Digital Dating in Kelowna, BC:
Examining How Women Experience Online Dating in a Small, Canadian City

by

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Abstract

Today, many individuals seek to establish intimate relationships using various forms of

computer-mediated communication, including online dating sites and mobile applications.

Investigating the ways in which location, in this case a relatively small, Canadian city, affect the

online dating experience was a primary purpose of this study. The researcher incorporated social

script theory and the life course perspective to gain an understanding of how age, gender, and

technology intersect for women dating digitally in the Kelowna, B.C. Census Metropolitan Area.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to explore and interpret the lived

experience of a small, homogeneous group of women. In-depth semi-structured interviews were

conducted with 11 women, aged 21 to 60+, who were predominantly using PlentyofFish and

Tinder. Using IPA's analysis process, themes were identified deductively by using the theoretical

concepts mentioned above; other themes arose inductively. This study found many of the

experiences of women in Kelowna were similar to those found in existing research, such as

having control in the online process, encountering unwanted interactions, and facing

misrepresentation or deception. That being said, Kelowna's size and characteristics did impact

the women's experiences; the online pool was limited at times, with too many matches who the

women already knew being presented, and with a transient dating pool being noted by some of

the women. Traditional, gendered dating practices were present online due to various dating

scripts and age norms. While there were differences among the experiences of women at various

stages of life, there were also numerous similarities.

Keywords: Online dating, digital dating, internet dating, Canada, Kelowna, urban, rural,

interpretative phenomenological analysis, social scripts, dating scripts, life course, gender

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Chapter One: Introduction

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for love and belonging is preceded only by basic physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943). In order to fulfill the need for love and belonging, human beings seek partnerships in various forms, including intimate relationships. Throughout history, introduction of new communication technologies has changed the way in which these intimate relationships have been formed (Lawson & Leck, 2006). While the challenge of finding a suitable partner remains as complex as it has ever been, the "resources for meeting these challenges have changed, and many of these changes can be traced to the invention, spread, and now ubiquity of the Internet" (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012, p. 4). Many individuals now seek to establish intimate relationships through the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC), including online dating sites and mobile dating applications (apps).

While computer dating services have been around since the 1960s, North American online dating, as it is recognized today, began with the launch of the Match.com website in 1995 (Ansari, 2015). While other commercialized dating services, such as "personal advertisements and video-dating," existed prior to 1995, they "never became a pervasive or socially acceptable means of meeting potential partners" (Finkel et. al, 2012, p. 13). Following the launch of the first online dating sites in the mid- to late-nineties, academic researchers have explored online dating in earnest through a variety of disciplines, including communications (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Stephure, Boon, Mackinnon, & Deveau, 2009; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Kang & Hoffman, 2011; Finkel et al., 2012; Ansari, 2015; Abramova, Baumann, Krasnova & Buxmann, 2016).

Research conducted in 2005 by Pew Research Center (PRC) showed that 43 per cent of American online daters had gone on a date with someone they met online (Smith & Anderson, 2016). In comparison, Canadians appeared to be ahead of the curve, as according to Brym and Lenton's 2001 survey, 62 per cent of Canadian online daters surveyed had "gone out on a date as a result of using such a [online dating] service" (p. 45). In PRC's 2015 survey, the number of Americans who had gone out with someone they met online increased to 66 per cent, which is consistent with the 2001 Canadian data (Smith & Anderson, 2016; Brym & Lenton, 2001).

Today, Match Group is the publicly traded parent company for more than 45 online dating brands, including Match, Tinder, PlentyOfFish, OKCupid, and several other niche sites (Match Group, 2017a). In recent years, the stigma surrounding online dating has lessened, allowing this form of dating to become commonplace and more widely accepted; in establishing itself in this way, online dating has "fundamentally altered the dating landscape" (Finkel et al., 2012, pp. 12-13). The rapid changes in CMC technology (particularly mobile technology as it relates to dating) support the need for continuing research in this field in order to identify current experiences and viewpoints (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson & Grant, 2011). As a woman who was single during her late twenties and early thirties, the researcher has first-hand experience dating in a computer-mediated world and can attest to the vast technological changes that have occurred over the years. The researcher also has many female friends and family members of all ages who have navigated, and continue to navigate, these same waters. Understanding how technology impacts the experiences of women, and how those experiences may be different, or similar, across different stages of life, were the essential motivations to conduct this research.

Online dating, as Lawson and Leck (2006) assert, "is largely a White, middle-class phenomenon" (p. 191), while Frohlick and Migliardi (2011) state that it "is regarded as a kind of heteronormative imperative" (p. 77). In considering heteronormativity, it is important to note that it "defines not only normative sexual practices but also a normal way of life" (Jackson, 2006, p. 107). This focus on heteronormativity is visible in both the structure and marketing of online dating sites (DeMasi, 2011). In order to appeal to a wide audience, online dating sites promote "relationship goals of romance, love, and monogamous coupling," simultaneously limiting the opportunity to foster relationships that "exist outside the narrow confines of relationship ideals historically identified with heterosexual intimacy" (DeMasi, 2011, pp. 224-225). Through their structure, online dating sites therefore promote an adherence to "established gender and sexual categories" rather than encouraging the exploration of one's identity as it relates to gender and sexual preferences (p. 231). This is foundational knowledge for the current study, particularly in relation to traditional gender roles and dating scripts that affect the women's experiences.

