010; Lannutti & Monahan, 2002; McLaren et al., 2014; Solomon et al., 2002).

In addition to the differential salience hypothesis, there is a second central assertion in RFT: the *general intensifier hypothesis*. The involvement dimension does not serve the same function as the two main relational frames, rather it acts as an intensifier variable – the greater the involvement, the more salient the dominance or affiliation frames are likely to become. To explain this idea, take the example of two people out to dinner. If they are talking back and forth to one another about their lives and their interests and are perceived as animated and enthusiastic about the topics, these features of the interaction could intensify the perception of the affiliative frame. However, if two people are out to dinner and one person does more of the talking and orders the food for both of them without asking for input from the other person, these features could lend themselves to the activation of the dominance frame. In these two scenarios, the frame that is activated is more salient because the interactants are more involved in behaviors that people interpret as indicative of that frame (i.e., either affiliative or dominant).

RFT is useful when applied to impression management and relationship formation (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren et al., 2014; Solomon et al., 2002). As an extension and refinement of RFT, Hall (2016) introduced a context-specific framework for studying the courtship stages of a romantic relationship. Though the dominance frame can be activated in a romantic relationship, Hall (2016) noted that when potential partners are in the initiating,

exploring, or developing stages of their relationship, it is more likely that the affiliation frame will be activated. As noted by Lannutti and Monahan (2002), “Engaging in a sexual encounter is often understood as an inherently affiliative activity” (p. 390). Similarly, communicating with others via an online dating site or app is also an inherently affiliative activity. With this knowledge in mind, the affiliative frame was broken down further to encompass three social-sexual communicative frames including friendliness, seductiveness, and flirtatiousness. Hall’s (2016) expansion of RFT allows for a greater understanding of the interpretative processes at play during social interactions between potential romantic partners. The subsequent section explores Hall’s (2016) additions and the research that helped to develop it further.

Social-Sexual Communication

Social-Sexual Communication and Sex Differences in Perceptions

Social-sexual communication is “characterized by messages that convey social interest of a sexual or romantic nature” (Solomon & Williams, 1997, p. 196). This is pertinent to the current investigation as interactions between two potential partners using an online dating site or app are inherently sexual or romantic in nature as this is likely the reason that they are engaged in conversation in the first place. Among the RFT factors, the current study will focus primarily on the features of an utterance (e.g., text messages exchanged between users) and the personal quality of flirting style (Hall et al., 2010; Hall, 2013). As this study is focused on participants in the early stages of courtship in an online dating context, the episodic goal is inherently affiliative since the goal of online dating is courtship. In addition to focusing only on the context of online dating, the messages collected for the purposes of this study will be early in the relationship and therefore, there will not be much historical context to take into consideration when determining frame interpretation. Lastly, the societal and cultural norms factor into this study in the form of

the traditional flirting style as it is the degree to which people adhere to the heterosexual traditional script for engaging in courtship (e.g., men should be more active in starting the relationship whereas women should wait for men to approach them; Hall, 2013). This will be explained in greater detail in the traditional flirting style section of this paper.

According to Solomon and Williams (1997), social-sexual communication is “an essential ingredient in the initiation and escalation of romantic and sexual relationships” (p. 197). The study of social-sexual communication has traditionally involved the study of sex differences in perceptions. Abbey (1982) initially asked the question do men and women differ in their perception of behaviors of platonic friendliness as (mistakenly) indicative of interest in a sexual relationship? The short answer is yes. Men and women, according to Abbey’s (1982) findings, seem to use different social-sexual schemas; men often misperceive targets’ friendly behaviors to mean that they are interested in a sexual relationship.

La France et al. (2009) conducted three meta-analyses on all relevant studies with a total of 3,631 participants. La France and colleagues (2009) focused on studies that included Abbey’s (1982) flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous measures. They found “men rate others more highly in terms of flirtatiousness, seductiveness, and promiscuousness [which] is accurate for *both* male and female targets and for some but not all modes of observation” (p. 281). Men did not only interpret women’s behaviors as more sexual, they also perceived men’s behaviors to be more sexual as well. The mode of observation refers to whether the observer was viewing an interaction that took place face-to-face (in person), if they watched a recording of an interaction, or if they just looked at photographs of people interacting. Men were more likely to rate peoples’ sexual intent higher when they were engaging in a face-to-face interaction. La France et al. (2009) suggested that it could be that messages that occur face-to-face are less ambiguous than

interactions that take place across other communicative channels due to the number of cues available. Error management theory was also put forth as an explanation for these findings.

Error management theory, developed by Haselton and Buss (2000), addresses the reasons behind why people make flawed judgments specifically during social-sexual interactions. Haselton and Buss (2000) assert that there are two types of errors that a person might commit when judging an interaction in a social-sexual context. The first type of error is called a false positive and it refers to when people perceive that there is sexual intent when there is not. The second type of error is called a false negative and occurs when people perceive there is no sexual intent when in fact there is. One main premise of error management theory is that people are biased toward making the error that is thought to be least costly to them (Haselton & Buss, 2000). Haselton and Buss (2000) suggest that in social-sexual interactions men are biased to pursue sex and women are biased toward finding long-term relationships that will not result in abandonment. Findings from all three meta-analyses conducted by La France et al. (2009) supported error management theory as “men, more than women, perceived that [both] women and men were more flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous” (p. 279). Thus, are less likely to make a false negative judgment when interpreting women’s behavior.

The current investigation posits that peoples’ perceptions may be biased by their flirting styles. This study will draw on elements of RFT to help understand the role flirting styles play in frame activation, specifically the three frames proposed by Hall (2016).

The Three Social-Sexual Frames

Drawing from past research (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Grammer et al., 2000; Koeppe et al., 1993; Saal et al., 1989; Solomon, 2006), Hall (2016) identified three distinct social-sexual communication frames, which he defines as “the dimensions of nonverbal and verbal actions that

occur when potential partners are in the initiating, exploring, or developing stages of courtship” (p. 139). These three frames include 1) seductiveness, 2) friendliness, and 3) flirtatiousness.

Seductiveness Frame. The seductiveness frame focuses on the sexuality or sexual explicitness of messages (Hall, 2016). Abbey (1982) measured peoples’ perceptions of flirtatiousness, seductiveness, and promiscuousness when observing various scenarios. Hall’s (2016) factor analyses suggested that one of the three social-sexual frames was seductiveness (which encompassed perceptions of promiscuousness). Seductiveness is important for understanding how people make judgments in a courtship scenario because “when communication is framed as seductive, it should provide more information and be more relevant when forming judgments about sexual outcomes, like sexual intent” (Hall, 2016, p. 144). Seductive behaviors are also interpreted as indicative of physical attraction between interactants.

Friendliness frame. The friendliness frame refers to the perception of messages as conveying warmth and general liking (Hall, 2016). Drawing on past research from Vorauer et al. (2003), Koeppel et al. (1993) and Saal et al. (1989), Hall (2016) theorized the presence of the friendliness frame. Vorauer et al. (2003) suggested that people might express liking rather than direct romantic interest because expressions of liking are less likely to be rejected and are therefore less risky. Friendliness is important for understanding how people make judgments in courtship scenarios because “when communication is framed as friendly, it should provide more information and be more relevant when understanding social relational outcomes than sexual outcomes” (Hall, 2016, p. 144). Friendly behaviors are typically perceived as indicative of social attraction or general liking (Hall, 2016), which are also key aspects of social-sexual communication (Lindgren et al., 2008) because liking a person is necessary to establish an affiliative connection.

Flirtatiousness frame. Flirting is a bit more ambiguous and open to interpretation, less straightforward than the other two frames. Flirting refers to “specific, overt behaviors (e.g., complimenting, hair tossing, making eye contact, etc.) that may or may not indicate sexual intentions” (Lindgren et al., 2008). Often, flirtatious behaviors have been correlated with peoples’ interpretations of friendliness. However, it remains a distinct frame as flirting does not always necessarily convey friendliness or seduction. Flirting often operates as a way for people to have fun or achieve an instrumental goal without the intent of developing a romantic relationship further (Hall et al., 2010; Henningsen, 2004). Thus, flirting is distinct and not always related to romantic or sexual attraction. Yet, it is important for understanding and engaging in social-sexual communication as “using [flirting] behaviors provides people with some protection from embarrassment or rejection, but also allows for multiple interpretations of sexual intent and can lead to misperceptions and misunderstandings” (Lindgren et al., 2008, p. 423). Furthermore, ambiguity is built into flirtatious interactions because people often use flirting to gauge the potential for relationship development or sexual interest of a potential partner (Henningsen, 2004).

There is a long research tradition that assumes people perceive targets using one frame or another – friendly *or* sexy (Saal et al., 1989), friendly *or* flirty (Koeppel et al., 1993), or flirty *or* seductive (Abbey 1982). Saal et al. (1989) conducted three studies on how people interpret behaviors in an interaction (from a third-party observer standpoint) as friendly or sexy. Across all three studies conducted by Saal et al. (1989), findings revealed that male observers perceived less friendliness and more sexiness in women’s behavior than female observers perceived, which is consistent with the previous research conducted by Abbey (1982).

Koeppel et al. (1993) looked at which nonverbal behaviors are associated with friendly, flirtatious, and seductive interactions, providing insight in several categories such as kinesics, haptics, proxemics, oculosics, and vocalics. Findings from this study showed that “males and females interpret the meanings of the behaviors differently, and that male observers more easily and readily infer seductive intent than other observers” (Koeppel et al., 1993, p. 29). It was also noted that when the males initiated the conversation it was seen as more normal and the male interactant was not as quickly judged to be behaving seductively. However, both men and women rated female initiators as somewhat more seductive regardless of the level of intimacy in their nonverbals (Koeppel et al., 1993).

After conducting factor analyses on the three frames across several studies, Hall (2016) concluded that perceptions of social-sexual communication seem to be *both-and* as opposed to *either-or* after all. Each of the three frames were correlated and were mutually indicative of each other, which is consistent with RFT as they all fall under the umbrella of affiliation. Therefore, peoples’ perceptions are not a matter of one single frame being activated only as opposed to another, but which frame is more salient overall. This supports RFT’s differential salience hypothesis. The idea that social-sexual frames are not strictly either/or is an important distinction to keep in mind when using flirting styles to approach how frames are activated. This is because a person’s flirting style influences how people are perceiving messages and the ways in which they engage with their interaction partners (Hall, 2013). Therefore, when understanding which social-sexual communication frames are activated based on the interactions between online daters, it is important to recognize that frames may be associated with a person’s flirting style.

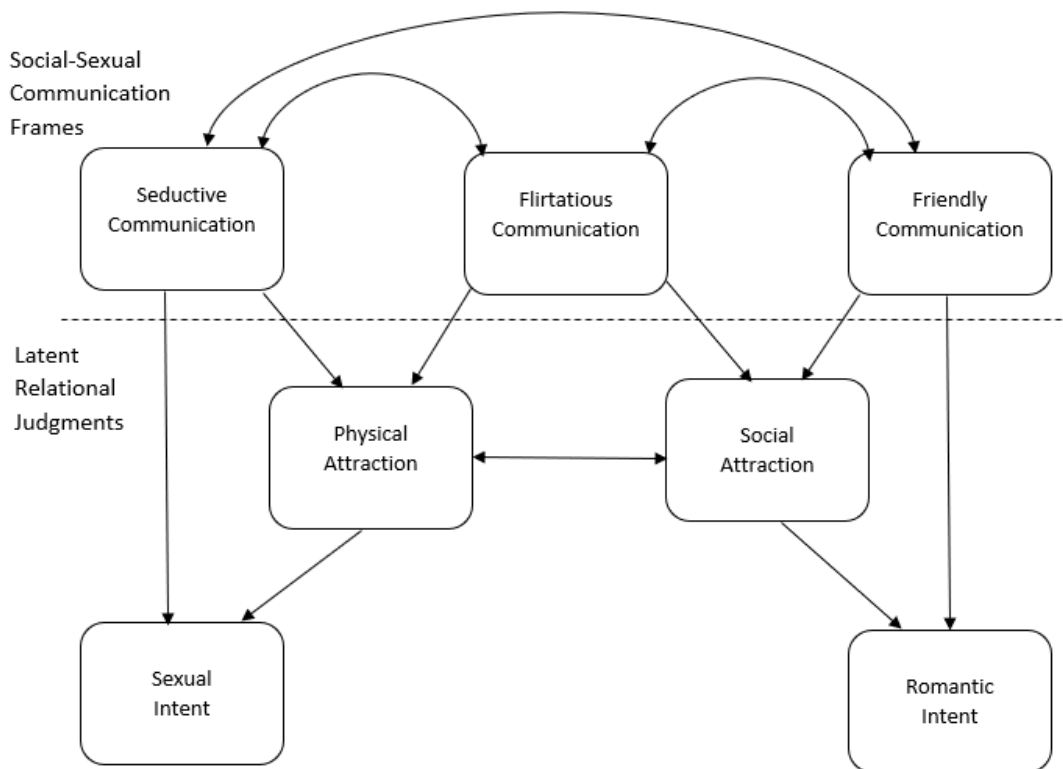
Hall’s (2016) three social-sexual communication frames are helpful to the current investigation because they go beyond the simple understanding of courtship interactions as

instances of affiliation. These three frames help to clarify the different ways that people are affiliating themselves with one another based on the messages' content. In other words, it is already understood that an interaction with another user on an online dating site is affiliative, but the messages could be interpreted as either friendly, seductive, or flirtatious based on which one is perceived to be more salient in the interaction.

Social-Sexual Frames and Latent Outcomes

Depending on these frames and the interpretation made by the interactants, there are four potential outcomes: 1) physical attraction, 2) social attraction, 3) romantic intent, and 4) sexual

Figure 1. Conceptual Model (Hall, 2016)



intent (see Figure 1 for a conceptual model). Hall (2016) explains social-sexual attraction and intention as “the latent and unobservable desires, cognitions, and goals that are formed as

communicators initiate and explore relationship potential” (p. 143). The outcome of *social attraction* refers to an interest in friendship, not necessarily a sexual or romantic relationship (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). The outcome of *physical attraction* refers to the perception that the way a person looks is beautiful and/or handsome, pleasant to look at (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). The outcome of *sexual intent* refers to communicators’ desire to engage in sexual activity whereas the outcome of *romantic intent* centers on communicators’ “interest in pursuing a romantic or intimate relationship” (Hall, 2016, p. 143). Romantic intent, unlike sexual intent, is usually long-term.

The aforementioned outcomes (i.e., social attraction, sexual attraction, sexual intent, romantic intent) fall into a duality of the social and sexual domains. When communication is framed as friendly, it should provide more information and be more relevant when understanding social relational outcomes than sexual outcomes. When communication is framed as seductive, it should provide more information and be more relevant when forming judgements about sexual outcomes. Flirting operates within both domains due to its ambiguity. While messages that trigger the frames of friendliness and seduction are typically quite clear and easy to comprehend, flirting behaviors serve various purposes and can help indicate sexual and relational interest, or even act as a goal in and of itself (Hall et al., 2010; Hall, 2016; Henningsen, 2004).

Flirting Styles, Behaviors, and Motivations

The current study posits that a person’s flirting style is a potential bridge between courtship perceptions, courtship behaviors, and the three social-sexual frames. As mentioned previously, a person’s flirting style operates on the RFT level of personal quality and provides insight as to how a person might interpret and engage in social-sexual communication. The flirting style inventory (Hall et al., 2010) takes a communicator style approach to understanding

how meaning is interpreted, similar to schemas (Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1985). Before exploring the five flirting styles, the concept of *schema* will be explained in this section.

Baldwin (1992) pointed out that much of the research on social cognition and relationships has focused on self-schemas, defined as “a cognitive structure representing information about the self” (p. 461). Self-schemas often help to explain how people’s experiences form the ways they think about themselves. However, Baldwin (1992) suggested that it is not enough to understand self-schemas when we want to expand our knowledge on relationship processes. He suggested that researchers take *relational schema* into account. Relational schema refers to “the notion that people develop cognitive structures representing regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness” (Baldwin, 1992, p. 461). As explained by Baldwin and Meunier (1999), “People’s response to new information reflects in part the particular interpersonal model that becomes activated at the time, shaping their expectancies, motivation, and sense of self” (pp. 209-210). Baldwin and Meunier (1999) explored the relational schema of attachment style when individuals were asked to think of certain types of relationships. They asked participants to visualize a relationship that made them feel either accepted or rejected during an experiment. The experiment, which focused on how lexical decision tasks could act as cues for the activation of different relational schemas (e.g., acceptance or rejection), revealed that these cues were a function of a person’s attachment style. Those who scored higher in secure attachment focused more on the possibilities of being accepted in their relationships, whereas those that scored higher in preoccupied attachment focused more on the possibilities of being rejected in their relationships. Such results indicate that relational schema plays a role in perceptions of experiences in relationships.

