ONLINE & REAL LIFE DATING
YOUNG PEOPLE

OnePlusOne is a research charity dedicated to strengthening relationships and families.

In this brief report, we take a look at recent studies relating to how and why young people are using online dating services, together with what may be interesting to explore further.

DATING APP USE = increasing

According to a Pew Research Report, 15% of American adults use online dating services and the highest growth of use in 2015 was with 18-24 year-olds, nearly tripling to 27%. The rise of mobile dating apps is similarly impressive. A more than fourfold increase to 22% indicates that young adults are now more likely than any other age group to use mobile dating apps [1].

MOTIVATION = complicated

The motivation of each user is not straightforward. One study asked participants what they believed the Tinder app was designed for. The answer was hook up (51.5%), dating (33.5%) or meeting (15%) [2].

Yet, another study found that 'although Tinder has the reputation of allowing users to easily hook up with someone, '***Love motivation*** was stronger than casual sex motivation'. With regard to gender, male Tinder users showed a higher motivation for casual sex than female Tinder users [3].

And what about other qualities? Research suggests that the 'greater perceptions of similarity increased perceptions of ***trustworthiness***, which contributed to individuals being perceived as more attractive' [4]. Trustworthiness and general attractiveness are what determine whether or not a match is found to be desirable.

DELAY = disappointment?

Continuing online interaction for extended periods produced negative outcomes. Research has shown that online daters may benefit from meeting their partner in person after a brief period of online interaction [5].

People naturally create mental constructs of their potential partners. The online profile is used to fill in any blanks about who the person may be in the real world and, after time, it may be difficult to accept any discrepancies from an idealised mental construct. This can be made worse if the online persona is built on dishonesty, misrepresentation or even exaggeration.

TECH = influence

While some dating apps were designed for hook ups, there may be a need to reconsider the 'scripts' on the apps as their popularity increases.

Scripts are part of the design code programme or sequence of instructions that are interpreted. The organic script orientation may be primarily based on attraction and may involve sex but, as apps become routinely used, it is important the technology considers love motivation, trustworthiness and the need for subsequent face-to-face interaction, at least for initial interactions.

We say…

We are all still learning about how technology such as dating apps will impact our ability to create and maintain relationships. The above research suggest that online relationships are different, which echoes existing research [6]. However, it is clear that a wider pool of possible partners and greater choice doesn't necessarily mean better choice.

Technology scripts for relationship initiation and development should be separate to the usual non-committal hook ups scripts, unless of course the app is openly only designed for hook ups. This is the best way to ensure individual users have the greatest amount of dating and relationship options.

As dating app use increases for young people, more research should be conducted to investigate and highlight the realities of how using an app may impact their choices and clarify when to move from the app to face to face communication if the user wants a relationship to blossom.

We can also improve our interaction skills generally. For example, we can learn to recognise when and how to change an interaction depending on what we want and by reading emotional cues. This is called 'relational capability' and it is something we have been researching for decades.

ENDS

OnePlusOne Marriage and Partnership Research is a registered charity, number 1087994 and a private company limited by guarantee, Company number 4133340. Our websites are www.onepusone.space and www.clickrelationships.org

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