Although research related to online dating abounds, as indicated above, opportunities remain for this thesis to expand existing academic knowledge. There appears to be a limited scope of academic research with a solely Canadian perspective in this field of study (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Sritharan, R., Heilpern, K., Wilbur, C. J., & Gawronski, B., 2010; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Fullick, 2013). Furthermore, existing research, from within and outside Canada, has been conducted with a mix of participants from urban, suburban, and rural areas (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Stephure et al., 2009; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Smith, 2016); however, only a couple of these studies have examined the ways in which a particular location's size and characteristics impact participants'

online dating experiences (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Stephure et al., 2009). Contextualizing

women's experiences within a specific place, in this case the Canadian city of Kelowna, BC, and

comparing and contrasting them to existing online dating research, provided an opportunity to

further investigate how place affects digital dating experiences. Furthermore, this research

sought to investigate how age, technology, and gender-related dating scripts impact experiences

within a defined location, thereby providing an in-depth look at the experiences of a small group

of women, rather than seeking to produce generalizable findings. The life course perspective and

social script theory were incorporated in the foundation of the study, as to the researcher's

knowledge, these models have not been extensively linked within this area of research, and the

findings could also inform discussions in those related bodies of scholarship. As the researcher

resides in Kelowna, selecting the city as the research site was partly a matter of convenience, as

it allowed her to achieve the purposive and quota sampling required for the study. However,

additional characteristics of the city made it an appropriate and interesting research site for the

current study.

In their 2001 study, Brym and Lenton estimated the market for unmarried, online daters

in British Columbia (B.C.) as just under 510,000 people. Of the 6,581 online daters surveyed in

the study, 19 per cent resided in B.C., ranking the province second highest in Canada. Further to

this, the researchers found that online daters were "likely to live in the suburbs or the core of

major urban areas" (p.13). As of 2016, the Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is home

to just under 195,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2017c). As the third largest CMA in British

Columbia, Kelowna consists of its "urban core" linked with "adjacent urban and rural areas that

have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core;" these areas include

Westbank First Nation, West Kelowna, Peachland, and Lake Country (Statistics Canada, 2017a; Statistics Canada, 2017b). The fact that Kelowna is a major urban centre in a province where the market for online dating appears to be high makes it an appropriate site for the current study. Additionally, the city has its own unique culture, characteristics, and demographics such as its largely White, middle-class population; its culture that mixes urban amenities with its rural roots; and its reputation as a popular destination for travellers, retirees, and entrepreneurs alike, that may impact the online dating experiences of its residents.

Established in 1905 with a population of 600, Kelowna was considered part of the "Canadian hinterlands…relatively isolated from the major centres of political and economic power and with its population connected mainly to fruit-growing and other agricultural activities" (Tourism Kelowna, 2017a; Aguiar, Tomic, & Trumper, 2005, p. 128). The city was originally settled by immigrants who came mainly from Britain and Scotland; since then the "history of the Okanagan is of making space white" (Aguiar, Tomic, & Trumper, 2005, p. 130). According to a recent census, just under 87 per cent of the population within Kelowna's CMA listed English as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2012). Further to this, a 2011 National Household Survey found that close to 80 per cent of the CMA's population identified North American (non-Aboriginal) or British Isles as their ethnic origin, and approximately 85 per cent of the population were non-immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2013). Furthermore, the 2010 average total income of women in Kelowna, aged 15 years and older, was reported as $31,853 (Statistics Canada, 2013). This income level, according to estimates from *MoneySense*, would classify an unattached woman as middle-class, which has an income range from $23,357 to $36,859 (Hodges & Brown, 2015). The data listed above points to a largely White, middle-class

population; this provides support for approaching this study from a heteronormative perspective and for choosing Kelowna as the research site.

While Kelowna is representative of Canada in the sense that it is considered one of the country's major cities, it is still relatively small in comparison to other urban centres in the country, ranking 22 out of the country's 36 CMAs in terms of size (Statistics Canada, 2017). By definition, Kelowna is no longer a rural area; however, on the homepage of its website, Tourism Kelowna describes the city as "Urban and rural; nature and culture; playtime and downtime," further proclaiming in the 'About' section that Kelowna is "The small city that offers everything" (Tourism Kelowna, 2017b). These statements demonstrate that while Kelowna offers urban amenities, it is still connected to its rural roots; this juxtaposition may make the digital dating experiences of women similar to both urban and rural locales.

While it was once isolated from major centres, highway and airport improvements provided easier access to the city, allowing Kelowna to establish itself as a popular vacation destination (Aguiar et al., 2005). In 2016, the city was host to over 1.9 million visitors, an increase of 27.5 per cent from 2011 (InterVISTAS Consulting Inc., 2017). Kelowna's reputation as a year-round "playground" was bolstered by its outdoor attractions, including Okanagan Lake, golfing, and skiing, as well as its ever-growing wine industry (Aguiar et al., 2005). Thanks in part to effective marketing of its weather and outdoor activities, such as golf, Kelowna has also established itself as a "well-known retirement city in Canada" (p. 129). In 2016, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business ranked Kelowna as the number one entrepreneurial community in Canada among CMAs with a population over 150,000 (Mallett, Bourgeois, & Gaudreault, 2016). Further to this, in its 2016 community trends report, the City of Kelowna

stated that "the Kelowna CMA saw a major increase in interprovincial migration and intraprovincial migration as Kelowna attracted students, young adults and retirees from the lower mainland and other provinces" between 2013 and 2015 (City of Kelowna, 2016, p. 2). With an increasing population, density that changes throughout the year due to tourism, a high percentage of older individuals who reside in the community, and a promising location for young entrepreneurs, Kelowna has a distinctive dynamic within which to investigate digital dating across various age groups.

  The purpose of the research project is to document, interpret, and analyze the experiences women in Kelowna have while pursuing and/or establishing relationships through digital means, such as online dating sites and mobile apps. In this vein, the primary research question is: How do women residing in Kelowna, BC experience digital dating? In addition to this primary research question, the following sub-questions will be addressed: How might Kelowna's size and characteristics affect the women's online dating experiences? How do the experiences of women in Kelowna compare to existing online dating research? How are the women's experiences, including technology use, similar or different according to their place in life? What aspects of culturally-bound, traditional dating scripts and gender norms, if any, affect the women's experiences?