Previous research illustrates the idea that personal characteristics such as sex (Abbey, 1982; La France et al., 2009; Lindgren et al., 2008), attachment style (Baldwin & Meunier, 1999; Solomon et al., 2002), and level of alcohol consumption (Lannutti & Monahan, 2002) influence an individual's perceptions and behaviors. Peoples' expectations of interactions and the views of themselves are formed and understood through relational schemas (Baldwin & Meunier, 1999).

It has been well documented that there are some notable sex differences when it comes to interpreting social-sexual communication. As Abbey (1982) initially reported – and was later confirmed by several subsequent studies (La France et al., 2009) – that men tend to interpret others' behaviors as more sexual than women would interpret those same peoples' behaviors. Another factor that might explain differences in perception is flirting style. Lindgren et al. (2008) also noted that “beliefs about flirting are related to sexual intent perceptions” (p. 429). This is exemplified by Koeppel et al.'s (1993) study. Participants that reported believing that flirtatious behaviors were indicative of a person's willingness to have sex were more likely to rate both male and female targets as more sexual than other participants who did not hold that belief. Past literature suggests characteristics influence how people frame their behaviors and judgments of others' behaviors in courtship. This study explores how a person's flirting style might influence the way they engage in and interpret others' social-sexual communication in the early stages of courtship in an online dating context.

The concept of *style* as an approach to interpreting communication can be understood as “an approach [that] maintains that the way a message is communicated is central to understanding the meaning of that message” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 366). Flirting style, therefore, is one element of understanding how a person might interpret and behave in courtship interactions. Flirting style operates as a personal quality within RFT as it suggests that the ways in which a

person engages in courtship behaviors is a consequence of the style they typically employ (Hall et al., 2010; Hall, 2013). In other words, frames are activated based, in part, on a person's relational schema. In the current investigation, flirting styles are the relational schema that will be considered for understanding which social-sexual frame is activated in textual interactions between users of various online dating sites.

The Five Flirting Styles

Flirting is ambiguous because there is no single or correct way to engage in flirtatious behavior. Flirting looks different depending on a person's flirting style. Hall et al. (2010) used a communicator style approach based on relationship initiation research to look at how someone's preferred flirting style factors into how they engage in courtship and which courtship strategies they are likelier to use. According to Hall (2013; Hall et al., 2010), there are five flirting styles: 1) physical, 2) polite, 3) playful, 4) sincere, and 5) traditional. The different flirting styles are explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

Physical. The physical flirting style is characterized by the directness of sexual communication in courtship. Those that scored highly in this style were more likely to be perceived as interested in sex and reported less difficulty in conveying their interest in a potential partner (Hall et al., 2010). Individuals high in this style also reported having the ability to know when others were interested in them and were more willing to express their sexual attraction, which tends to happen quickly for them. Relationships that developed when people used this style were rated as having strong sexual chemistry and a close emotional connection. Those that scored low in this style reported being uncomfortable expressing their sexuality and were hesitant to show their sexual interest in a potential partner (Hall et al., 2010). Women were more

likely than men to report using this type of flirting and, for women, it is negatively related to the traditional style.

Reporting unexpected findings, Hall and Xing (2015) found that men who rated highly in physical flirting style engaged in fewer and less frequent flirtatious glances, whereas women who scored highly as physical flirts engaged in more palming behaviors, less self-touch, asked fewer questions, and smiled and nodded more. They also found that in general, regardless of sex, physical flirts held more fluid conversations and gave fewer compliments to their interaction partner. The physical style of flirting is positively related to the sincere and playful styles, which suggests “that those who are comfortable expressing their interest in others physically are also more likely to seek an emotional connection and have a playful manner of flirting” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 386). It is hypothesized that those that report having a physical flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that will be interpreted as seductive. Physical flirts are also hypothesized as more likely to interpret others’ behaviors as seductive.

Polite. The polite style of flirting is described as a “rule-governed and cautious approach” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 371). People that employ this style of flirting typically stay away from overt sexual behavior and adhere to courtship rules. They also tend to be cautious when it comes to courtship initiation. Hall et al. (2010) found that those who scored high in the polite style of flirting are concerned with their image (e.g., they do not want to be seen as trying too hard or as needy), do not want to lose control of the situation or be perceived as too aggressive in their pursuit, and they seem to have a more difficult time conveying their sexual interest to a potential partner. During courtship, “proper manners, nonsexual communication, and less forward behaviors are typically used” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 387). Polite flirts report being interested in fewer potential partners, and women that scored highly in this style noted that they were less

likely to approach people they were interested in and were less likely to find flirting flattering. Those that scored lower on this style reported that they were less cautious in their behaviors, paid less attention to behavioral norms, and were more forward in expressing their interest in a potential partner. Women were more likely than men to score high in this style of flirting. Those scoring highly on the polite style reported that their most recent romantic relationship was both important and meaningful to them.

Hall and Xing (2015) found that men who scored highly in the polite flirting style were more likely to move further away from their interaction partner as the interaction progressed. Polite style men were also more likely to nod and engage in affirming behaviors. Overall, regardless of sex, polite flirts were less likely to engage in self-touch, asked fewer questions, typically had a lower vocal pitch, and appeared more distant and reserved during interactions with people they were physically attracted to. Polite flirts also tended to rely less on nonverbal communication behaviors (Hall & Xing, 2015). The polite style of flirting is positively related to the sincere style and negatively related to the playful style (Hall et al., 2010, p. 388). It is hypothesized that those that employ a polite flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that can be perceived as friendly. They are also likelier to perceive others' behaviors as friendly.

Playful. The playful style of flirting encompasses *the here for a good time, not a long time* mentality as those that employ this style tend to view flirting as a form of enjoyment that is not necessarily tied to relational development (Hall et al., 2010). This flirting style is “associated with behaviors that are playful, flirty, fun, and prone to dismissing the necessity of a link between flirting and beginning a relationship” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 371). The playful style is fun and self-esteem enhancing, which has been found to be one of the reasons people enjoy and engage in flirting behaviors (Henningesen, 2004). People that employ the playful style are less

likely to care about how their actions are interpreted by others and are more likely to flirt with people they have no long-term romantic interest in. This was the only style that men scored higher in than women in the Hall et al., (2010) research, however, this is not always the case as other studies have shown that women are likelier to engage in flirting for fun (Henningesen, 2004; Mongeau et al., 2004) and though they did not define flirting in terms of styles, Koepfel et al. (1993) found no differences between men and women when it came to playful flirting behaviors.

Hall and Xing (2015) found that men who rated highly in the playful flirting style tended to puff out their chest while interacting with a partner they were physically attracted to, whereas women who scored highly as playful flirts tended to act more coyly and withdrawn by asking fewer questions and shrugging more, especially earlier on in the interaction. Playful flirts, regardless of sex, also tend to compliment their interaction partners more. The playful style is positively related to the physical style and negatively related to the polite style (Hall et al., 2010). It is hypothesized that those that employ a playful flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that are interpreted as flirtatious and seductive. Additionally, playful flirts are more likely to interpret others' behaviors as flirtatious and seductive.

Sincere. The sincere flirting style is “marked by a desire to create an emotional bond with a potential romantic partner” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 370). Eliciting self-disclosure from a potential partner and conveying personal interest are a couple of behaviors associated with this style. Establishing an emotional connection has been reported as a common motivation for flirting and a common goal for a first date (Hall et al., 2010; Henningesen, 2004). The sincere style is highly associated with intimacy goals and “is most effective at conveying sincerity but not at communicating sexual interest” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 371). Sincere flirts often communicate their interest in others by being friendly. Those that scored highly in this style

tended to view emotional connection and genuine interest as central to courtship. They were also found to be more comfortable approaching romantic interests, more flattered by flirting behaviors, and often believed that others were flirting with them. People that scored highly in the sincere style also reported a greater likelihood of determining relationship potential.

Relationships with people who scored as sincere flirts were often reported as having a strong emotional connection, strong sexual chemistry, and were characterized as meaningful and important. They also tended to move quickly regarding relationship development.

Hall and Xing (2015) found that men who rated highly in the sincere flirting style tended to lean toward their partners more and crossed their arms and legs less frequently throughout the interaction, whereas women who scored highly as sincere flirts engaged in coy gazes, palming behaviors, and more smiling and laughing throughout the interaction. They also found that in general, regardless of sex, sincere flirts engaged in less self-touch as well. This style was positively related to the polite and physical style, but unrelated to the playful and traditional styles (Hall et al., 2010). It is hypothesized that those that employ a sincere flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that can be interpreted as friendly. Sincere flirts are also more likely to interpret others' behaviors as friendly.

Traditional. The traditional style of flirting encompasses the extent to which a person behaves according to the traditional gender roles during courtship that are perpetuated within Western culture (i.e., the man tends to take on the role of the pursuer, the woman is the gatekeeper who is to be pursued) (Hall et al., 2010; VanderMolen, 2013). People that score highly in this style typically adhere to these gender roles in relationships (Hall et al., 2010). Women who scored high in the traditional style were found to be less likely to actively communicate any romantic attraction even if they were interested. They were also less likely to

engage in flirtatious behavior and did not find others' flirty behaviors as flattering. Women that subscribe to the use of this style reported having more trouble getting men to notice them and felt less successful and confident when flirting. Men who scored high in this style reported feeling romantic interest with less people and were more likely to approach people they had known for a longer period of time. According to Hall et al. (2010), "two highly traditional partners would probably proceed slowly in all stages of courtship" (p. 386).

Hall and Xing (2015) found that men who scored highly in the traditional flirting style were more likely to lean toward their interaction partner, spoke in a higher pitch, and maintained open-body posture. Women who scored highly as traditional flirts engaged in more palming behaviors and were more likely to tease their partner, especially in the beginning of an interaction (Hall & Xing, 2015). Traditional flirts have been noted as having the most sex differences in how the style is enacted by men and women, which makes a lot of sense considering this style is taught culturally according to gender roles (VanderMolen, 2013). It is hypothesized that males who employ a traditional flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that can be interpreted as flirtatious and females who employ a traditional flirting style are more likely to engage in behaviors that can be interpreted as friendly.

Online Dating

According to Valkenburg and Peter (2007), 43% of single internet users reported having used a dating site and over the past decade. In the 15 years since, the popularity of online dating sites has steadily increased (Brown, 2020; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Vogels, 2020). This is true regardless of age, sex, gender, sexuality, income level, education level, etc. (Brown, 2020; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Vogels, 2020). The current research is primarily focused on the communication aspect of the online dating process – specifically, the textual messages

exchanged between two online dating users. Therefore, the subsequent literature review focuses on the communication and self-disclosure that occurs between online dating users, not the matching or selection processes in online dating sites.

There are two important concepts for thinking through how relationships develop in the realm of dating: self-presentation and self-disclosure (Ellison et al., 2006; Taylor & Altman, 1987). Self-presentation refers to the crafted face that people convey to others for the purposes of establishing a favorable impression (Goffman, 1959). In an online dating context, self-presentation is most pertinent when people put together their user profile: the pictures they choose to upload and the information they choose to reveal about themselves on their profile description. Self-disclosure is key for relationship development and can be defined as “any message about the self that an individual communicates to another” (Gibbs et al., 2006).

Online dating occurs in a reduced-cue environment, which means that users must find ways to adapt to the online context to convey meaning and therefore form meaningful relationships with others. Text-based messaging is the main way that people do this in online dating contexts. Early scholars on computer-mediated communication initially theorized that in reduced-cue environments it would be impossible to form meaningful relationships with others, however, many studies have found otherwise. As Walther (2015) explains in his social information processing theory (SIP), people *do* form meaningful bonds through online interactions, and they do so by adapting their communication using the tools that are available to them. In other words, when there are no nonverbal cues available (e.g., facial expression, gestures, etc.) people create them by using the composition of text and extra-textual features, like emojis, available to them. For example, when we cannot convey laughter to another person through the mere act of laughing, people will often type “lol” or perhaps include a smiley-face

emoji or emoticon in the text to signify that they found something funny or to lighten the formality of the message.

When people interact online, what they say and do is influenced by personal qualities and their communication goals. While previous research has indicated that people are good at being able to create and perceive the meanings of reduced-cue messages, there is also reason to believe that online behaviors are influenced by communicators' goals and personality (Tskhay & Rule, 2014; Walther et al., 2005). For example, Walther et al. (2005) found that when asked to present themselves through text-message exchanges as either nice or mean, participants were able to convey such attitudes and interpret these attitudes accurately. Participants that were told to convey a disliking of their conversational partner engaged in behaviors such as ignoring their partner's messages whereas participants who were asked to convey liking toward their partner were more direct in letting their partner know that they liked them by explicitly typing out their affection in a text message (Walther et al., 2005). Tskhay and Rule's (2014) meta-analysis of online communication found that people were able to accurately interpret different personality traits of people they had not met before based on their online profiles alone. These findings are consistent with SIP and lend support to the idea that our messages convey meaning and are influenced by communicator goals.

Gibbs et al. (2006) found that depending on the relational goals that interactants have (e.g., short-term, or long-term relationship), people typically engage in different online strategies and online self-disclosure fluctuates accordingly. Ellison et al. (2006) found that online daters thoughtfully craft their self-presentation and self-disclosures to reflect their relational goals. One participant in their study stated that they take particular care not to post anything overtly sexual on their profiles because they do not want to indicate to other users that they are looking for a

quick hookup or short-term sexual fling. This shows that even in an online setting, people are still aware that the things they say or the pictures they post are used to infer relational messages and intent, just as people do when they engage in courtship offline.

Message-Specific Features

As the current research is focused on the textual exchanges between users of an online dating site, it is important to understand the meanings conveyed and perceived in the textual interactions that occur in the time between matching and meeting up. This part of the online courtship process is important for determining how the relationship progresses. Sharabi and Dykstra-DeVette (2019), in their work on relationship initiation processes in online dating, found several strategies of self-disclosure that people utilize when courting someone online. During the communication stage, online daters must manage the composition of their texts to make a favorable impression and they also use text composition to form impressions of others. Reduced-cue environments force people to adapt, people are able to do so, and this study posits that what they write should be more reflective of and influenced by their flirting style.

Sharabi and Dykstra-DeVette's (2019) work noted various strategies people use when constructing text messages. One strategy was calling out dissimilarities, which consisted mostly of interactants teasing each other in a way that came across as more flirtatious than some of the other strategies for creating a shared context. For example, some users were noted as engaging in perceived homophily, which was described as conversation centering on shared interests, attitudes, and/or values between the users (Sharabi & Dykstra-DeVette, 2019). The strategy of noting dissimilarities aligns with the teasing behaviors that Hall (2013) found playful flirts were fond of using in face-to-face interactions and the perceived homophily strategy lines up well with the interaction behaviors of highly sincere flirts (Hall, 2013). With this in mind, it can be

assumed that there are some message-specific features that align more with some flirting styles than others.

Flirting Styles and Online Dating

In an online dating context, self-disclosure initially occurs through text exchanges and meaning is conveyed and created through those text messages. In addition to the goals that drive people to participate in these online dating interactions, past research suggests self-disclosures are also influenced by a person's flirting style – both in how these messages are received and how they are enacted (Hall et al., 2010; Hall, 2013; Hall & Xing, 2015). Although the flirting styles inventory was initially developed based on how people engage in flirting behaviors offline, there are online behaviors that align with the flirting styles as well. For instance, physical flirts are more open to engaging in sexting behaviors and will respond quicker when communicating with a potential partner online compared to other flirting styles (Hall, 2013). Hall also noted that “when chatting online, physical flirts think the conversation is going so well that they overestimate how much their partner is flirting with them” (2013, p. 47) similar to their perceptions of their offline flirting interactions. Polite flirts, when engaging with a potential partner online, tend to be more up front about their past relationships and typically steer clear of any racy conversations or sexting (Hall, 2013). Playful flirts, like physical flirts, are more willing to engage in sexually charged texts and will often engage in online chats just for the fun of it (Hall, 2013). Sincere flirts are the most likely of the flirting styles to start a relationship online and often gain the trust of the person they are flirting with by keeping their messages positive, friendly, and authentic (Hall, 2013). Lastly, men that score highly in the traditional style are rather active on online dating sites and tend to overestimate the interest level of the woman they

are chatting with (Hall, 2013). These general behaviors for how the different flirting styles interact online make sense given their flirting behaviors offline.