  Operating from a social constructionist framework within the constructivist paradigm, this qualitative research study sought to discover the socially constructed realities of the study participants in regards to their experiences with digital dating. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the methodological approach selected to garner rich data from a small sample of women and make sense of their experience of online dating in a relatively small Canadian

city. Data gathering was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 11 purposively,

quota-sampled participants. Using IPA's thematic analysis process, themes were identified

deductively from the data, with codes being derived from the theoretical concepts of social script

theory and technological changes within the life course theoretical perspective (discussed

below); other themes arose inductively from the data. In general, and while this is not a critical

study as such, an account of gender as a discourse that both prescriptively and descriptively

assigns meaning and value to human experience on the basis of social beliefs about sex

differences (Minnich, 2010) provided an underlying framework for understanding social scripts

as gendered narratives in their own right.

The goal through this framework is not to produce generalizable findings, but rather to

provide an in-depth account of the experiences of a select group of women living in a clearly

defined geographical area at a specific point in time. More generally, this study is seeking to

explore how place affects the digital dating experience, how dating and gender intersect in our

digital age, and how one's understanding of technology may hinder or facilitate success in the

formation of intimate relationships, which typically occupies a large part of an individual's life.

To that end, through interviews with 11 women, ranging in age from 21 to 60+, from Kelowna

and its surrounding communities, this research study found that for this group of women, digital

dating is the primary access point to the dating pool in the city, though the technology is viewed

as both a blessing and a curse when it comes to dating. Though many of the experiences of this

group of women in Kelowna are similar to those found in existing research, the city's size and

characteristics present challenges including a dating pool that is at times limited, with ties to the

women's existing social networks, as well as matches who are only in town temporarily for

business or for holidays. Furthermore, a variety of gendered dating scripts and age norms allow

heteronormative dating practices to flourish within the digital space. While there are differences

among the experiences of women at various stages of life, there are also numerous similarities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As the existing literature regarding online dating is vast, it was important to focus on this

study's main purpose in order to properly review key areas that relate specifically to the

intersection of online dating, social scripts, and the life course within a specific geographic

location of a particular population size. First, in the courtship and dating section, the social

construction and history of dating and courtship will be discussed, situating it within a cultural

perspective and focusing on those aspects related to North America. Social script theory and the

life course perspective will be outlined, as both models incorporate ways in which individuals

are provided with culturally-influenced instructions on how to act in a given situation. Existing

literature examining gender and dating within these models, both within conventional dating and

digital dating, will be presented. Then, a review of literature related to digital dating, examining

the rise of online dating and mobile apps, and outlining who uses this technology and why will

be provided. Furthermore, literature examining how location and place affect digital dating

experiences will be outlined. Finally, previous Canadian research will be presented as an

additional foundational element of the current study.

Courtship and Dating

This section will offer a brief overview of courtship and dating in North America,

beginning with a discussion of its social construction, its history, and its role in the 21st century.

Discussions regarding the life course perspective and social script theory in relation to courtship and dating will follow to end this section.

A social construction. Though many of the non-verbal cues used by men and women to signal interest in each other, such as smiling or gazing at the object of one's affection, appear to be shared throughout cultures around the world (Fisher, 2016), it is important to recognize that the socially constructed rituals and processes surrounding courtship are often culturally specific. As Ingoldsby (2003) points out, most Americans pursue relationships primarily with themselves in mind thanks to an "individualistic culture;" further to this, their idea of what constitutes a "perfect companion" is typically constructed through the notion of "romantic love" that is ever present in television, movies, and advertising (p. 12). Yet, in their comparison of American, Russians, and Lithuanians, de Munck, Korotayev, de Munck, and Khaltourina (2011) found that there is not one universal structure of romantic love. While all three cultures agreed on certain facets of romantic love, such as happiness and passion, the Americans listed "friendship and comfort love" as integral to romantic love, while the Russians and Lithuanians "saw love as "unreal," "temporary," and "a fairytale"" (pp. 128-129). In examining courtship across race and gender within the U.S., Braboy Jackson, Kleiner, Geist, and Cebulko (2011) found that African Americans would not consider someone as a "boy/girlfriend" until they had met each other's families (p. 645). Within North America's multicultural society, then, a variety of socially constructed courtship and dating rituals may exist. As the research site for the current study points to a largely White, middle-class demographic, the history of courtship and dating in North American culture from a heteronormative perspective will be briefly outlined in order to understand the progression to the current dating landscape.

Love, sex, and marriage: A brief history. From the nineteenth-century tradition of *calling*, to *dating* in the early 1900s, to *going steady* in the 1940s, to *hooking up* in the 21st century, heteronormative rituals surrounding courtship have evolved significantly over time (Bailey, 2004; Ingoldsby, 2003; Braboy Jackson et al., 2011). *Dating* staked its claim as the predominant form of courtship by 1924 but was negatively viewed, in part due to the implied economic exchange: in paying for the date, the man was essentially buying the woman's company (Bailey, 2004, p. 23). In order to make the exchange more "equitable" for the man, it was implied that the woman would have to include more than just her company, inferred by Bailey to be some form of sexual act (p. 23). In the 1950s and early 1960s, marriage provided economic security for women; it was not particularly focused on notions of love (Ansari, 2015). By the 1960s and 1970s, women approached dating and sex with increasingly liberal mentalities, eschewing the economic-exchange idea and taking advantage of better options for birth control (Bogle, 2008; Bailey, 2004; Ingoldsby, 2003). Since then, North American courtship rituals have continued to lose much of their formality (Ingoldsby, 2003).

While dating was once predominantly an activity relegated for adolescents, today women of all ages are active in the dating world (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Sassler, 2010). Today's dating pool includes more women in their thirties, forties, fifties, and beyond due to "marital delay, relationship dissolution and churning, and high divorce rates" (Sassler, 2010, p. 557). For younger women, the pathway to marriage is now longer due to the fact that a greater percentage are pursuing post-secondary education and seeking to establish a career prior to starting a family (Arnett, 2000). In 2000, Dr. Jeffrey Arnett coined the term *emerging adulthood* to describe this lengthened transition period from adolescence to adulthood, which occurs from

the late-teens to the mid-twenties. Although the media "often portrays the romantic and sexual

behavior among adolescents and emerging adults as different from that engaged in by previous

generations…there is little empirical foundation for such claims" (Sassler, 2010, p. 570). In other

words, women may share similar dating experiences at similar points during their life course,

regardless of the year they were born.

Knowledge of North American dating history underlines the fact that dating traditions

change over time, providing a framework where online dating sites and apps can be viewed as

another step in this ever-evolving cultural practice. Furthermore, understanding the changes that

have occurred, particularly over the past 50 years, is important since the women participating in

this study will have lived through some, or all, of these various cultural and societal shifts

relating to courtship and dating, which may have an impact on their current dating experiences in

the digital world. These cultural and societal shifts are key features of the life course perspective,

which will now be outlined in order to understand the effects age may have in this study.

The life course perspective. Examining and understanding the ways in which historical

events and societal changes shape the lives of those individuals who experience them is the

foundation of a theoretical model known as the *life course perspective* (Hutchison, 2011). In the

life course perspective, a sociological theory that emerged in the 1960s, individuals are grouped

within a *cohort*, based on their *chronological age*, allowing researchers to investigate how

particular "historical forces" acting on the entire cohort may have shaped individual experiences

(p. 11). In relation to this particular study, the main historical force acting on the various cohorts

is the introduction of the internet, and subsequently the introduction of online dating tools.

Another life course perspective concept that is relevant to this study is that of *social age,* as it relates to the "socially constructed meaning of various ages" that exist within a given society (p. 22). As part of social age, *age norms* exist; they are similar to social scripts, which will be discussed next, in that they communicate "behaviours that are expected of people of a specific age in a given society at a particular point in time" (p. 22). As Hutchison (2011) points out, social age and age norms may contribute to how individuals perceive the world around them and may influence their behaviour at different points in their life, though human agency is of course always at play with each individual and variations may occur within any given cohort. In the United States, age norms surrounding the establishment of romantic relationships and marriage have typically been associated with adolescence and young adulthood; however, as mentioned previously, these norms are changing as men and women pursue post-secondary education, cohabitate before marriage, marry later in life, or seek new relationships after a divorce (Arnett, 2000; Hutchison, 2011).

In regards to how the internet has influenced notions of social age, researchers have been concerned with the binary categorization of cohorts as either "digital natives" or "digital immigrants," where the former includes individuals who were born after the advent of the internet and the latter includes individuals who were introduced to the technology later in life (Wang, Myers & Sundaram, 2013). The general assumption has been that people born after the internet was launched in 1990 are better able to use digital technology; however, through an extensive literature review, Wang, Myers, and Sundaram (2013) concluded that a host of factors impact a person's technological aptitude and the placement of people as either digital natives or digital immigrants is limiting, as this operates on a continuum rather than as a binary. The ways

in which technology use and age intersect in the digital dating sphere will be discussed further; however, the life course perspective and the categorization of digital natives and digital immigrants will assist in understanding potential differences that may present themselves between the cohorts of women in this study.

   Social scripts, dating, and gender. Tying together elements related to the social construction of dating, its history, and the life course perspective, *social script theory* argues that there are socially constructed "scripts," unique to each culture in which they develop, that provide individuals with what amounts to an instruction manual about their role within a given situation, informing them about how to act in order to properly adhere to the script (St. Clair, 2008). As Wiederman (2005) points out: "Inherent in social scripting theory is the assumption that people learn scripts as a function of being raised in a particular culture" (p. 496). Heterosexuality, though thought to be something that exists naturally without much effort, actually consists of individuals following existing gender rules and customs to maintain the prevailing social structure (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011). As such, men and women have traditionally been provided with a well-known, gender-specific "socially scripted relationship sequence" that they are expected to follow in their quest for a partner (Metts, 2006, p. 26).

   When examining the history of courtship and dating in North America, men and women have traditionally held roles that were economically bound, with the man being the provider and the woman being dependent on him, providing physical and emotional support in the relationship (Bailey, 2004; Ingoldsby, 2003). These traditional roles have evolved over the years, with women having more independence, particularly financially; however, many of the traditional dating scripts still persist. Research examining first-date scripts and gender among college

students, conducted by Morr Serewicz and Gale (2008), found that "both men and women expect

the man to take a more active role in the date," with men being assigned the majority of actions

in the script, even in cases where the woman initiated the date (pp. 160-161). Furthermore,

women displayed "a more romanticized view" of the script and showed "greater cognitive

complexity regarding the date situation;" as such, talking to friends about the details of the date

was an action for women within the script (p. 161). In her research with college-educated

women, aged 25 to 40 who identified as hetero- or bi-sexual, Lamont (2014) found that

"gendered courtship conventions persist even as heterosexual relationships become more

egalitarian" (p. 189). In other words, although the women wanted relationships where equality

between the sexes was paramount, the majority of them also "expected men to ask and pay for

the first date, confirm the exclusivity of the relationship, and propose marriage" thereby

signaling a continued focus on traditional dating scripts (p. 196). Similarly, in their quantitative

study of male and female college students, aged 17 to 22, Braboy Jackson et al. (2011) found that

although dating has become less traditional, gender-related expectations from the past still exist,

such as a man being required to purchase gifts for a woman to show his commitment.