It would make sense for there to be a correlation between the textual strategies used by the different flirting styles. Based on the previous research regarding how the different flirting styles prefer to engage in flirting (Hall, 2013), the proposed hypotheses are subsequently listed. A polite style flirt will generally compose textual communication that they perceived as friendly, whereas a playful flirt will more likely compose textual communication they perceive to be flirtatious and seductive. Physical flirts will most likely compose textual communication they perceived to be more seductive, while a traditional style flirt will most likely engage in behaviors coded as friendly and flirtatious, moderated by sex such that female traditional flirts will be more likely to engage in friendly behaviors and male traditional flirts will be more likely to engage in flirtatious behaviors. Lastly, sincere flirts will most likely compose textual communication they perceive as friendly or flirtatious.

However, message reception is a bit more complex than message production. Based on a person's flirting style, it could be that they have different thresholds for the different social-sexual frames. For example, physical flirts are more likely to engage in seductive communication frequently whereas a polite flirt is likely not to engage in seductive communication. Therefore, when interpreting the same message, if it is slightly more sexual, that might be enough for the polite flirt to interpret the message using the seductive frame, but the physical flirt might think of it as more flirty or friendly because the seductiveness is not as clear or direct as what they are used to. Due to this possibility, the question of directionality is posed in addition to the hypotheses regarding the flirting styles' perceptions of textual exchanges.

Study Overview

The present research encompasses two studies, with the second study including a thematic analysis after the initial quantitative portion. The first study focuses on the perceptions people have of various textual interactions. The predictions include the following:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between the physical flirting style and perceiving interactions as seductive.

H2: There will be a positive relationship between the sincere flirting style and perceiving interactions as friendly.

H3: There will be a positive relationship between the playful flirting style and perceiving interactions as flirtatious.

H4: There will be a positive relationship between the polite flirting style and perceiving interactions as friendly.

H5: The relationship between traditional flirting style and interaction perceptions will be moderated by sex such that there will be a positive relationship between the traditional flirting style and perceiving interactions as flirtatious for males and a positive relationship between the traditional flirting style and perceiving interactions as friendly for females.

H6: The association between involvement and frame activation will vary as a function of frame salience, such that the magnitude of the involvement-frame association will be greater with the most salient frame than with the other two frames.

RQ1: Do individuals' flirting styles influence which frame they perceive as the dominant frame?

Study Two, Part A focuses on message frames in communication via text with a potential romantic partner in an online dating context. The predictions include the following:

H1: The physical flirting style will positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction as seductive.

H2: The sincere flirting style will positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction as friendly.

H3: The playful flirting style will positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction as flirtatious and seductive.

H4: The polite flirting style will positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction as friendly.

H5: The relationship between the traditional flirting style and perceptions of one's engagement in an online dating interaction will be moderated by sex such that there will be a positive relationship between the traditional flirting style and engaging in behaviors that participants self-perceive as flirtatious for males and a positive relationship between the traditional flirting style and engaging in behaviors that participants self-perceive as friendly for females.

H6: The correlation between involvement and the self-reported highest scoring frame will vary as a function of frame salience, such that the magnitude of association will be greater with the most salient frame than with the other two frames.

Study Two, Part B centers on whether a person's flirting style influences the online dating sites they prefer to use and explores the potential reasons why that might be. This thematic analysis is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: Do people who score highly in certain flirting styles have preferences for which online dating sites they choose to use?

RQ2: Are there norms on different dating sites that are more characteristic of certain flirting styles or socio-sexual frames?

CHAPTER THREE

Study One

Study One Methods

Pre-Test of Textual Interactions

To determine which interactions to include in Study One, a pretest was conducted. Using real-life textual interactions offered by participants from a previous data set (e.g., Hall, 2016), a total of 14 potential messages were put into a Qualtrics survey. Following each interaction was a single question to gauge participants' interpretation of the socio-sexual frames: "Which word best describes the interaction you just read? You can only pick one." The three options listed were friendly, flirtatious, and seductive. The survey was posted to the researcher's Facebook as well as on r/SampleSize. After removing unfinished responses, a total of 78 responses were collected. Frequency tables were generated to determine what percentage of participants had interpreted each interaction as friendly, flirtatious, and seductive. Five interactions were chosen based on the frequency with which the volunteers rated each text (see Appendix A-E). To ensure that Study One participants would be reading and interpreting a variety of message types, the following labels were used to guide the decision: very friendly, a little flirty; very flirty, a little seductive and a little friendly; very flirty, not anything else; very seductive, only a little friendly and a little flirty; and very friendly, somewhat seductive.

Main Study

Participants and Procedure

The data for Study One was collected using convenience sampling. Calls for participants were posted to a research participation pool at a large Midwestern university in a Communication Department and anyone 18 years and older was eligible to participate in an

online survey. Students that chose to participate received five points of extra credit upon completion. The survey included general demographic questions, forced-choice perceptions of five different text message interactions, social-sexual perceptions (Hall, 2016) of those text messages, and the flirting styles inventory (FSI; Xing & Hall, 2015).

A total of 175 participants began the study, but 10 participants were removed as they did not complete the survey. Three attention checks were run (i.e., responding with the same non-midpoint response to a positively and negatively worded item on the same scale) and survey completion times were checked (i.e., taking less than five minutes to complete the full survey was marked as a sign that the participant did not give their full attention or provide thoughtful answers). If participants failed at least two of these attention checks (including the completion time), then they were removed from the study. This left 153 participants in the final analysis.

Most participants were female (54.2%), White (79.1%), and straight (88.9%). Participants also identified as bisexual (9.2%), and 1.3% selected Other (writing in pansexual and questioning). Participants could identify with as many racial and ethnic categories as they wished. Other racial and ethnic categories were 10.5% Asian, 6.5% Black, 3.9% Latino/a/x, and 2.6% selected Other. Participants were 20.49 years of age on average ($SD = 2.21$, $mdn = 20$, $range = 18-38$).

Measures

Differential Salience. To test differential salience, participants were timed on the question immediately following each text message interaction. After reading through the textual interaction and clicking “next”, they were shown the following question: “Overall, was the message that you just read flirtatious, friendly, or seductive?” They were only allowed to pick one. This tested differential salience because the longer it takes to determine the frame of an

interaction, the more ambiguity there is within that interaction as to which frame is dominant (Solomon et al., 2002). Therefore, in this study, the less time it took for people to determine the frame activation, the more salient the frame.

Social-Sexual Perceptions. To measure social-sexual frame interpretations, participants completed a 10-item scale developed by Hall (2016). Four items were used to measure the seductive frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .95). An example item for the seductive frame was "Sexually assertive/sexually unassertive". Three items were used to measure the flirtatious frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .75). An example item for the flirtatious frame was "Inviting/Not inviting". Three items were used to measure the friendly frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .90). An example item for the friendly frame was "Kind/Unkind".

Flirting Styles Inventory (FSI). Flirting styles were measured using the revised version of the flirting styles inventory (Xing & Hall, 2015). The revised version includes 23 items and uses a 7-point Likert-type scale. The revised scale was developed to remove the presumption of an opposite-sex partner in the item phrasing, and to shorten the scale (by five items) while maximizing latent factor fit and each item's unique contribution to overall model fit. Five items measured the traditional style (Cronbach's alpha = .74). Example items included, "Men should pursue women, not the other way around," and "I wish we could go back to a time where formal dating was the norm." Four items measured the physical style (Cronbach's alpha = .81). Example items included, "I am good at showing my sexual interest," and "I am good at using body language to flirt." Four items measured the playful style (Cronbach's alpha = .66). Example items included, "The primary reason I flirt is because it makes me feel good about myself," and

“I flirt with people I have absolutely no interest in.” Five items measured the sincere style (Cronbach’s alpha = .76). Example items included, “I really enjoy learning about another person’s interest,” and “I really look for an emotional connection with someone I’m interested in.” Five items measured the polite style (Cronbach’s alpha = .66). Example items included, “People should be cautious when letting someone know they are interested,” and “It is important to not say something overly sexual when showing interest.” The reliabilities were consistent with the revised measure (Hall & Xing, 2015); that is, a scale with fewer items often reduces conventional measures of reliability also had stronger latent model fit.

Study One Results

Data was analyzed using OLS linear regressions with the flirting styles as IVs and the three frames that participants interpreted from the interactions presented to them in the survey as DVs. Each regression was run with five predictors: 1) traditional flirting style, 2) physical flirting style, 3) playful flirting style, 4) sincere flirting style, and 5) polite flirting style.

Hypothesis One

H1 predicted that the physical flirting style would positively predict seductive perceptions. A linear regression was calculated to test this hypothesis for each textual interaction as well as the total across all textual interactions. Analysis indicated that a physical flirting style did significantly predict how seductively people perceived three of the five textual interactions (see Appendix F, Appendix, H, and Appendix I). The higher participants scored in the physical flirting style, the more likely they were to rate the first, third, and fourth textual interactions as more seductive controlling for the other flirting styles. The regression analysis on perceptions across all textual interactions indicated that the physical flirting style significantly predicted how

seductively participants perceived the textual interactions overall (see Appendix K). Overall, H1 was supported.

Hypothesis Two

H2 predicted that the sincere flirting style would positively predict friendly perceptions. A linear regression was calculated to test this hypothesis for each textual interaction as well as the total across all textual interactions. Analysis indicated that a sincere flirting style significantly predicted how friendly people perceived four of the five textual interactions (see Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, and Appendix J). The higher participants scored in the sincere flirting style, the more likely they were to perceive the first, second, third, and fifth textual interactions as more friendly controlling for the other flirting styles. The regression analysis on perceptions across all textual interactions indicated that the sincere flirting style significantly predicted how friendly participants perceived the textual interactions overall (see Appendix K). Overall, H2 was supported.

Hypothesis Three

H3 predicted that the playful flirting style would positively predict flirtatious perceptions. A linear regression was calculated to test this hypothesis for each textual interaction as well as the total across all textual interactions. Analysis indicated that a playful flirting style did not significantly predict how flirtatious people perceived any of the textual interactions (see Appendix K). Overall, H3 was not supported.

Hypothesis Four

H4 predicted that the polite flirting style would positively predict friendly perceptions. A linear regression was calculated to test this hypothesis for each textual interaction as well as the total across all textual interactions. Analysis indicated that a polite flirting style significantly

predicted one of the five textual interactions (see Appendix F), however, it was in the opposite direction of the hypothesis. Rather than a polite flirting style *positively* predicting friendly perceptions, the higher a participant scored in the polite flirting style, the less they perceived the first text as friendly. Overall, H4 was not supported.

Hypothesis Five

H5 predicted that the perceptions of those that score high in the traditional flirting style would be moderated by sex such that males would be more likely to perceive interactions as flirtatious whereas females would be more likely to perceive interactions as friendly. To test the effect of sex (i.e., male or female) on the relationship between the traditional flirting style and the perceptions of the textual interactions, a moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). A total of 18 moderation models were run, one for each individual textual interaction and the flirtatious, friendly, and seductive perceptions across all textual interactions. All six models run on flirtatious perceptions were not significant (see Appendix L). Only one moderation model was found to be significant for friendly perceptions. Sex significantly moderated whether a participant that scored highly in the traditional flirting style perceived the first textual interaction as friendly (see Appendix M). This indicates that female participants with a higher traditional style were more likely than traditional male participants to perceive the first text as friendly. Only one model was found to be significant for the outcome of a seductive perceptions. Sex significantly moderated whether a participant that scored highly in the traditional flirting style perceived the fourth textual interaction as friendly (see Appendix N). This indicates that male participants with a higher traditional style were more likely than traditional female participants to perceive the fourth text as seductive. Although a few of the moderation tests were significant, H5 was not supported.

Hypothesis Six

H6 predicted that the more salient the frame is in a textual interaction, the quicker participants would respond with that frame when compared to the other two frame interpretations. In other words, if the frame is obvious, participants will interpret it faster. When messages are a bit more ambiguous, it should take more time to discern the frame. Frequencies were run to determine how often participants rated each text exchange as flirtatious, friendly, or seductive. Then, the amount of time spent to decide was examined. After an initial run of frequency analyses, it was clear that there were some major outliers skewing the time data for the first three textual interactions (i.e., eight outliers for the first text, one outlier for the second text, and six outliers for the third text). There were no outliers for the last two texts, which could mean that participants became familiar with the task as they repeated it several times on the fourth and fifth texts. Outliers, defined as any participant that took longer than three standard deviations above the mean to respond, were removed and frequencies were rerun for all textual interactions.

For the first textual interaction, 107 (74.8%) participants selected friendly, 36 (25.2%) participants selected flirtatious, and no one selected seductive. This was in line with what was expected for participant perceptions of the first textual message interaction as it was interpreted in the pretest as very friendly, a little flirty. For the second textual interaction, 44 (29.3%) participants selected friendly, 105 (70%) selected flirtatious, and only one (.7%) participant selected seductive. This was mostly in line with what was expected as the second textual interaction was interpreted in the pretest as very flirty, a little seductive, and a little friendly. For the third textual interaction, four (2.8%) participants rated the text as friendly, 114 (78.6%) participants selected flirtatious, and 27 (18.6%) selected seductive. This was mostly in line with what was expected regarding participant perceptions for the third textual interaction as

participants in the pretest interpreted it as very flirty, not much of anything else. For the fourth textual interaction, six (4%) participants rated it as friendly, 25 (16.6%) participants rated it as flirtatious, and 120 (79.5%) participants rated it as seductive. Again, this was mostly in line with what was expected for participant perceptions of the fourth textual interaction as it was interpreted in the pretest as very seductive, a little friendly, a little flirty. For the fifth textual interaction, 119 (78.8%) participants rated it as friendly, 26 (17.2%) participants rated it as flirtatious, and six (4%) participants rated it as seductive. This was mainly in line with what was predicted of participant perception as the fifth textual interaction was interpreted as very friendly, somewhat seductive in the pretest.

The next step in answering H6 involved comparing the average time it took participants to select their responses to see if there were any significant differences. This was done by running five independent samples *t*-tests on the top two responses for each textual response. This was decided as the third ranked response on each textual interaction was never higher than six people and therefore was too few responses to compare using an ANOVA.

For the first text, no significant difference was found between the average time it took to interpret the first text as friendly ($M = 5.25$ seconds, $SD = 2.63$, $N = 107$) versus flirtatious ($M = 5.83$ seconds, $SD = 3.22$, $N = 36$); $t(141) = -.98$, $p = .332$.

For the second text, no significant difference was found between the average time it took to interpret the second text as friendly ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 8.63$, $N = 44$) versus flirtatious ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 8.83$, $N = 105$); $t(147) = 1.03$, $p = .304$.

For the third text, no significant difference was found between the average time it took to interpret the third text as seductive ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.96$, $N = 27$) versus flirtatious ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 2.62$, $N = 114$); $t(139) = -.89$, $p = .376$.

For the fourth text, a significant difference was found between the average time it took to interpret the fourth text as seductive ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.79$, $N = 120$) versus flirtatious ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 3.13$, $N = 25$); $t(143) = -3.63$, $p = .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.09$.

For the fifth text, no significant difference was found between the average time it took to interpret the fifth text as friendly ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 2.14$, $N = 119$) versus flirtatious ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 3.13$, $N = 26$). Though the difference was not significant, it was near significance: $t(143) = -1.79$, $p = .084$.

Although for all five text exchanges the dominant frame (defined by consensus) was selected more quickly than the second most commonly selected frame, H6 was unsupported because only one of five of the differences in time were significant.