Furthermore, as Emmers-Sommer, Farrell, Gentry, Stevens, Eckstein, Battocletti, and Gardener

(2010) found when studying first date scripts among college students, men had "higher sexual

expectations…than did women;" these expectations were heightened when the man initiated and

paid for the date, particularly if the date happened "at a private location, such as an apartment"

(p. 350). Through the examination of different cohorts, the researcher sought to determine what

traditional dating scripts and gender norms, if any, affect the experiences of women who are

dating digitally in Kelowna, B.C. The existing research related to online dating in regards to life course, social scripts, and gender will be outlined further in the sections that follow.

       Life course and social scripts within digital dating. Existing online-dating research related to age and gender are foundational to the current study. Through an extensive review of literature focused on online dating and gender, published over the course of the past 20 years, Abramova et al. (2016) concluded that women initiate contact less frequently than men and that women are more focused on "socio-economic characteristics," while men are "attracted by physical appearance" (para. 36). Similarly, a 2011 Canadian study conducted by Frohlick and Migliardi, conducted with women over the age of 30, found that most women created their dating profiles to make themselves appealing to men, but also set "out the terms for love and romance that women expected from men" (p. 81). Additionally, the majority of the women did not want to make the first move, pointing to a continued focus on traditional dating scripts and gender roles. In more recent life course research, McWilliams and Barrett (2014) investigated men and women between the ages of 53 and 74 to determine how gender and age influenced their expectations of dating online. Through semi-structured interviews with eight men and two women, along with two romance coaches, the researchers found that although online dating provided women with more choice and control, they were still unlikely to make the first contact online. Conversely, through interviews with 50 men and women between the ages of 15 to 58, Lawson and Leck (2006) found that Internet dating enabled users to break away from traditional gender expectations, "by allowing women to behave more assertively and men to be more open." (p. 205). For a handful of participants, online dating provided a way to transcend sex role stereotypes and avoid commitment. As heteronormativity influences the digital dating

experiences of women in North America, as evidenced above, there are other gender and cultural influences that affect women in other parts of the world. In India, for example, matrimonial websites categorize users based on skin-tone, whereby "dark-skinned or very dark-skinned women…are undesirable, or, simply, invisible" (Jha & Adelman, 2009, p. 76). On the other side of the globe in Mexico, women use internet matchmaking services and "Vacation Romance Tours" to "meet, date, and perhaps marry U.S. men," who are idealized as the antithesis of Mexican men and thought to provide an opportunity for "a stable middle-class lifestyle" (Schaeffer-Grabiel, 2004, p. 33). These findings highlight the ways in which culture and place affect dating experiences and will be useful in the current study when investigating how traditional dating scripts and gender roles play out for women who are online dating at various stages of life.

Digital Dating

In order to establish the context of digital dating that the researcher seeks to investigate, general information regarding online dating sites and mobile apps, including history, usage, and general facts will be provided. Following these sections, the researcher will examine what effects location may have on online dating and will introduce research from a Canadian perspective to further establish the foundation of the current study.

The rise of online dating. Since the launch of the first commercial dating site in 1995, more individuals have turned to the Internet as a way to meet a partner (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). The use of online dating sites in Canada seemed to increase in the years that followed the initial establishment of these services due to: (1) an increase in the number of single people; (2) a heightened focus on work, leading to a decrease in personal time; (3) an increase in geographical

mobility amongst those looking for a partner; and, (4) a decrease in the opportunity to meet a

partner through work (Brym and Lenton, 2001). Based on part of their 2001 survey, Brym and

Lenton estimate that approximately "1.1 to 1.2 million Canadians have visited an online dating

site" though they assert "that the potential for online dating in Canada is about 3.1 million

unmarried people" (p. 12). In its 2015 national survey of 2,001 American adults, Pew Research

Centre (PRC) found that 12 per cent of respondents had used online dating sites, while nine per

cent had used mobile dating apps; this was an increase of three per cent and six per cent

respectively as compared to 2013 survey results (Smith, 2016).

The perceived advantages of online dating have shown consistency throughout the years.

Individuals in Canada and the U.S. say online dating allows them to meet new people; it is a

convenient and efficient way to access to an untapped pool of people from the comfort and

privacy of their own homes (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Smith 2016). There

are also perceived disadvantages to online dating, including a belief that it is more dangerous and

that it allows people to deceive others more easily (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Smith, 2016). PRC's

national survey found that "53% of women who have used online dating agree that it is more

dangerous than other ways of meeting people;" comparatively, only 38 per cent of men shared

this same belief (Smith, 2016, para. 13). Research confirms that both sexes misrepresent

themselves online; however, the fact that people will have to eventually meet offline tends to

temper the "discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves" (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

Past research has found that risk-taking was perceived as necessary to take advantage of the

possibilities offered by Internet dating and, generally speaking, online daters are positive about

their experiences (Lawson & Leck, 2006; Smith, 2016). Although online dating is certainly not

the most prominent way of meeting a spouse, it is clear that internet users who are single are

increasingly choosing online dating sites and mobile apps as a viable way to meet potential

partners (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

Who is dating digitally? Identifying the demographics of those who use Internet- and

mobile-based technology as part of their dating life is important baseline information for the

current study. Brym and Lenton (2001) found Canadian online daters were "more likely to be

male, single, divorced, employed, and urban…[and] also more likely to enjoy higher income" (p.

13). In more recent U.S. research, high-usage groups of people utilizing online dating sites or

mobile apps included college attendees, those in their mid-20s to mid-40s, and urban/sub-

urbanites (Lenhart, 2014). In comparing results from its 2015 survey with a previous 2013

survey, PRC found that online dating usage among 25- to 34-year-olds remained unchanged, at

22 per cent, but increased for all other groups between the ages of 18 and 64 (Smith, 2016).

Usage among 18- to 24-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds grew markedly, with use in the former

group increasing from 10 per cent to 27 per cent, and use in the latter group increasing from six

per cent to 12 per cent. An increase in the usage of mobile apps by 18- to 24-year-olds was also

noted, with an increase from 5 per cent to 22 per cent occurring from the 2013 to the 2015

survey. In their online survey of 175 heterosexual men and women, 14.3 per cent of whom were

Canadian, Stephure et al. (2009) found older participants were more active online daters and

spent more of their time pursuing relationships online than younger participants. In examining

motivations across age groups, Brym and Lenton (2001) found that those under the age of 30

were less focused on meeting people in person when online dating as compared to those over 30.

In a finding particularly germane to this study's focus on the difference age norms make to

online dating choices, the researchers determined "that people under the age of 25 or *over the age of* 59…are most likely to use online dating to find sexual partners" (p. 20). While it is clear people of all ages are using online dating as a tool, it is also useful to understand the ways in which digital dating technology has changed throughout the years.

From algorithms to apps. Today, there are as many dating sites and apps to choose from as there are dating preferences. IBISWorld (2016) reports that the US dating services industry, which includes online and mobile dating, now generates $2 billion in annual revenue, making it big business in North America. While free online dating sites and apps do exist, many internet dating services only allow free access to initially peruse the site, requiring a membership fee to be paid by the user in order to access full functionality of the site.

Both the original dating computers of the sixties and most of the current online sites use mathematical algorithms as part of their matching process (Ansari, 2015; Fry, 2015). Users are expected to create a profile, including text and photos, and there is often a questionnaire involved asking about preferences, both in a mate and in a relationship. As Fry (2015) points out, there are "three key ingredients" in these questionnaires: the user's answers; the answers they would like a prospective partner to give; and the importance of each question to the user (p. 35). The algorithm analyzes answers between all users to determine which users are a match. Though unsupported by scientific research, many individuals believe that the "trait-based information" provided by a user in their dating profile, in conjunction with the site algorithm, can determine the success of a match; in reality, these "pre-existing personal qualities account for a very small percentage of the variance in relationship success" (Finkel et al., 2012, p. 51). In other words, even with a wealth of information regarding two individuals, determining the success of their

relationship prior to them having met each other is highly unlikely. Having access to so many

potential partners, and then having so much information about each one, has actually caused

individuals to become "fussier," easily finding so-called "deal-breakers" in a profile even though

they may not actually impact the relationship in the long-term (Krotoski, 2013, p. 106).

Furthermore, in conducting research with its users, OkCupid found that photos in online dating

profiles are actually more important than the text, which informs "less than 10% of what people

think of you" (Rudder, 2014). The rise of the smartphone has resulted in some dating services,

like Tinder, being developed solely as mobile apps, with a heightened focus on pictures rather

than on lengthy profiles (Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Ligtenberg, 2017).

   The introduction and rise in popularity of mobile dating apps signals a shift in the

mediated-dating landscape. Tinder was among the first of its kind to use digital images, location,

and game-like elements to pair-up users, rather than relying on trait or profile-based algorithmic

recommendations. Tinder does not require a user to create a lengthy profile or answer

questionnaires about their ideal match; rather, a user creates an account by signing up with their

Facebook account (Sumter et al., 2017). Tinder is often negatively portrayed as only being useful

for hooking up, particularly among emerging adults; however, Sumter et al. (2017) found that

emerging adults had several motivations for using Tinder besides casual sex. Using an online

survey with participants ranging in age from 18 to 30, the researchers found that participants

"most often use Tinder for the excitement and because it is a new and cool app" (p. 72). In

considering motivations related to relationship development, the researchers found that emerging

adults were motivated more by love and romance than by casual sex when using the app.

Additionally, both of these motivating factors increased with age. When taking gender into

account, however, "male Tinder users showed a higher motivation for casual sex than female

Tinder users" (p. 74). In their online survey of 497 American men and women, who had an

average age of 30.9, Ranzini and Lutz (2017) found that women used Tinder more for

"friendship and self-validation" while men used it "more for hooking up/sex, traveling, and

relationships" (p. 91). Over the course of the past three years, numerous articles have surfaced in

the media talking about "Tinder tourism" and "Tinder tourists," discussing the advantages and

disadvantages of using Tinder for "hooking up" while traveling (e.g. Davies, 2014; Yahoo

Travel, 2014; Thompson, 2017). Tinder itself promotes the app as a way to find partners while

traveling in one of its YouTube marketing videos (Duguay, 2017). This is an interesting aspect to

note within the current study since Kelowna is such a well-known tourist destination.

Many online sites have expanded their services to include a mobile app; while some

integrate geolocation, such as OkCupid, others simple offer an app version of the online site,

such as eHarmony. A more recently developed app, Bumble, uses similar concepts to Tinder,

with one twist—once a man and a woman have matched, the woman has 24 hours to make the

first move in initiating the conversation or the match expires ("Bumble - About," 2017). Earlier

this year, Match launched the 'Missed Connections' feature to its app, making "geolocation THE

priority in your search criteria" (Match Group, 2017, para. 5). This "location-based

feature…allows users to see other members they have crossed paths with in real life," (para. 2)

with Match claiming that the feature is "empowering singles to merge their online and offline

worlds by giving them another easy tool to make real connections" (para. 7). As the use of

location-based features in digital dating technology has increased in recent years, and the

variable of a city's size figures into the research question posed above, considering how place impacts a user's experience is relevant to the current study.