Research Question One

RQ1 asked if individuals' flirting styles influence which frame they perceived as the dominant frame. To answer this question, a binary logistic regression analysis was run on the top two frame responses for each textual interaction. Frame responses were coded in binary to reflect the following frames for each text: 1) flirtatious versus friendly, 2) flirtatious versus friendly, 3) flirtatious versus seductive, 4) flirtatious versus seductive, and 5) flirtatious versus friendly.

Four binary logistic regressions found that none of the predictor variables were found to significantly predict frame perception regarding the first, second, third, and fifth textual interaction.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to investigate how flirting styles influence flirtatious versus seductive perceptions of the fourth textual interaction. The physical and playful flirting styles were found to contribute significantly to the model in the expected directions. The unstandardized beta weight for the Constant: $B = -1.66$, $SE = 2.53$, $Wald = .43$, $p = .512$. The

unstandardized beta weight for the physical flirting style: $B = -.47$, $SE = .18$, $Wald = 6.64$, $p = .005$. The estimated odds ratio favored a decrease of nearly 31% for flirtatious perceptions every one unit increase in the physical style of flirting. This indicates a significant likelihood that those who scored higher in the physical style of flirting would select seductive as the perceived frame for the fourth textual interaction. The unstandardized beta weight for the playful flirting style: $B = .49$, $SE = .25$, $Wald = 3.95$, $p = .024$. The estimated odds ratio favored an increase of nearly 63% for flirtatious perceptions every one unit increase in the playful style of flirting.

Study One Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold – 1) to explore how flirting styles influence participants' perceptions of textual interactions in the early stages of a potential romantic relationship, and 2) to determine if differential salience could be tested by the time it takes for people to interpret the frame of an interaction.

Participants' perceptions of five textual interactions were tested in two ways – as a timed forced-choice question that asked them to determine which frame immediately came to mind after reading the textual interaction, and then an untimed, more nuanced, semantic differential assessment. In addition to their perceptions of these text messages, participants' flirting styles were assessed. Though there were trends in how much time it took participants to determine the frame of a textual interaction in the forced-choice option, differences were mostly non-significant except for text exchange four wherein there was a significant association between playful and physical flirting style and the frame participants chose. However, despite the non-significant results for the forced-choice perceptions of the frames, there were significant results when it came to the semantic differential assessment of framing perceptions. The implications of these results are explored further in the subsequent paragraphs.

Nuance and the Big Picture

Results indicated that flirting styles tend to be influential when participants take the time to think through a more nuanced assessment of the textual interactions, but not so much when it comes to the forced-choice frame interpretations that immediately followed the text messages. In other words, rather than explaining the immediate perceptions of an interaction, flirting styles seems to be more important when it comes to deliberated or detailed perceptions regarding the textual exchanges. Physical flirts were significantly more likely to rate the text messages as seductive, and sincere flirts were significantly more likely to rate the presented text messages as friendly. This could also be an indication that flirting style is important when deliberately thinking through an interaction. Initial, forced choice perceptions of an interaction may be more influenced by broader consensus, as RFT would suggest. RFT posits that there are multiple factors that go into the frames that people use to interpret interpersonal interactions (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015): the features of an utterance, the episodic goal, the relational context, personal qualities of the interactants, and social/cultural norms surrounding the interaction. The results suggest that there are other factors beyond an individual's flirting style that influence understanding and determining the frame of a social-sexual online interaction. For example, the specific features of a message undoubtedly contribute to the frame interpretation of a text message, given the clear consensus among participants in evaluating the three frames. In addition to these factors, the personal quality of flirting style has some influence over how a person might deliberate on the frame of an interaction, especially for physical and sincere flirts.

Differential Salience

The forced-choice perceptions were timed to test the differential salience hypothesis, a central proposition of RDT. Previous research using RFT has measured differential salience by correlating the level of involvement participants reported with the frame they interpreted from an interaction (Solomon et al., 2002). This study sought to determine if the time it takes someone to interpret an interaction could be used as an indicator of the message ambiguity. In other words, the expectation was that the dominant frame of the textual interaction would be selected significantly faster compared to the non-dominant frame. If an individual deliberates, even for a second longer, then the frame could be interpreted as less salient to them. This is similar to an earlier assertion that the “frames are thought to operate in mild opposition to one another, such that as one assumes salience, the other tends to recede” (Dillard et al., 1996, p. 706). Dillard and colleagues’ (1996) findings illustrate that people tend toward whichever frame they feel summarizes the interaction and if the interaction is more ambiguous, “individuals may defer relational interpretation until more data become available” (p. 718). Given the current study’s findings regarding the effect of deliberation on the frame interpretation, this is consistent with previous scholarship on the differential salience hypothesis.

Five textual interactions were chosen from the pretest with various levels of frame salience (see Appendix A-E). The participants in this study perceived the frames very similarly to those in the pretest. This suggests there is a consensus among all participants as to which is the dominant frame. However, Study One’s results indicate that the frame most commonly picked is not necessarily picked faster. Aside from the fourth textual interaction, none of the other texts had a significant difference in how much time it took for participants to determine the frame. The trends in the data indicated that the average time it took participants to choose the dominant frame was faster in all but one textual interaction (text three – between seductive and flirtatious).

Therefore, this measure of involvement – speed of decision of frame – could prove to be a useful measurement with a greater number of participants and more statistical power.

CHAPTER FOUR

Study Two, Part A

Study Two, Part A Methods

Participants and Procedure

For the second study, participants were recruited using convenience sampling from two sources. As with the first study, calls for participants were posted to a research participation pool at a large Midwestern university in the Department of Communication Studies. In addition to the research pool, calls for participants were posted to Amazon's MTurk as Study Two required that participants be current and active users of online dating sites or apps, which was harder to find using the student research pool. Students that chose to participate received five points of extra credit for their participation and those that were recruited via MTurk were compensated \$1.40 for their time. To be eligible for this study, participants had to meet the following requirements: a) be 18 years of age or older and b) currently be utilizing online dating sites, and c) be willing to share the contents of a textual interaction that has occurred between them and a potential romantic partner in the early stages of courtship (i.e., between matching and meeting). Those interested in participating clicked the link provided on the recruitment call, which led them to the survey where they were first given an informative consent form to agree to before completing the survey at their own convenience.

Like the first survey, this survey was conducted via Qualtrics and included general demographic questions, an involvement scale, questions regarding intent, and the flirting styles inventory (FSI). After providing the text exchange, participants were asked to evaluate their own messages using a social-sexual frame interpretation scale.

A total of 427 participants began the study, but after filtering out those that failed to meet the study requirements and pass the three attention checks, a total of 149 participants remained. Two study criteria questions related directly to the eligibility of the participants: 1) Are you currently using online dating sites (e.g., eHarmony, Match.com, etc.) or apps (e.g., Tinder, Bumble, etc.)? and 2) Have you recently sent a text message to a potential romantic or sexual partner through an online dating site (e.g., eHarmony, Match.com, etc.) or app (e.g., Tinder, Bumble, etc.)? If the participants answered “no” to either one of these questions, they were forced to exit the survey. One attention check was embedded within the measurement of intent and asked participants to fill in the first bubble on the item scale. If they failed to do so, they were removed from the data.

Participants were pretty evenly split when it came to sex with 49.7% female. Additionally, participants were mostly White (84.6%) and straight (80.5%). Participants also identified as bisexual (15.4%), gay (.7%), lesbian (.7%) and other/preferred not to disclose (2.6%). Participants could identify with as many racial and ethnic categories as they wished. Other racial and ethnic categories participants identified with include 7.4% Asian, 7.4% Black, 2% Native American, .7% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1.3% selected “other”. 4% of participants identified as Mixed Race and 11.5% identified as Latino/a/x. Participants were 25.71 years of age on average ($SD = 9.90$, $mdn = 21$, $range = 18-58$).

Measures

Involvement. Participants completed a 4-item involvement scale developed by Graves and Samp (2021) to measure differential salience. Participants were asked to consider the textual interaction they had – and which they provided earlier in the survey – then fill in the measure as it pertained to their *own* behaviors in said interaction. The measure used a 7-point semantic

differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .92). Items included "disinterested/interested", "uninvolved/involved", "inactive/active", and "withdrawn/engaged".

Sexual and Romantic Intent. Participants completed a 7-item intent scale developed by Hall (2016). The measure used a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .90). Example items included "I did not want to have sex with this person/I very much wanted to have sex with this person", and "I was not at all open to a committed dating relationship with this person/I was very much open to a committed dating relationship with this person". The Cronbach's alpha for the sexual intent items was .96 and the Cronbach's alpha for the romantic intent items was .92.

Social-Sexual Perceptions. To measure social-sexual frame interpretations, participants completed a 10-item scale developed by Hall (2016). Four items were used to measure the seductive frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .93). An example item for the seductive frame was "sexually assertive/sexually unassertive". Three items were used to measure the flirtatious frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .76). An example item for the flirtatious frame was "inviting/not inviting". Three items were used to measure the friendly frame interpretation on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's alpha = .84). An example item for the friendly frame was "kind/unkind".

Flirting Styles Inventory (FSI). Flirting styles were measured using the revised version of the flirting styles inventory (Xing & Hall, 2015) also used in Study 1. Five items measured the traditional style (Cronbach's alpha = .70). Four items measured the physical style (Cronbach's alpha = .61). Four items measured the playful style (Cronbach's alpha = .64). Five items measured the sincere style (Cronbach's alpha = .64). Five items measured the polite style

(Cronbach's alpha = .69). The reliabilities were consistent with the revised measure (Hall & Xing, 2015).

Study Two, Part A Results ¹

Hypotheses One – Four

H1 stated that those that the physical flirting style would significantly positively predict perceptions of one's own behavior in a textual interaction as seductive. H2 asserted that the sincere flirting style would significantly positively predict perceptions of one's own behavior in a textual interaction as friendly. H3 guessed that the playful flirting style would significantly positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in a textual interaction as flirtatious and seductive. H4 posited that the polite flirting style would significantly positively predict perceptions of one's own behaviors in a textual interaction as friendly.

Three multiple linear regression models were used to test if the predictor variables – sex, involvement, the five flirting styles, sexual intent, and romantic intent – significantly predicted the frame interpretations of one's own behaviors in a textual interaction as seductive, flirtatious, and friendly. Overall, the first model, with the seductive frame as the dependent variable, was statistically significant ($R^2 = .22$, $F(9, 139) = 4.26$, $p < .001$; see Appendix P). Three variables significantly predicted the interpretation of one's behavior in an online dating textual interaction as seductive: the physical flirting style (standardized $\beta = .26$, $p = .002$), the sincere flirting style

¹ A MANOVA was conducted to determine if there were any differences between the participants recruited from MTurk and the participants recruited from the student research pool. Participants from MTurk were significantly likelier to be traditional flirts, reported more sexual and romantic intent, more involvement, and were more likely to perceive their behaviors in an interaction as friendly.

(standardized $\beta = -.17, p = .035$), and sexual intent (standardized $\beta = .35, p < .001$). Thus H1 was supported.

Overall, the second model, with the flirtatious frame as the dependent variable, was found to be statistically significant ($R^2 = .18, F(9, 139) = 3.43, p < .001$; see Appendix P). Only one variable significantly predicted the interpretation of one's behavior in an online dating textual interaction as flirtatious: sexual intent (standardized $\beta = .32, p < .001$).

Lastly, the third model, with the friendly frame as the dependent variable, was statistically significant ($R^2 = .21, F(9, 139) = 4.11, p < .001$; see Appendix P). Three variables significantly predicted the interpretation of one's behavior in an online dating textual interaction as friendly: involvement (standardized $\beta = .23, p = .010$), the playful flirting style (standardized $\beta = -.23, p = .005$), and the sincere flirting style (standardized $\beta = .15, p = .032$). Thus H2 was supported. H3, while not supported, was reversed as the playful style of flirting was not a significant positive predictor of perceptions of flirtatious or seductive behaviors in a textual interaction, but it was a significant negative predictor of perceptions of friendliness. Lastly, H4 was unsupported as the polite style of flirting was not found to be a significant predictor of any of the three social-sexual frames.

Additionally, a correlation analysis was run between the five flirting styles and all three frame interpretations (see Appendix Q). Analysis indicated that the physical flirting style was significantly correlated with engaging in textual interactions wherein the participant perceived their own behaviors as seductive and flirtatious. It was also found that the sincere flirting style was significantly correlated with the engaging in textual interactions wherein the participant perceived their own behaviors as friendly. Finally, a significant negative correlation was found between the playful flirting style and participants perceiving their own behaviors in a textual

interaction as friendly. See Appendix Q for more information regarding the correlational analysis.

Hypothesis Five

H5 predicted that sex would moderate the relationship between the traditional flirting style and frame interpretation such that participants who identified as males would be more likely to engage in behaviors interpreted as flirtatious whereas those who identified as females would be more likely to engage in behaviors interpreted as friendly. To test this effect, a moderation analysis was conducted for each social-sexual frame interpretation using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). Refer to Appendix R for a full report of the three models.

The first model looked at how the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant contributed to the variance in the outcome of a seductive frame interpretation. The model was significant at the .001 level ($F(3, 141) = 6.65, p < .001, R^2 = .12$), indicating that together, the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant, and the interaction between those two variables significantly contributed to 12.39% of the variance in interpreting the provided textual interaction as seductive. The interaction effect between the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant was found to be significant (unstandardized $b = .45, t(141) = 2.10, p = .04$; see Appendix T). For females, there was a statistically nonsignificant .06 decrease in the perception of one's textual interactions as seductive (unstandardized $b = -.06, t(141) = -.43, p = .67$). For males, there was a .39 increase in the perception of one's textual interactions as seductive (unstandardized $b = .39, t(141) = 2.43, p = .02$). Participants who scored high in the traditional flirting style were less likely to report their own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction

as seductive if they were female but were significantly more likely to perceive their behaviors as seductive if they were male.

The second model looked at how the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant contributed to the variance in the outcome of a flirtatious frame interpretation. The model was nonsignificant ($p = .13$), but the interaction effect between the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant was found to be significant at the .05 level (unstandardized $b = .41$, $t(141) = 2.06$, $p = .04$; see Appendix U). Participants who scored high in the traditional flirting style were less likely to report their own behaviors in an online dating textual interaction as flirtatious if they were female but were significantly more likely to perceive their behaviors as flirtatious if they were male. The third model looked at how the traditional flirting style and sex of the participant contribute to the variance in the outcome of a friendly frame interpretation. The model was nonsignificant. Thus, H5 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis Six

H6 predicted that the dominant interpretation frame would be most strongly correlated with involvement. For example, compared to the association between involvement and the other frames, involvement should be most strongly associated with the friendly frame when the participants perceive the friendly frame to be the dominant frame. After splitting the data into groups according to the dominant frame that people chose, it was clear that most participants considered their interactions to be friendly when compared to the other two frames (83% of participants rated their interactions highest for the friendly frame). Therefore, three Pearson correlations were run for participants who interpreted their own textual interactions as mostly friendly. Analyses were only conducted for those participants who rated friendly frame to be dominant, as there were too few participants who rated the other two frames as highest.

Results of the Pearson correlation for those that rated the interaction as mostly friendly indicated that there was no significant association between involvement and the seductive frame, $r(124) = .074, p = .415$. A significant relationship was found between involvement and the flirtatious frame, $r(124) = .194, p < .05$ as well as between involvement and the friendly frame $r(124) = .271, p = < .01$. A test was conducted using the online calculator (Preacher, 2002) to check for any significant differences between the correlations. The results indicated that there was only one significant differences between the correlations of the three frames and involvement; seductive/flirtatious: $z = .95, p = .17$, seductive/friendly: $z = -1.61, p = .05$, flirtatious/friendly: $z = -.66, p = .25$. Overall, H6 was partially supported as there was a significant difference between the correlations of involvement and the seductive frame and involvement and the friendly frame, but no significant differences between the other correlations.

Study Two, Part A Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how flirting styles influence participants' behaviors when engaging in textual interactions with a potential partner in an online dating context. Participants provided snippets of a textual interaction they had with a potential partner via an online dating app or site. After providing the textual interaction, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their perception of their own behavior in the interaction (i.e., which social-sexual frames did they perceive in their own interaction), their romantic and sexual intent, and the extent of involvement they perceived in their interactions.

Flirting Styles and Behaviors in Online Dating Textual Interactions

Results indicated that flirting styles are associated with participants' own textual interactions with a potential dating partner, particularly for the physical, sincere, and traditional flirting styles. Physical flirts were significantly more likely to perceive their own textual

interactions as seductive and flirtatious. Sincere flirts were significantly more likely to perceive their textual interaction as friendly. According to Hall and Xing's (2015) research on flirting styles and behaviors, physical flirts "are capable of clearly conveying their own interest," and sincere flirts are more likely to "convey romantic attraction through emotional connection and showing sincere interest in potential partners" (p. 44). The findings from this current study corroborate those results as physical flirts were significantly more likely to interpret their own behaviors in an online dating context as seductive. In other words, they believe they are able to encode their sexual intentions in messages sent to their potential romantic partners. Additionally, sincere flirts being significantly more likely to interpret their own behaviors in an online dating context as friendly is consistent with the definition of the style – part of a sincere flirt's pursuit of a romantic partner involves forming an emotional connection as a gateway to romance.

For traditional flirts, sex acted as a moderator in that traditional males were significantly more likely to interpret their own behaviors as both more seductive and more flirtatious than traditional females. In fact, for females, as traditional style increased, they were less likely to perceive their textual interactions as seductive or flirtatious. This finding reinforces the understanding of traditional flirts firmly adhering to traditional gender roles in a courtship context wherein men are expected to put in the efforts of wooing the woman in a relationship and women are expected to be more passive for their part in a courtship interaction (Hall & Xing, 2015). As suggested by Hall and Xing (2015), "females might be more successful in enacting the traditional script by being more reserved in courtship interactions and might be perceived as more attractive if they act in a yielding or uninterested way, especially in the early part of the interaction" (p. 58). Findings from the current study support this idea.

How Flirting Styles Influence Behaviors in An Online Dating Context

RFT suggests that multiple factors feed into how an interaction is interpreted, goals of the interactants serves as one of these factors (Dillard et al., 1996; Solomon & McLaren, 2008). Hence, the measures of sexual and romantic intent in Study Two, Part A provide insight as to whether flirting styles would still be significant predictors of frame interpretation even when a person's intent is taken into consideration. Hall's (2016) research on social-sexual frames shows that "social-sexual communication and contextual cues helps individuals discern the openness, availability, and intentions of potential partners" (p. 139). In courtship contexts, communication conveys intentions as well as interaction partners' personal qualities.

Results of the first regression analysis show that the physical flirting style positively predicts participants' likelihood of interpreting their textual interactions as seductive and the sincere flirting style negatively predicts participants' likelihood of interpreting their textual interactions as seductive. Moreover, sexual intent significantly positively influences the likelihood of participants to interpret their own behaviors in a textual interaction as seductive. These results are consistent with what is already known regarding flirting styles and the different behaviors they are more likely to engage in (Hall & Xing, 2015). Physical flirts have been characterized as being more comfortable flirting in a seductive and sexually direct way than some of the other flirting styles (Hall, 2013). Additionally, sincere flirts tend to enjoy creating a genuine connection with their potential sexual and/or romantic partners and are more likely to prefer interactions that are less overtly seductive and more centered around similarities and common interests (Hall & Xing, 2015). Therefore, the negative association between those high in the sincere flirting style and their engagement in seductively encoded behaviors is consistent with past work about flirting styles and related behaviors. That sexual intent was a positive predictor of engagement in seductive behaviors is consistent with previous research on the topic;

Solomon (2006) noted that when there is more seduction present in an interaction, more sexual intent is perceived. Therefore, it would make sense that those who reported greater sexual intent in their interactions also perceived their behaviors as more seductive.

Results of the second regression analysis show that only sexual intent predicted participants' interpretation of the flirtatious frame. This finding is unsurprising. That sexual intent was the only significant predictor in participants' perceptions of their own behaviors as flirtatious indicates that flirting messages are understood as intending a sexual outcome, regardless of flirting style. Peoples' interpretation of the flirtatious social-sexual frame is less related with people's personal flirting styles and perhaps more linked with societal schema surrounding flirtatious interactions. Flirtatious behaviors are often understood as an overt display of a person's romantic and/or sexual interests in another person (Henningsen, 2004) and are generally dispersed throughout a society via popular media that show certain behaviors as obvious forms of flirtation. The conclusion here is that regardless of one's flirting style, the more participants were looking for sexual contact (e.g., a hookup), the more flirtatious they perceived their communication behaviors.

Results of the third regression analysis reveal that two variables significantly predicted participants' likelihood of interpreting their textual interaction as friendly: involvement (in a positive direction) and the playful flirting style (in a negative direction). As the correlational analysis revealed, involvement is significantly correlated with the dominant frame in an interaction. As the general intensifier hypothesis would suggest, the friendly frame was the most dominant frame overall. Therefore, it would make sense that involvement is a significant predictor of the friendliness frame in this research. The playful style being a negative predictor of the friendliness frame can be understood according to past research about flirting styles. Playful

flirts do not typically seek to make sincere connections with the person they are flirting with, as they use flirting for instrumental means without any romantic intent (Hall, 2013).

These results confirm what previous research has shown and expands our knowledge on the role of flirting styles as well as intent in the social-sexual frame interpretations of online dating textual interactions (Hall, 2016; Hall & Xing, 2015). Even when intent is included, it does not remove the influence of certain flirting styles on frame interpretation, which supports RFT's general premise that multiple factors contribute to frame interpretations. Therefore, though this research was primarily focused on the personal quality of flirting styles, including intent (representing the episodic goal factor of RFT) in the analyses provides insight that the significant influence of one does not necessarily remove the influence of the other. Ultimately this supports RFT's primary assertion that frames are interpreted based on many factors ranging from micro to macro and these factors often work together in a person's perception of social-sexual frames.

Lastly, the correlational analyses conducted for H6 reinforced the idea of a positive relationship between perceptions of involvement and the interpretation of the dominant frame in an interaction. In this study, 83% of participants reported the dominant frame in their textual interaction as friendly. Due to the lack of participants that rated their interaction as mostly seductive or mostly flirtatious, this analysis was conducted with participants who rated their interactions as mostly friendly because there was not enough statistical power to run the analyses on the other two social-sexual frames. According to RFT, involvement should be positively related to frame interpretation such that the dominant frame would be most correlated with involvement. Involvement was significantly correlated with the friendly frame (i.e., the dominant frame) at the .01 level, significantly correlated with the flirtatious frame at the .05 level, and not significantly correlated with the seductive frame at all. These findings support RFT's general

intensifier hypothesis, that posits that involvement is most strongly associated with perceptions of the dominant frame in an interaction (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2015; Solomon et al., 1997). Furthermore, the correlation comparison tests demonstrated that the correlations between involvement and the friendly frame and involvement and the seductive frame were significantly different from each other, which supports the general intensifier hypothesis. The correlations between all other frame pairings were not found to be significantly different from one another. This is consistent with past research that has measured the differential salience hypothesis as Lannutti and Monahan (2002) found that involvement was significantly correlated with the dominant frames of the interactions presented in their analysis of RFT.

Study Two, Part A Limitations

This study yielded useful insights on RFT and social-sexual frame interpretation and provided information regarding the role of flirting styles in the engagement of textual interactions in an online dating context. However, there are limitations to keep in mind when interpreting these results. First and foremost, this study had a small sample size, especially regarding the analyses for H6. The small sample size made it difficult to assess the general intensifier hypothesis on any frame aside from the friendly frame. Secondly, this study was able to get a variety of participants outside of the realm of college students, however, both samples were recruited using convenience sampling and therefore cannot present an accurate representation of the online dating population that can be generalized beyond the participants in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Study Two, Part B

Study Two, Part B Thematic Analyses

Participants and Procedure

Recruitment for this study was the same as Study Two, Part A. The eligibility requirements were the same for both. After completing all the measures related to flirting styles, intent, involvement, and frame perceptions, participants answered four open-ended questions regarding their use of online dating, site preferences, and common behaviors they expect from users on their preferred site.

Measures

Online Dating Preferences. Participants who indicated that they were currently using online dating sites were directed to four open-ended survey questions. Those questions included: 1) Which dating site do you prefer to use? 2) Why do you prefer this site? What is it about that site that you like? Why do you keep coming back to it? What makes it better than the others? 3) What is the typical user of this site like? How would you describe how people typically behave on this site? 4) What sorts of interactions do you expect when using this site? Specifically, how do people communicate with each other on this site? If you were to describe it to another person, what would you say is normal or typical on that site? Thematic analysis was used to determine the norms of various online dating sites. The data were also analyzed for any descriptions that align with the five flirting styles and three social-sexual frames. In addition to the thematic analysis, correlations were conducted to test the relationships among flirting styles and dating site preference.

Study Two, Part B Qualitative Results

This study was guided by two overarching questions: 1) Do people who score highly in certain flirting styles have preferences for which online dating sites they choose to use? 2) Are there norms on different dating sites that are better suited for certain flirting styles?

Dating Site Preferences

To answer the first question, responses were split into four categories, representing the types of online dating sites: 1) Tinder, 2) Bumble, 3) sites for “serious commitment” (e.g., Hinge, Match, OkCupid, Plenty of Fish, and eHarmony), and 4) “other” (i.e., sites that only one participant listed). Then, a correlational analysis was conducted between the dating site preferences and the five flirting styles (see Appendix S). Analysis revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between the traditional flirting style and a preference for Tinder. Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between the traditional flirting style and a preference for Bumble. A significant positive correlation was found between the physical flirting style and a preference for Tinder. Lastly, a preference for the more serious dating sites was significantly negatively correlated with both the traditional flirting style and the physical flirting style.

Online Dating Norms

To answer the second question, thematic analysis was used to determine how participants characterized their preferred dating site and if the typical behaviors they reported on these sites seem better suited for some flirting styles compared to others. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a six-step process. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data. Secondly, the research makes note of initial codes as they sort through the data. These codes could take the form of patterns the researcher notices while reading through the responses or repetitive quotes that tend to appear frequently as the research reads, etc. Thirdly, using the

codes from step two, the researcher generates themes based on how the codes are related to each other and how they relate to the initial research question. Fourthly, the researcher reviews the themes, which allows them to double-check their work and be certain that the themes are cohesive. Fifthly, the themes are finalized and thematic descriptions are determined to allow readers to understand the thematic categories. Finally, in the sixth step, the researcher pulls examples directly from the data that illustrate the emergent themes.

Of the 149 participants, 62% listed Tinder as their preferred dating site, 13% listed Bumble, and 20% listed sites generally characterized as more serious (e.g., Hinge, Match, OkCupid, Plenty of Fish, eHarmony), and 4.7% listed some other site or app not listed by anyone else (e.g., Grindr, Snapchat, Tantan, Taimi, Elite Singles, Our Time, Secret Benefits). Within these overarching categories, various reasons were presented by participants for why they chose their preferred site and what behaviors constituted the norms and expectations of those using the site. Themes are categorized according to the general site preferences focusing on just the first three groups due to the lack of participants in the “other” category.

Tinder. As the most preferred site offered by participants in this study, there were several reasons given for why Tinder was chosen. These reasons included ease of use, the popularity of the site, perceived age similarities among the users. Relevant to this investigation, participants also mentioned the casual, more directly sexual goals of the users of this site. When answering the question of *why* they preferred to use Tinder, 66 (72% of those listing Tinder) participants explicitly noted that it was “easy to use”. In conjunction with the idea that Tinder’s interface is more conveniently set up for the users to navigate was the idea that there were generally more people using this site (49% of those listing Tinder) and therefore there would be a greater chance of matching with someone of similar interests and the potential for relationships. There was also

an element of socialization reported by the participants as many participants noted that Tinder is what most of their friends use or what other people their age are using (17% of those listing Tinder) and therefore it made the most sense for them to use it as well.

Participants mostly agreed that Tinder is a dating site very much geared toward sexual forwardness and hookups. Tinder was characterized by most participants (both those who preferred it and those who did not) as a more “casual” space for those looking for a relationship. Of the participants who listed Tinder as their preferred dating site, 27% explicitly noted its “casual” nature, 24% described it as a space to just have “fun”, 25% used the word “flirty”, 29% noted how sexual the site is, 11% described other users as “playful”, and 8.7% said that they expected communication with other users to be sexually “forward” and direct. Though Tinder is not explicitly marketed as a hookup site, like some online dating sites (e.g., Secret Benefits, Ashley Madison), the overwhelming perception of its casualness was a common sentiment of participants throughout the data. One participant wrote, “Most people you see are probably not looking for a committed relationship, so it just depends on what you want.” Other participants stated that “the typical user of [Tinder] is really playful,” “very sexual,” and that “the messages are pretty forward.” Though it did happen a couple of times, it was very rare that a participant made any comment about Tinder being a site for serious dating, as opposed to a place for casual hookups. To put it in one participant’s words, “Tinder really has the ‘hookup’ vibe.”

Data was also analyzed for any words used by participants that could be directly associated with the flirting styles and the social-sexual frames. When it came to Tinder many participants described the typical Tinder user to be “playful”, “crude”, “very forward and very sexual”, and “flirtatious” as well as “sexually motivated”. A common behavior noted by several participants was that other users, especially men, often broke the ice with cheesy or forward and

sexual pickup lines and the expectation was that many users would talk about sex in an outgoing manner. Additionally, many participants reported that the interactions they expect on this site could be described as “fun” and “casual”. One participant even stated,

I love a good game of hot or not! Plus, there’s an expectation that a hookup will ensue – and that’s what I’m interested in. It’s casual and no one on there is really looking for something serious or committed.

Another participant wrote that they “love male validation”, which was something a lot of women reported was easy to find on Tinder. As another participant put it, “If you’re a woman using Tinder, be prepared to be inundated with messages, more than you can keep up with”. These comments are consistent with the traditional, physical, and playful flirting styles as well as the seductive and flirtatious social-sexual frames.

Bumble. Participants provided a mixed characterization of Bumble with some similarities to Tinder, but also a perception that “real” relationships were more likely to be found on Bumble than on Tinder. The biggest difference noted by participants was that women get to be in control of the interaction, and it therefore felt a bit safer and like a slight step-up from the sexual playground of Tinder. For heterosexual users, Bumble is set up such that after users match with each other, the man cannot speak first, it must be the woman who sends the first message in order for the interaction to begin. This was a major reason why some participants who preferred Bumble: 53% of those who listed Bumble as their preference noted they liked that the woman was the one in control of the interaction. One participant described Bumble as a space where “people are overall less creepy” and “the behavior is a lot more chill and respectable because it is more female centered [since] women have to talk first so men can’t send gross pick-up lines.” Other participants noted that “girls have more control” on Bumble and that they appreciated that

“the women message first and the app is more serious than Tinder.” Some participants noted that “people on Bumble are more likely to be looking for a relationship”, implying that sites like Tinder are not a space where one could expect someone looking for something more than a casual or more sexual connection.

Though it was often characterized as a step up from Tinder in terms of the expectations that users are looking for more serious relationships, participants also noted that it was a space where they could just as often run into people looking for casual hookups on Bumble as well. As noted by one participant, “[Bumble users are] overly friendly or overly sexual, never both.” Thus, although it was considered by many of the participants who preferred Bumble to be a bit more tame and sincere than Tinder, Bumble was generally characterized as a mix bag of users looking for casual hookups as well as sincere romantic relationships, with built-in features that made it easier for women to have control over the interactions.

Data was also analyzed for any words used by participants that could be directly associated with the flirting styles and the social-sexual frames. Almost all participants that preferred Bumble emphasized that they were drawn to the site because, for those seeking heterosexual (i.e., straight) relationships, women hold the power in the interaction. One participant stated, “I like that I have more of a say on Bumble as a woman” and another participant said, “Women have to talk first so men can’t send gross pickup lines” as opposed to Tinder, where pickup lines were an expected form of communication. Multiple participants also noted that Bumble users are more “open to compliments and jokes” which is a slight difference from the overly shallow and surface level conversation that participants described as the norms and expectations for communication on Tinder. However, most users of Bumble did not describe the communicative norms as overly distinct from Tinder aside from the role of woman-speak-

first in the interaction and multiple participants noted that hookups were just as much expected as the potential for a serious romantic relationship. As one participant put it, “It is very much like Tinder – most people our age use it for hookups – but girls have to make the first move.” These comments are consistent with the physical and sincere flirting styles, in opposition to the traditional flirting style, and are connected to both the seductive and friendly social-sexual frames.