Location and its effects. Online dating sites offer a number of factors from which users can select potential partners, including geographical proximity. As evidenced in the previous section, the function of place is becoming increasingly important, particularly with the rise of location-based real-time dating (LBRTD) apps, like Tinder, which use "the geographical distance between users as a key variable on the basis of which possible partners can be found" (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017, p. 81). Several online dating studies have selected participants from a combination of urban, suburban, and rural communities; however, the specific characteristics of these particular locations, including their size, and the impact they have on the digital dating experiences have not been a focal point of the research (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs; 2006; Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Smith, 2016). Although Stephure et al.'s (2009) study incorporated both urban (65.7 per cent) and rural (32 per cent) participants, the main variable they were interested in was age, so place did not become a focus. They analyzed residence of online daters against age and against the daters' "satisfaction with offline means of meeting people," neither of which showed any differences between urban and rural residence (p. 679). In their 2001 mixed methods study, which included both internet users and online daters from across Canada, Brym and Lenton (2001) did segment their results regionally and identified instances where size of community had an impact. For example, the researchers found that "a disproportionately large number of…people who do not live in the core of a major city" view the convenience of online dating as advantageous compared to other ways of meeting people (p. 26). Interestingly, when it came to disadvantages, online daters from across regions

and communities all agreed that people lying or hiding things were the primary pitfalls of online dating.

Where community size has been more of a focus is in the study of LBRTD apps. Prior research investigating these apps emphasizes their ability to blend online and offline space, thereby affecting the user experience (Blackwell, Birnhotlz, & Abbott, 2015; Toch & Levi, 2013). Blackwell et al. (2015) assert that these types of apps can "complicate interaction by aggregating or "co-situating" diverse sets of individuals…across traditional spatial or community boundaries that serve as cues for self-presentation and impression formation" (p. 1117). In other words, the ways in which individuals present themselves and develop impressions of others are influenced by the fact that their online and offline lives are intertwined.

The size of a community also has an effect on the LBRTD-app user experience. Through semi-structured interviews, Blackwell et al. (2015) investigated the experiences of 36 men who were using Grindr, a men-seeking-men LBRTD app. The participants were located in Chicago, IL, "which has a dense and widespread distribution of Grindr users," and in Ithaca, NY, "a relatively isolated university town." (p. 1126). Part of this research sought to identify the ways in which users experienced co-situation. It was noted that users in Chicago could find a whole new set of possible matches depending on which part of the city they were in, thanks to its population density. In Ithaca, however, the lower density meant the selection of matches remained uniform, regardless of where in the city a user was located; additionally, in order to find more matches, the app would start showing users from nearby communities. Another difference in the less-dense city was that new users were noticed quickly, creating excitement among existing users (p. 1127). Thus, the researchers concluded that visibility "is dependent on both geographic

proximity and the density of user distribution in geographic space" (p. 1127). Toch and Levi

(2013) investigated how location and privacy intersect in "PNAs (People-Nearby Applications),"

which they defined, similar to LBRTD apps, as "mobile systems that allow users to discover new

people using geographical proximity search and online communication" (pp. 539-540). Through

interviews with 18 men and 7 women in Tel Aviv, the researchers found that PNAs provided

users with the ability to diverge from their existing networks. Further to this, and similarly to

Blackwell et al. (2015), Toch and Levi also emphasized that increased population density

provides diverse matches "in a very similar way that a walk in an urban environment will enable

interaction with people from different backgrounds" (p. 546). The researchers integrated urban

studies thinking into their discussion, doing so to "focus on understanding the socio-spatial

perspectives of a given space, discovering the relations between geographical properties of a

space and its social properties" (p. 547). As such, they compared PNAs to "a city's public

street," stating that to be effective, "a good People-Nearby application needs enough diversity

and density to make interactions interesting, but at the same time enforced norms that provide

safety to its dwellers" (p. 547). These findings regarding the effect of location on the digital

dating experience, as it relates to increasingly popular LBRTD apps, are important to note when

examining the experiences of women in Kelowna, an urban community with rural roots.

     A Canadian perspective. While some online dating research has incorporated a

percentage of Canadians into participant samples (Madsen & Edwards, 2015; Stephure, Boon,

Mackinnon, & Deveau, 2009), research focused solely on Canadians appears to be limited (Brym

& Lenton, 2001; Sritharan, R., Heilpern, K., Wilbur, C. J., & Gawronski, B., 2010; Frohlick &

Migliardi, 2011; Fullick, 2013). Of these Canadian-focused studies, only two, Brym and Lenton

(2001) and Frohlick and Migliardi (2011), qualitatively examined the experiences of online

daters, though the former was to a lesser degree. As the study conducted by Frohlick and

Migliardi (2011) offers a similar research design incorporating life course and sexual scripts, all

from a Canadian perspective, it offers a foundation from which to focus the current study.

Frohlick and Migliardi (2011) explored "the ways in which online dating as a technology

and sociality affects, through everyday practices, the production of heterosexual subjectivity as

an ongoing process through the life course" (p. 73). The researchers conducted interviews with

27 Canadian women over the age of 30, the majority of whom were in their 40s and 50s; one

woman resided in England, while the remaining women were dispersed in urban and rural

communities across Canada. In addition to the interviews, the researchers also examined most of

the women's online dating profiles and conducted a small focus group with three of the women.

For these women, online dating "was more convenient…safer…[and] less expensive" than other

offline dating options (p.78). The women also inferred that online dating "has become the only

route to 'finding a man'" (p. 78). In keeping with traditional heterosexual scripts, the majority of

women tried to construct a profile that would attract their desired partner, while at the same time

waiting for the man to make the first move. One common experience among the women was the

significant investment of time required to be successful; this included time to create a tempting

profile, time to maintain a consistent presence on the sites, and time to digitally interact with

potential partners. For women in the older age groups, time was also invested "to stay fit, to look

good, to maintain a youthful appearance," as this seemed to be a requirement to reciprocate

sexual advances from much younger men (p. 84). Although the current study is on a much

smaller scale, the structure and results of Frohlick and Migliardi's research provide a solid

foundation for the researcher. Since the 2011 study was conducted, newer technology has been

developed which relies less on profile content and more on pictures; much of the technology also

has a heightened focus on geolocation. Through the expansion of the age range of women

studied, along with the technological changes that have occurred in the past five years, the

current research may yield similar or different results. Whereas Frohlick and Migliardi's study

took an ethnographic approach, the current study pursued a phenomenological approach,

whereby the researcher chose to hone in on a relatively small Canadian city to see if the previous

findings held up in this context and to determine what impacts, if any, the community's size and

characteristics had on online dating experiences.