Sites For Getting Serious. Most of the other dating apps or dating sites that people listed that were *not* Tinder or Bumble were often positioned in opposition to the sexual directness that people so often used to describe more popular and well-known apps, especially with regard to Tinder. One participant noted that they preferred OkCupid because they were looking for “actual relationships and not just hookups.” Almost all participants that listed a different app than Tinder and Bumble explicitly noted that they used their preferred site for the express purpose of finding a “real connection” and that people who engaged in these sites were more likely to be looking for long-term relationships and commitment that, apparently, should not be expected from sites such as Tinder. Another participant whose preferred dating site was listed as Match noted that they “expect people to act more formally and less openly sexual than other sites.” Generally, participants described the communication on these “more serious” sites as friendly, respectful, and more authentic than the conversations users might have on Tinder.

Data was additionally analyzed for any words used by participants that could be directly associated with the flirting styles and the social-sexual frames. When it came to the more serious dating sites the typical user was often described as “friendly”, “looking for actual relationships and not just hookups,” “respectful,” and “genuine.” One participant stated that they “expect people to act more formally and less openly sexual than other sites” and it was quite common for

participants to note that they expected friendly interactions with other users. Participants who preferred these “more serious” sites also said, “People are much more polite and serious about looking for a true connection as opposed to rushing to meet [in person]” and that “people aren’t into games.” Generally, genuine connection and romantic intentions were more expected on these sites compared to Tinder and Bumble. These comments are consistent with the sincere and polite flirting styles as well as the friendly social-sexual frame.

Study Two, Part B Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain further insight on the relationship between flirting styles and dating site preferences as well as an understanding of the perceptions and expectations that users have when navigating these sites. Participants provided in-depth responses to overarching questions regarding their dating site preferences and what they saw as the typical communicative behaviors that take place on these sites. Correlational analysis between dating site preferences and participants’ flirting styles revealed some significant relationships between the traditional and physical flirting styles and preferences for Tinder and, to a lesser extent, Bumble. Additionally, participants described the various sites according to the norms and expectations they have for interactions with other users. These descriptions provide a more than surface-level account for which sites might be better suited to certain flirting styles as opposed to others, an insight that will be explored in the subsequent paragraphs.

Flirting Styles and Site Preference

Results indicated that the traditional flirting style was significantly positively correlated with a preference for Tinder and significantly negatively correlated with a preference for Bumble and the sites grouped in the “serious” dating category. This finding is unsurprising as traditional flirts adhere to the typical norms of gender roles, which means that traditional flirts expect men

to be the one to make the first move, something which is not possible for a man to do if they are straight and using Bumble. Additionally, as found in the quantitative results of Study Two, Part B, men who scored highly in the traditional flirting style were more likely to engage in behaviors they perceived as seductive and flirtatious. Based on the way participants characterized Tinder, it makes sense for the traditional flirting style to be significantly associated with a preference for Tinder. Additionally, participants described the more serious dating sites in stark contrast to the expectations of Tinder users, therefore, traditional flirts might not feel as open to engage in overtly seductive or flirtatious behaviors when using those sites, hence the significant negative correlation.

Results also indicated that the physical flirting style was significantly positively correlated with a preference for Tinder, and significantly negatively correlated with the more serious dating sites, which was again unsurprising. As the qualitative results illustrated, participants described Tinder as a sexually forward and hookup-oriented site. Users are expected to be flirtatious and interested in more casual sex compared to users of other sites. Participants described the more serious dating sites in a much different light than Tinder, noting the expectations for users to be more friendly and authentic and not overtly sexual or flirtatious. Physical flirts are characterized by their likeliness to engage in overtly sexual behaviors during courtship and have been found to use sex as a means to start a relationship (Hall, 2013). It was also found in the quantitative results of Study Two, Part A that those who scored highly in the physical flirting style were more likely to perceive their own behaviors as seductive. Therefore, the physical flirting style being significantly positively related to a preference for Tinder is consistent with the communicative behaviors associated with that style as well as what participants' expectations of users of the site. Furthermore, considering that participants provided

data based on perceptions revolving around their own textual communication in an online dating setting, it suggests that people are consciously constructing messages that fit the norms of the site they use.

Communicative Norms and Expectations

In addition to the correlational analysis conducted between the flirting styles and the dating site preferences, thematic analysis revealed some insights on which dating sites might be better suited for the different flirting styles. As noted in the correlational outputs, there were clear connections between the traditional and physical flirting style, but no other flirting styles were found to have a significant correlation with the preferences. However, some of the qualitative data indicated that those who score highly in the sincere and polite flirting styles might find that dating sites such as Hinge, Match, eHarmony, OkCupid, and Plenty of Fish suit their courtship behaviors better than sites such as Tinder and Bumble.

When it comes to the polite flirting style, many participants noted that the more serious dating sites offered interactions wherein the norm was more formal and respectful conversation. Participants also noted that they expected interactions that were less openly sexual than what you might find on Tinder or Bumble. As Hall (2013) noted in his research on flirting styles, polite flirts do not typically enjoy overly sexual and direct flirtation, but they do appreciate being respected and let the relationship blossom more slowly. This is also something that participants noted regarding the more serious sites – that the expectation for interactions on the site was the communication was more drawn-out and that users were not in a rush to meet up in person before getting to know each other a bit via textual communication.

There were also several descriptions offered by participants regarding the more serious dating sites that align with previous research on the behaviors associated with a sincere flirting

style. As opposed to the fun, flirty, and seductive descriptions that so often characterized Tinder – and to a lesser extent, Bumble – a commonly used word participants offered to describe the conversations they typically had on these more serious sites was “friendly”. Findings from the quantitative analyses of Study Two, Part A showed that sincere flirts were significantly more likely to perceive their own behaviors as friendly and significantly less likely to perceive their behaviors as seductive. With those findings in mind, it would make sense that sincere flirts would be more drawn to sites such as Hinge and the other “serious” sites listed. Interactions were often characterized as genuine as well, which is another characteristic of the sincere flirting style (Hall, 2013).

Limitations

Although significant relationships were found in the current data, the overwhelming majority of participants listed Tinder as their preferred dating site leaving a small amount of participants preferring other dating sites. A larger sample of participants who prefer Bumble as well as the sites typically characterized as more serious would be helpful in gleaning any differences between those sites and the flirting styles. Based on the way participants described some of the other sites, it could well be that there are significant relationships between some of the other flirting styles and dating sites other than Tinder, but we would need to have a larger sample size to ensure statistical power. Additionally, having more qualitative data from participants that prefer dating sites aside from Tinder would have provided a more robust picture of the other sites, especially for Bumble as it was a tossup between participants for how casual the site is viewed, making it more difficult to get a clear understanding of how users view Bumble compared to the other major sites listed.

CHAPTER SIX

General Discussion

The present three-part investigation provided important insights to how peoples' flirting styles are related to their perceptions of communication in online dating sites and which sites they prefer to use when online dating. Additionally, these studies added to our understanding of RFT in the realm of social-sexual communication. The first study focused on peoples' third-party perceptions of five actual textual interactions that occurred between two people in the early stages of courtship to determine how flirting styles were related to social-sexual frame interpretations. The second study centered on encoding of communication in a textual interaction through an online dating site and how the flirting styles relate to peoples' perceptions of their own behaviors. Lastly, the qualitative component of the second study provided insights on the relationships between the flirting styles and dating site preferences as well as an in-depth understanding on how the participants expect users of the various dating sites to communicate. The results are explored in conjunction with previous knowledge on these topics in the subsequent paragraphs.

Relational Framing Theory

This research has added to our understanding of RFT, including a confirmation of multiple factors contributing to the frame interpretation of an interaction, a new way to measure the concept of differential salience, and a confirmation of the general intensifier hypothesis. Results from Study One showed that flirting styles did factor into peoples' perceptions of a textual interaction to some extent but that message features were also used to determine which frame the interaction fit into. For example, of the five textual interactions shown to participants in Study One, the one perceived to be the most seductive by all who participated was the text that

included a winky face. Generally, winky faces in a text suggest a flirtatious and playful tone indicating some sort of sexual interaction to be desired by the people who use it. However, although message features hold weight when it comes to frame interpretation, the results suggest the five flirting styles also influence decoding communication. Frame interpretation in Study One was measured in two ways. First, by a forced-choice “choose one” measure immediately following participants’ observations of the textual interactions wherein participants had to choose only one of the three social-sexual frames they perceived the interaction as. Second, a semantic differential scale asked participants to determine how seductive, flirtatious, and friendly the interaction seemed on a 10-item Likert-type scale. When analysis was conducted on the forced-choice responses, only one of the textual interactions’ frame perceptions was shown to have a significant relationship with any of the flirting styles. However, when analyses were conducted with the semantic differential frame assessment data, more significant relationships between frame interpretations and the flirting styles were found. These results indicate that the aspect of personal quality – in this case, flirting style – might not necessarily play a big role when it comes to making snap judgments, especially on interactions regarding others’ behaviors, but it seems to matter more when people take the time to process their thoughts before forming perceptions on an interaction. Thus, this research added a more nuanced understanding to the ways the five overarching factors in RFT (e.g., message features, episodic goals, personal qualities, relational history, and social contexts) contribute to how people frame interactions

Study Two, Part A incorporated participants’ intent regarding a person’s engagement in textual interactions with other users on a dating site. By including intent measures in the survey, the episodic goal – one of the five main aspects that RFT – was accounted for. Results suggest while intent did explain some of the variance in the frame interpretation, it did not negate the

significance of some of the flirting styles, namely the traditional, physical, sincere, and playful styles, depending on the frame. However, of all three social-sexual frames, only one factor contributed to the flirtatious frame interpretation: sexual intent.

As noted earlier in the investigation, the central tenet of RFT is people make inferences about communication using relational frames, which is similar to the concept of social schema and mental models of relationships (Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1985; Zvelc, 2009). Schemas provide people with a metaphorical blueprint for how certain interactions should go depending on the context (Zvelc, 2009). Relational schema can also be informed by societal narratives about interactions in a particular context. To expand on this idea of societal narratives, I am referring to the general schema that is presented or relayed in media and repeated as a cultural discourse. Therefore, while flirting styles generally had significant relationships with the outcomes of the seductive and friendly social-sexual frames, understanding societal narratives for social-sexual interactions could help explain why sexual intent was the only predictor variable for the interpretation of one's own communication as flirtatious. The schema for identifying what flirting looks like is strongly sexualized. Flirtatious behaviors are often understood as an overt display of a person's romantic and/or sexual interests in another person (Henningesen, 2004) and are generally dispersed throughout a society via popular media that positions certain behaviors as obvious forms of flirtation. For example, making direct references to sex when talking to someone you are interested in at a bar. Thus, it can be concluded that when people are more sexually motivated (i.e., have high levels of sexual intent), that intention outweighs the significance of a person's individual flirting style because societal narratives that contribute to our understanding of what a flirtatious interaction looks like. In other words, highly flirtatious interactions occur when a person is motivated by sex.

Differential Salience

This research also yielded implications for the differential salience hypothesis, specifically regarding how the concept might be measured in future research utilizing RFT. The differential salience hypothesis refers to the idea that although multiple frames can be present throughout a given interaction, frames tend to displace each other, and one becomes dominant. To elaborate, “because many behaviors and messages may convey [multiple frames], effective processing requires that cues activate one relational frame and inhibit the competing interpretive frame” (Solomon et al., 2002, pp. 137-138). Previous scholarship using RFT has measured differential salience by conducting a correlational analysis between the level of involvement participants reported with the frame they interpreted from an interaction (Solomon et al., 2002). The current research used a different approach by timing how long it took participants to choose a frame in the forced-choice measure of framing perceptions. The expectation was that the longer the participant took to decide on a frame, the more ambiguous the interaction was. In other words, the faster a frame was selected, the more dominant that frame is. The results from these timed interpretations of text messages in Study One showed that the dominant frame was not necessarily picked faster statistically overall. However, the data was trending toward significance in the direction supportive of the hypothesis, meaning that on average participants did pick the dominant frame slightly faster than the non-dominant frames. This suggests the time it takes to frame an interaction could be a useful way to measure the differential salience hypothesis in future RFT scholarship. The present study may not have enough statistical power to find that relationship, so it is possible that the effect is there, but the study was underpowered.

The General Intensifier Hypothesis

Finally, while Study One incorporated measures to test the differential salience hypothesis, Study Two, Part A tested another of RFT's major propositions: the general intensifier hypothesis. According to Solomon et al. (2002), the general intensifier hypothesis refers to the idea that involvement helps determine the intensity of the frame perceived in an interaction. In other words, the more involvement is associated with a particular frame, the more likely that frame is the dominant frame in an interaction. For example, in Study Two, Part A, involvement was most strongly correlated with the friendly frame, which was the most highly perceived frame across all participants as 83% perceived their behaviors in a textual interaction as friendly. This supports the general intensifier hypothesis for the friendly frame. The correlation between involvement and the friendly frame was significantly stronger than the correlation between involvement and the seductive frame, providing further support for this hypothesis. It is important to point out that this correlation comparison test is new to this dissertation and is a higher standard of comparison than correlation comparisons (i.e., this correlation is stronger than that one). As a limitation, there was not enough data for the other two frames to run statistical analyses on seductive or flirtatious as the dominant frames.

Flirting Styles

In addition to the knowledge gained regarding RFT, these studies provided several insights for understanding flirting styles as well. Overall, this research illustrates that flirting styles *do* have a relationship with how people decode and encode communication behaviors in the context of online dating. In Study One, the physical flirting style was found to be significantly associated with the interpretation of the textual interactions as seductive whereas the sincere flirting style was found to be significantly associated with the interpretation of the textual interactions as friendly. In Study Two, Part A, the physical flirting style was found to be

positively associated with the seductive frame and the flirtatious frame; the sincere flirting style was found to be positively associated with the friendly frame and a negative predictor of the seductive frame; the playful flirting style was found to be a negative predictor of the friendly frame; and the traditional flirting style was moderated by sex such that male traditional flirts were significantly more likely to perceive their own behaviors as seductive and flirtatious. The qualitative analysis of Study Two, Part B also confirmed that flirting style was associated with dating site choices. A major takeaway from the open-response answers participants offered suggest that, whether conscious or not, people tend to gravitate toward dating sites that suit their flirting styles and communicative practices. These results add to the literature on flirting styles and reaffirm previous research on the ways in which the various flirting styles tend to manifest in a courtship context, but this research is focused specifically on how these perceptions and behaviors play out in the realm of online dating. Findings regarding the flirting styles will be discussed more in-depth in the next section on practical implications.

Practical Implications for Online Daters

Taken together, the results from this three-part investigation do hold practical value for online daters. If I were to give advice to those currently navigating the waters of online dating, I would first ask them to reflect on their motivations for using an online dating site. Are they looking for something casual? Or perhaps their looking for something serious and long-lasting? Maybe they are a woman who is open to both romantic and sexual outcomes, but wants more control over the interactions they have? Based on the qualitative data gathered, there are clear norms and expectations for the various sites that seem to relate to the ways different flirting styles approach courtship as well as a better understanding of the motivations of the typical user

of various sites (e.g., sexual relationships and casual hookups or long-term romantic relationships).

If your main goal is a sexual hookup or you are looking for something more casual, people using sites like Tinder share those norms and goals. Participants noted that the main expectation of users on Tinder is that it is rare to find someone looking for something more than a hookup. For those whose goal is a serious long-term romantic relationship, using sites like Hinge, eHarmony, OkCupid, or Match would be more beneficial as the expectation for users of these sites is that the majority of users are looking for partners who are serious about commitment. However, it should be noted that just because a site has “more of a hookup vibe” does not mean you will never be able to form a long-term relationship with another user, it just is not the norm or expectation for those who use it. Furthermore, those who are high in the physical style of flirting, for example, often use sex as a way to enter into long-term relationships (Hall, 2013). So, if you are a physical flirt and want a romantic relationship, Tinder and sites similar to Tinder are not necessarily a hindrance to this goal. Finally, as it relates to your motivations for engaging in online dating, if you are not sure what you want in terms of a relational outcome and you are open to both casual and potentially serious relationships, then Bumble is a good space for that, unless you are a traditional or physical flirt.

For traditional flirts, this research suggests they would prefer sites like Tinder, where the expectation for seductive and flirtatious communication is high. As Hall (2013) wrote traditional flirts tend to operate under the belief that men should take control of the interaction in a courtship context, especially when it comes to initiating the courtship. This would rule out the use of Bumble for traditional flirts looking for an opposite sex partner as Bumble explicitly functions with women as the initiators. Furthermore, traditional flirts tend to incorporate gender

roles into their expectations of how men and women should behave when they are dating with men being the more assertive in the interaction, expressing their interest more boldly, and women acting more coyly, allowing the man to dote on her (Hall, 2013). Tinder, as described by the participants in this study, fits these expectations perfectly. Revisiting one participant's comments on why they preferred Tinder over all other dating sites, she said "I love the male validation". There was also a consensus that men on Tinder were much more seductive and forward in their pursuit of women with cheesy pickup lines and flirty compliments.

Physical flirts, particularly men, would also do well on sites like Tinder for similar reasons to traditional flirts. Their typical flirtatious tactics are perfectly in line with how participants who preferred to use Tinder described the expected norms and communicative behaviors of users of the site. Participants described Tinder as a space for those who are outgoing, sexually forward, and okay with the aggressive flirting that often takes place. According to Hall (2013), physical flirts are outgoing, aggressive, heavily flirtatious, and sexually forward, often using sex as a gateway for a more long-term relationship. Therefore, Tinder is the best space for those who identify as physical flirts.

Sincere flirts might fare better in online dating contexts using sites like Hinge, eHarmony, or Match. Based on how participants explained the norms and expectations, users of these sites are more amenable to sincere and genuine connection and developing that connection before meeting up in person. Hall (2013) noted that "when getting to know you, a sincere flirt will ask a lot of questions and will later remember important details about you, even before asking you out on a date" (p. 108). Some participants noted that unlike other sites, the more serious sites (e.g., Hinge, eHarmony, Match, etc.) presented more opportunities to get to know other users that you connected with without the pressure to meet up fast. In other words, users of

these sites seem content to converse more in-depth and for a longer period of time before pushing to go on a first date. Sincere flirts are also more likely to seek opportunities for personal connection more so than physical connection when seeking a partner and express their interest in others in more conversational and less sexually forward ways (Hall, 2013). These behaviors are more in line with the more serious dating sites listed by the participants as users are expected to be seeking more of a “real” connection with other users before expressing their sexual interests. Therefore, similar to how the users of these sites were described, sincere flirts are connection-seeking people who engage in more friendly and less seductive discourse when expressing their interest in another person.

For playful flirts, the results suggest that sites like Tinder allow for more seductive and flirtatious communication. Hall (2013) explained playful flirts as people who flirt for flirting’s sake. In other words, playful flirts flirt for fun. They also tend to keep things casual with others and enjoy sending sexy messages (Hall, 2013). With all that in mind, Tinder is the perfect space for playful flirts to explore online dating. There was plenty of qualitative evidence to suggest that Tinder is a space where users are expected to engage in overly sexual and flirtatious communication with some participants directly describing their expectations on Tinder to be “playful”. Therefore, if I were to suggest an online dating site that best suits a playful flirt, my first suggestion would be Tinder.

Lastly, for polite flirts, there was no conclusive evidence to suggest a clear space for polite flirts to engage in online dating. However, based on what we do know, it is more likely that polite flirts would enjoy online dating on the sites characterized as more serious. Multiple participants described these sites as “respectful” and expected the users to be sincere and genuinely interested in getting to know the other person better before pushing to meet up offline.

These characterizations do fit with what is known about polite flirts. Hall (2013) describes polite flirts as people who like to be friends before they become romantic partners. Polite flirts are also less aggressive and less assertive and tend to avoid overly forward forms of communication like pickup lines. Therefore, polite flirts should stay away from online dating sites such as Tinder and try the more serious dating sites like Hinge, eHarmony, OkCupid, and Match.

Limitations

These studies have yielded some useful insights on RFT in a social-sexual context and has provided some information regarding the role of flirting styles in perceptions of potentially romantic textual interactions from a third-party perspective. However, there are limitations to keep in mind when interpreting these results. First and foremost, this study had a small sample size and focused on a small portion of the potential online-dating population. Emerging adults are not the only population of online daters. For this dissertation, there were limited resources for recruiting participants that represented other age groups, as well as a more diverse population in other demographic areas (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation). Future research regarding flirting styles should seek to expand beyond the young-adult, white college student.

Another limitation, as with most social science investigations, is that there are only so many factors that one can feasibly measure within a single study. As the theory of RFT explains, frames are triggered by several factors, all on varying levels of peoples' understanding of the world around them. Because this study was focused solely on the personal characteristic of flirting style, other highly reasonable facets of perception were not included in the surveys for participants (e.g., goals or motivations for flirting, relational history of the interactants, message features, etc.). All these factors could contribute to the perceptions of an interaction in

conjunction with a person's flirting style, but they were not the focus of the study and were therefore set aside.

Future Possibilities

The current research was driven by the idea that our words convey meaning and that people will infer our goals and frame them accordingly using one of the three social sexual frames in an online dating context: friendly, flirty, or seductive. The frame that is engaged with the composition of one's message influences the perception of that message by the message receiver. Frame activation likely influences the degree to which the message is interpreted as intended. For example, it could be supposed that polite conversation from a polite flirt will be perceived by a sincere or physical flirt as not interested in pursuing a romantic relationship as the friendly frame is most likely to be activated during interactions with a polite flirt and sincere and physical flirts will not see that as a further indication to pursue a romantic relationship. However, friendly conversation between two polite flirts, though the friendly frame is still activated, their interpretation of potential future romance could still be considered a possibility. Though this research did not incorporate measures of how an intended message was perceived from anyone other than the message sender, it could be beneficial for future scholars to look into for a deeper understanding of flirting styles and message intention and reception.

The current research provided useful information to further our understanding of RFT and flirting styles within an online dating context. Future research should bolster the number of participants in the study so that more than one frame may be analyzed as the dominant frame. As noted earlier, 83% of participants in Study Two, Part A chose the friendly frame as the dominant frame of their given textual interaction, leaving too little data to statistically analyze the general intensifier hypothesis with the other two social-sexual frames. Researchers using RFT should

also utilize the timing measure to test the differential salience hypothesis as this research suggests it could be a useful tool for understanding the concept. Lastly, the qualitative analysis of Study Two, Part B revealed that people generally *do* have preferences for online dating that fit their flirting styles and the communicative practices related to those flirting styles. Future scholarship could expand on the things learned in this research regarding the expectations and norms for users of the various sites focusing on more than the sites that were offered by the participants themselves. More exploration would be useful for understanding the connection between online dating and flirting styles and could be helpful for people who use online dating sites by providing further insights on which dating sites or apps might work best for people according to their primary motivations and their flirting styles.

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APPENDIX A

Text One

SUPER FRIENDLY, A LITTLE FLIRTY

Person 1: Hey, are you going to the meeting tonight?

Person 2: Yeah I think so. It's at 7 right?

Person 1: Yeah, I think they are just introducing what the club is about and it's a chance to meet new people.

Person 2: Are you still seeing that one girl?

Person 1: No I'm single riht now lol

Person 2: Alright well I'll see you at the meeting I guess

Person 1: Ok, I'll see you then :)

	N	%
Friendly	61	78.2%
Flirtatious	17	21.8%

Table 1. Frequency of frame interpretation.

Person 1: Hey, are you going to the meeting tonight? Person 2: Yeah I think so. It's at 7 right? Person 1: Yeah, I think they are just introducing what the club is about and it's a chance to meet new people. Person 2: Are you still seeing that one girl

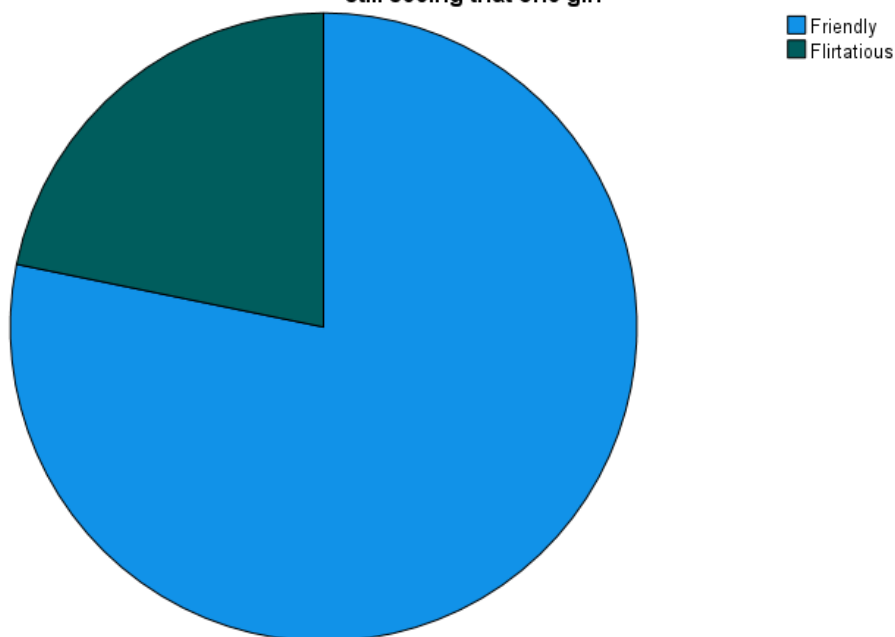


Figure 1. Pie chart illustrating the frequency of frame interpretation.

APPENDIX B

Text Two

VERY FLIRTY, A LITTLE SEDUCTIVE, A LITTLE FRIENDLY

Person 1: Hey! If you're bored you should come out to Replay!

Person 2: Oh no! I would love to come out but I'm stuck in Overland Park. Do you go there often?

Person 1: yeah, my sister and I go here a lot. It's a cool place! You should check it out sometime.

Person 2: We should go sometime soon! You could show me around downtown Lawrence. What other bars do you like? :)

Person 1: Henry's and Jazz house. Well my sister and I are gonna go dance, hope there are no creeps on the dancefloor. Bye!

Person 2: ooo I wish i was there to fend off al the weirdos! and show you my kickass dance moves ;)Have a good night, [name]. Talk to you tomorrow :)

	N	%
Friendly	17	21.8%
Flirtatious	58	74.4%
Seductive	3	3.8%

Table 2. Frequency of frame interpretation.

Person 1: Hey! If you're bored you should come out to Replay! Person 2: Oh no! I would love to come out but I'm stuck in Overland Park. Do you go there often? Person 1: yeah, my sister and I go here a lot. It's a cool place! You should check it out some

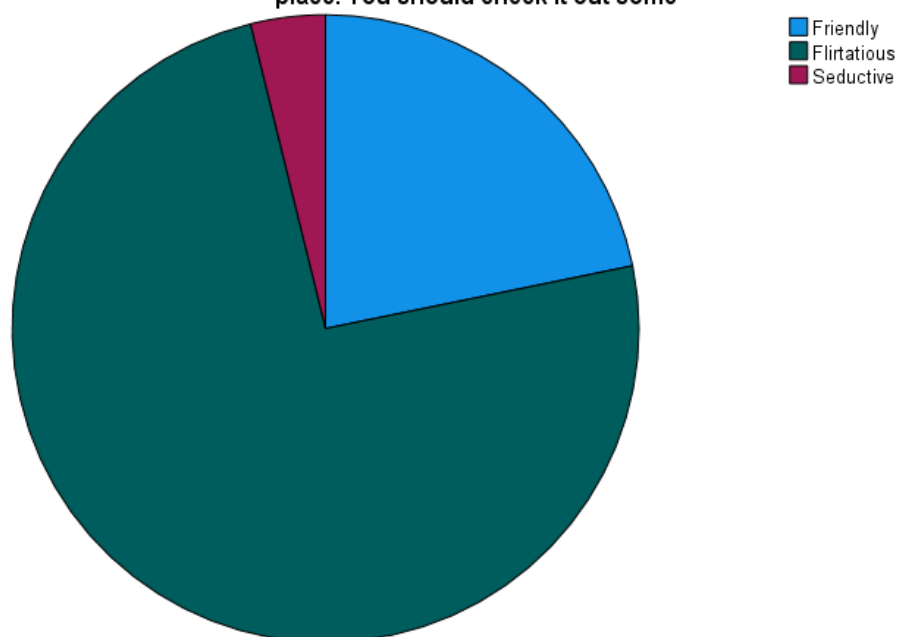


Figure 2. Pie chart illustrating the frequency of frame interpretation.

APPENDIX C

Text Three

VERY FLIRTY, NOT MUCH OF ANYTHING ELSE

Person 1: Hope you have a fun night :) don't shack up with too many frat boys ;)

Person 2: only you! goodnight:)

Person 1: aweee you're so sweet. Wish i could be there with you

Person 2: i mean i kinda like you;) i wish you could too:(

Person 1: awe well if it helps i miss you

Person 2: Miss you too! cant wait till you come home in a couple weeks!

Person 1: me too! goodnight cutie:)

Person 2: goodnight! :)

	N	%
Friendly	4	5.1%
Flirtatious	66	84.6%
Seductive	8	10.3%

Table 3. Frequency of frame interpretation.

Person 1: Hope you have a fun night :) don't shack up with too many frat boys ;) Person 2: only you! goodnight:) **Person 1: aweee you're so sweet. Wish i could be there with you Person 2: i mean i kinda like you;) i wish you could too:(** **Person 1: awee**

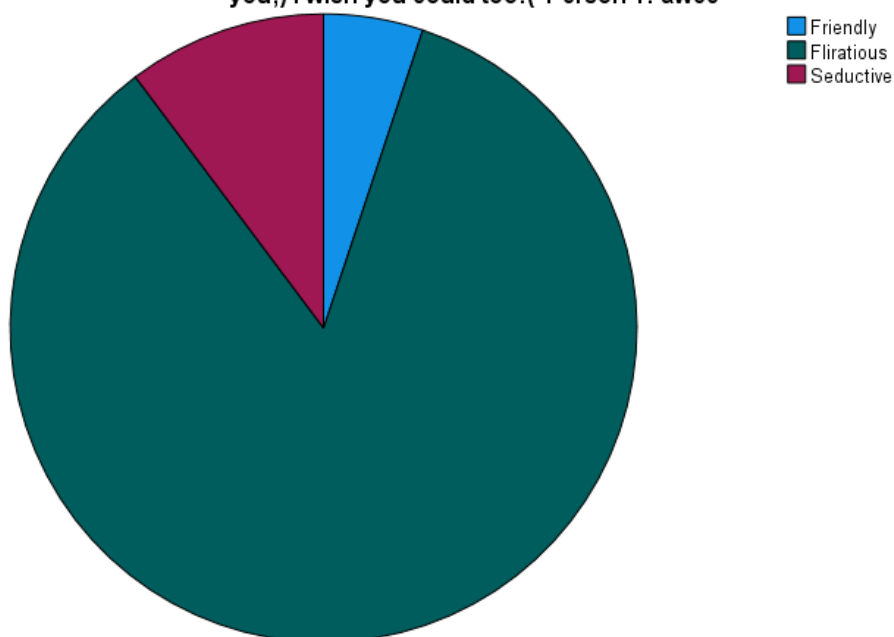


Figure 3. Pie chart illustrating the frequency of frame interpretation.

APPENDIX D

Text Four

VERY SEDUCTIVE, A LITTLE FRIENDLY, A LITTLE FLIRTY

Person 1: I miss you

Person 2: I miss your presence as well :P

Person 1: That sounds so formal

Person 2: Haha well i'm not getting emotional

Person 1: Well when I said I miss you I was not getting emotional...I miss things about you ;)

Person 2: Now you got my mind in naughty plces

	N	%
Friendly	1	1.3%
Flirtatious	29	37.2%
Seductive	48	61.5%

Table 3. Frequency of frame interpretation.

Person 1: I miss you Person 2: I miss your presence as well :P Person 1: That sounds so formal Person 2: Haha well i'm not getting emotional Person 1: Well when I said I miss you I was not getting emotional...I miss things about you ;) Person 2: Now y

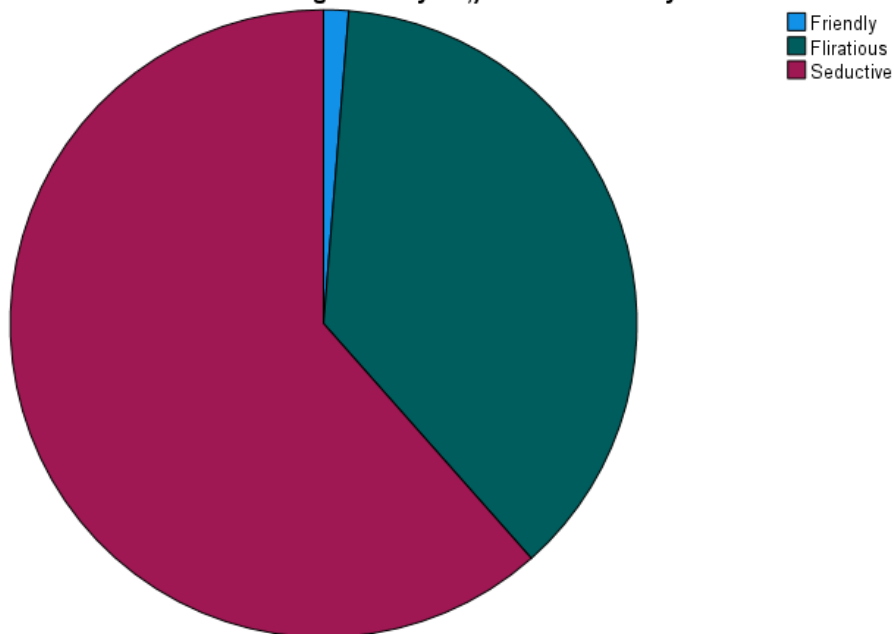


Figure 4. Pie chart illustrating the frequency of frame interpretation.

APPENDIX E

Text Five

VERY FRIENDLY, SOMEWHAT SEDUCTIVE

Person 1: Haha what are you up to tonight?

Person 2: Nothing!! Watching tv and eating with my roommates right now!!

Person 1: That sounds fun, I probably should do some homework for tomorrow but if you're free after we should do something!

Person 2: Tonight??

Person 1: Yeah!

	N	%
Friendly	61	78.2%
Flirtatious	14	17.9%
Seductive	3	3.8%

Table 4. Frequency of frame interpretation.

Person 1: Haha what are you up to tonight? Person 2: Nothing!! Watching tv and eating with my roommates right now!! Person 1: That sounds fun, I probably should do some homework for tomorrow but if you're free after we should do something! Person 2: Ton

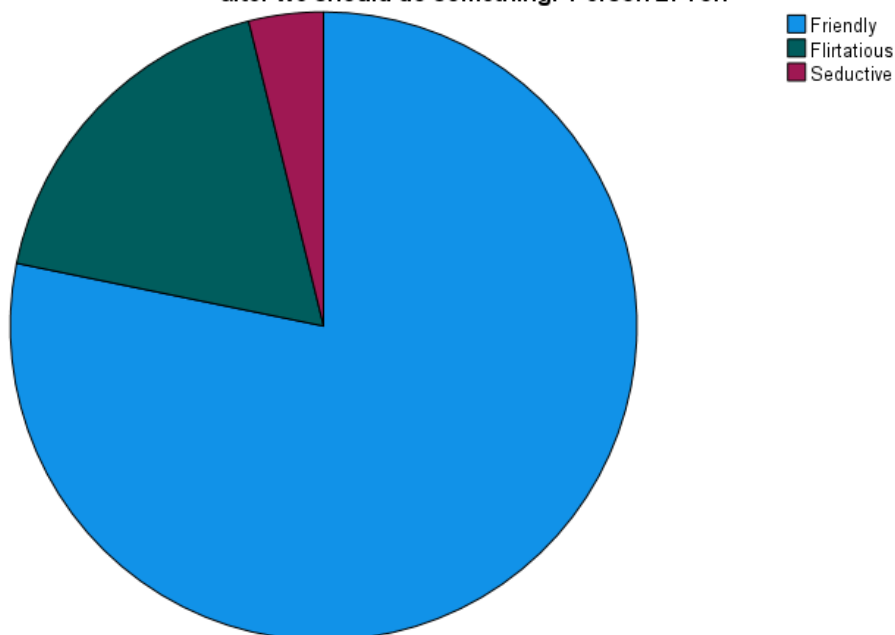


Figure 5. Pie chart illustrating the frequency of frame interpretation.

APPENDIX F

Table 1:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation of Text One; Super Friendly, A Little Flirty (N = 153)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	.11	.10	.05	.12	.06	.09
Physical	.14*	.08*	.09	.10	-.10	.07
Playful	-.07	.10	.03	.13	.10	.09
Sincere	-.20	.13	-.28*	.17*	.19*	.12*
Polite	.10	.10	.04	.13	-.19*	.09*
ΔR -squared		.01		-.01		.02

Notes: * $p < .05$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX G

Table 2:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation of Text Two; Very Flirty, A Little Seductive, A Little Friendly (N = 153)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	-.14	.11	-.03	.10	.09	.09
Physical	.01	.09	.12	.08	.11*	.07*
Playful	-.17	.11	-.01	.11	-.02	.09
Sincere	-.48**	.15**	.05	.14	.34**	.12**
Polite	.06	.12	.13	.11	.11	.09
ΔR -squared		.06		-.01		.06

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX H

Table 3:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation of Text Three; Very Flirty, Not Much of Anything Else (N = 153)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	.05	.12	-.10	.08	.09	.10
Physical	.21**	.09**	-.03	.06	-.06	.08
Playful	-.15	.12	.02	.08	.11	.11
Sincere	-.24	.16	.22*	.10*	.37**	.14**
Polite	.18	.12	-.07	.08	-.01	.11
Δ R-squared		.02		.02		.02

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX I

Table 4:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation of Text Four; Very Seductive, Only A Little Friendly and Flirty (N = 153)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	.03	.11	-.03	.10	.04	.11
Physical	.27***	.09***	.08	.08	.06	.09
Playful	-.16	.12	.00	.11	.11	.12
Sincere	.05	.16	.11	.14	-.13	.16
Polite	.15	.12	.06	.11	.16	.12
ΔR -squared		.04		-.02		-.01

Notes: *** $p < .001$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX J

Table 5:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation of Text Five; Very Friendly, Somewhat Seductive (N = 153)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	.03	.10	.04	.12	-.03	.08
Physical	.07	.08	.09	.09	-.04	.06
Playful	.01	.11	-.09	.12	.01	.08
Sincere	-.72***	.14***	-.01	.16	.32**	.11**
Polite	.10	.11	.15	.12	-.04	.09
ΔR -squared		.14		-.02		.04

Notes: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX K

Table 6:

Study One: Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation Across All Five Text Interactions (N = 153)

Frame Interpretation

	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Traditional	.03	.07	-.01	.07	.05	.07
Physical	.14**	.06**	.07	.05	-.00	.05
Playful	-.11	.07	-.02	.07	.06	.07
Sincere	-.29**	.10**	.02	.09	.22**	.09**
Polite	.12*	.07*	.06	.07	.02	.07
ΔR -squared		.07		-.02		.02

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX L

Table 7:

Study One: Moderation Analysis Results Predicting Flirtatious Perceptions of Textual Interactions (N = 151)

	Flirtatious											
	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>		<u>Model 4</u>		<u>Model 5</u>		<u>Model 6</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
TradFlirt	.10	.15	-.01	.13	-.19*	.09	-.14	.12	.10	.14	-.03	.08
Sex	.12	.90	.16	.76	-.72	.56	-1.08	.74	.77	.83	-.15	.50
Sex*Trad	.01	.26	-.08	.22	.14	.16	.28	.21	-.05	.23	.06	.14
R-Sqr		.01		.00		.04		.02		.05		.00

Notes: Sex was dummy coded as 0 = Females, 1 = Males. Each model corresponds with the textual interaction in numerical order (i.e., Model 1 is the analysis on the first textual interaction, Model 2 is the analysis on the second textual interaction, etc.) with Model 6 being the mean scores across all textual interactions; * $p < .05$; *b* refers to the unstandardized coefficient; *SE* refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX M

Table 8:

Study One; Moderation Analysis Results Predicting Friendly Perceptions of Textual Interactions (N = 151)

	Friendly											
	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>		<u>Model 4</u>		<u>Model 5</u>		<u>Model 6</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
TradFlirt	.17	.11	.02	.11	-.04	.36	.00	.14	-.15	.29	.00	.08
Sex	1.11	.64	-.40	.65	-1.15	.74	-.69	.83	-.99	.59	-.41	.48
Sex*Trad	-.37*	.18*	.05	.19	.29	.21	.29	.24	.21	.17	.09	.14
R-Sqr		.03		.01		.02		.02		.04		.01

Notes: Sex was dummy coded as 0 = Females, 1 = Males. Each model corresponds with the textual interaction in numerical order (i.e., Model 1 is the analysis on the first textual interaction, Model 2 is the analysis on the second textual interaction, etc.) with Model 6 being the mean scores across all textual interactions; * $p < .05$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX N

Table 9:

Study One: Moderation Analysis Results Predicting Seductive Perceptions of Textual Interactions (N = 151)

	Seductive											
	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>		<u>Model 4</u>		<u>Model 5</u>		<u>Model 6</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
TradFlirt	.15	.12	-.02	.14	.08	.14	.14	.14	.14	.13	.10	.09
Sex	.77	.71	.34	.82	.34	.87	1.56	.83	.57	.76	.73	.52
Sex*Trad	-.14	.20	-.02	.23	.02	.25	-.46*	.24*	.07	.22	-.11	.15
R-Sqr		.03		.01		.02		.03		.11		.05

Notes: Sex was dummy coded as 0 = Females, 1 = Males. Each model corresponds with the textual interaction in numerical order (i.e., Model 1 is the analysis on the first textual interaction, Model 2 is the analysis on the second textual interaction, etc.) with Model 6 being the mean scores across all textual interactions; * $p < .05$; *b* refers to the unstandardized coefficient; *SE* refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX O

Table 10:

Study One: Logistic Regression Results for Research Question One (N = 141)

Flirtatious versus Seductive Frame Interpretation			
	<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>Wald</u>
Traditional	-.09	.24	.12
Physical	-.47	.18	6.64
Playful	.49	.25	3.95
Sincere	.07	.32	.05
Polite	-.02	.25	.01

Notes: Significant results are bolded; *B* refers to the dstandardized coefficient; *SE* refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX P

Table 11:

Study Two, Part A: Multiple Linear Regression Results Predicting Frame Interpretation (N = 149)

	Frame Interpretation					
	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
Sex	.08	.20	-.05	.18	.01	.15
Involvement	-.12	.11	.04	.10	.23**	.08**
Traditional	.10	.11	-.00	.10	.01	.08
Physical	.26**	.12**	.13	.10	-.05	.09
Playful	-.05	.12	-.01	.10	-.23**	.09**
Sincere	-.17**	.14**	.09	.13	.15	.11
Polite	-.02	.13	-.05	.11	-.11	.09
Sexual Intent	.35***	.08***	.32***	.07***	.00	.06
Romantic Intent	-.05	.09	.08	.08	.13	.07
ΔR -squared		.22		.18		.21

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; b refers to the standardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX Q

Table 12:*Study Two, Part A: Correlation Table (N = 149)*

	Sed	Flirt	Frien	Inv	Trad	Phys	Play	Sinc	Poli	Sex	Rom
Sed	1										
Flirt	.57**	1									
Frien	-.02	.38**	1								
Inv	.02	.19*	.30**	1							
Trad	.09	-.05	-.11	-.13	1						
Phys	.25**	.20*	.01	.17*	.05	1					
Play	.04	.01	-.29**	-.11	.20*	.13	1				
Sinc	-.14	.12	.20*	.05	-.10	.23**	-.13	1			
Poli	.04	-.06	-.10	.03	.31**	-.02	-.03	-.04	1		
Sex	.34**	.37**	.10	.32**	-.09	.14	.05	-.05	.03	1	
Rom	.06	.25**	.27**	.40**	.02	.07	-.11	.14	-.02	.41**	1

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

APPENDIX R

Table 13:

Study Two, Part A: Moderation Analysis Results Predicting Frame Interpretations of Textual Interactions (N = 141)

	<u>Seductive</u>		<u>Flirtatious</u>		<u>Friendly</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>SE</u>
TradFlirt	-.06	.14	-.22	.13	-.12	.12
Sex	-.70	.84	-1.26	.77	.22	.64
Sex*Trad	.45*	.21	.41*	.20	-.01	.16
R-Sqr		.12		.04		.02

Notes: Sex was dummy coded as 0 = Females, 1 = Males; * $p < .05$; b refers to the unstandardized coefficient; SE refers to Standard Error

APPENDIX S

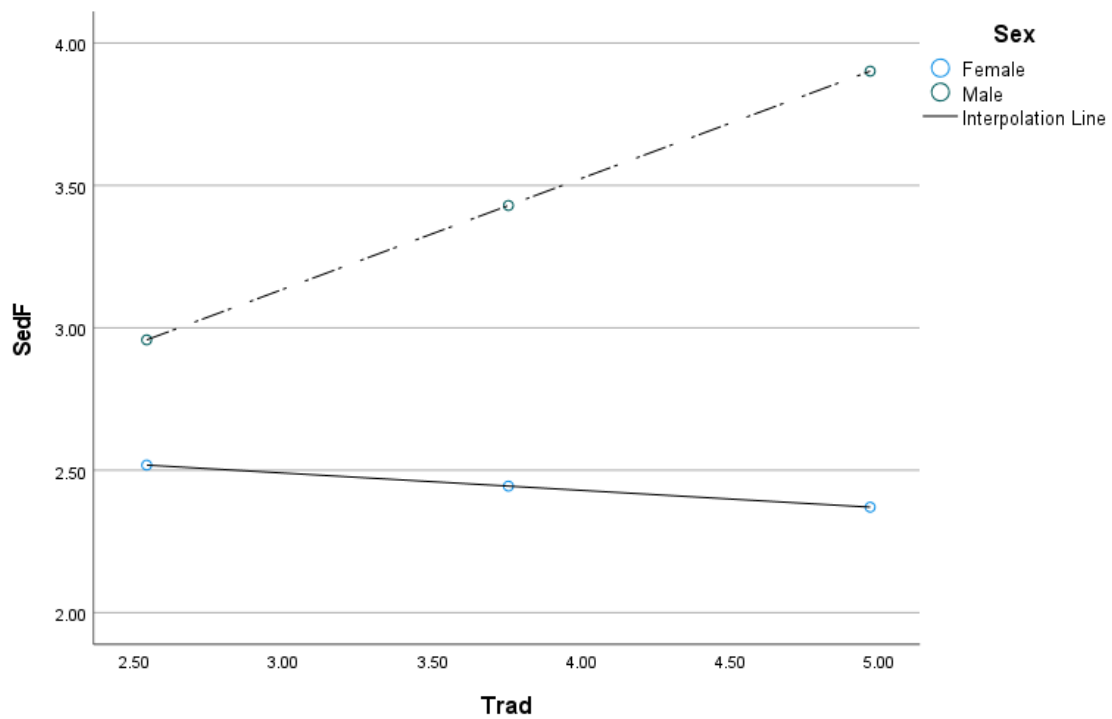
Table 14:*Study Two, Part B: Correlation Table (N = 149)*

	Tinder	Bumble	Serious	Trad	Phys	Play	Sinc	Poli
Tinder	1							
Bumble	-.49**	1						
Serious	-.65**	-.19*	1					
Trad	.29**	-.19*	-.22**	1				
Phys	.16*	-.04	-.17*	.05	1			
Play	.02	.12	-.08	.20*	.13	1		
Sinc	.05	-.07	.06	-.10	.23**	-.13	1	
Poli	.07	-.07	-.07	.31**	-.02	-.03	-.04	1

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

APPENDIX T

Figure 1:

Study Two, Part A: Moderation Model One

APPENDIX U

Figure 2:

Study Two, Part A: Moderation Model Two