Summary

As outlined through the literature review, this study builds upon the existing body of

research related to digital dating. In order to properly document, analyze, and make meaning of

the experiences of study participants, outlining the history and social construction of dating

highlighted the various cultural and social experiences of courtship and dating that occurred prior

to the internet. As illustrated through the reviewed literature, dating is a relatively recent concept,

which has always been in flux; however, it has continued to encourage traditional gender roles,

in part through social scripts, even as women have become more independent and as dating has

extended to include older women at later stages of their life course. This study will add to the

existing body of research by examining gender and dating scripts through the life course

perspective, as these scripts seem to have maintained traditional elements across all ages of

individuals. The introduction of the internet can be considered a factor in driving a major cultural

shift, within the life course, that will have affected the cohorts of women in different ways.

It is clear that the percentage of individuals using online sites and mobile apps to date has increased in recent years, with numerous sites and apps being developed to cater to a wide variety of people. The research that has been conducted regarding online dating shows that individuals enjoy the element of choice that this form of dating provides, yet they also recognize drawbacks similar to traditional dating, such as deception issues. The recent rise in smartphone use, along with the development of location-based real-time dating apps, have changed the digital dating landscape, overlapping the digital and physical sphere within an individual's life. Since it is clear that dating-related technologies and dating norms are always changing, and the percentage of single women does not appear to be decreasing, this research will provide timely scholarship to this field of study. Additionally, by situating the research within the context of a small, Canadian city, it will provide a unique vantage point within this area of study by examining the ways in which a community's size and characteristics impact the digital dating experience, a vantage point that has not been extensively used in previous online dating research.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Conducting research requires a researcher to outline the ontological, epistemological, and methodological framework within which he or she will operate. Ontologically speaking, this research operates from the "meta-theoretical tradition" of *social constructionism*, which posits that "knowledge is culturally, historically, and contextually contingent" (Schwab & Syed, 2015, p. 3). There is not one version of truth or reality, but multiple, socially constructed truths and realities that arise based on each individual's unique experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective is key to the researcher, since her goal is to understand the multiple, socially-constructed realities that exist for women who are dating using online sites and/or mobile apps.

Epistemologically speaking, operating from within the constructivist paradigm, the interaction

between the researcher and the research participants occurred in a "transactional and

subjectivist" way, whereby each woman and the researcher came to understand her experiences

through the process of interaction that occurred during the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.

111). As this study is qualitative in nature, the goal was not to produce generalizable data, but

rather to offer an in-depth look at the phenomenon of digital dating from a small number of

participants (Schwab & Syed, 2015). The research framework operated from a methodological

standpoint that required interaction between the researcher and the participants in order to fully

understand the socially-constructed realities of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The specific methodological approach used to do this was *interpretative*

phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is rooted in "phenomenology, hermeneutics, and

idiography," and is concerned with "the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the

meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience"

(Smith, 2011, p. 9). IPA was established in the 1990s by Johnathan A. Smith, with the primary

focus of research being the thorough description, and subsequent interpretation, of each

participant's *lived experience*, which is in and of itself an interpretation of his or her own

particular reality as it relates to the phenomena being studied, known in IPA as a *double*

hermeneutic (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2011).

Since the focus of this research was the lived experiences of women dating via online

sites and/or mobile apps, IPA provided a useful framework for gaining an in-depth understanding

of the experiences of the small, select group of participants the researcher met with. One-on-one

interviews were conducted in order to document the participants lived experiences; these

interviews were subsequently interpreted using IPA. Throughout the process, the researcher kept

a journal in order to identify her own personal views and beliefs in relation to the subject matter.

Since the researcher must interpret the participant's interpretation of her personal experience (the

double hermeneutic of IPA), the identification of the researcher's own "interpretative

framework" through the journaling process contributes to the "transparency of the analysis"

(Storey, 2007, p. 54). Data analysis, conducted through IPA, occurred deductively in relation to

the theoretical concepts of social scripts, gender, and the life course perspective (as it relates to

technology) as discussed earlier, while also occurring inductively in relation to the interview data

collected.

Definitions

The main term that needed to be defined as part of the research was *dating*, specifically

within the context of online sites and mobile apps, since this can have multiple meanings

depending on who you ask. In the context of this study, the researcher borrowed from Lawson

and Leck's (2006) definition of internet dating as "the pattern of periodic communication

between potential partners using the Internet as a medium" (p. 191). Because the goals of women

in the various age groups examined were not identical, the researcher did not want to impose too

many restrictions with the definition; the goal was to describe the lived experiences of the

participants, which included their own specific definition of what constitutes online dating.

In addition to the definition as outlined above, the researcher noted that online dating was

used as a term by the participants regardless of whether they were using mobile-only apps, such

as Tinder, or more traditional online sites, such as PlentyofFish. Prior studies have used the terms

digital dating (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Davis & Fingerman, 2015), internet dating (Lawson &

Leck, 2006), and online dating (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). For the

purpose of this study, the researcher will use these terms interchangeably to encompass the entire

scope of the women's experiences regardless of what type of platform they were using.

Data and Data Gathering

In order to follow the IPA methodology, as outlined below, data was gathered from a

small, relatively homogeneous group of women residing in the Kelowna CMA. The fact that the

researcher had similar experiences as the participants allowed her to develop rapport with them

fairly quickly, which was needed to make the participants feel comfortable and trusting

throughout the IPA research process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Research site. As a Canadian woman currently residing in Kelowna, British Columbia,

the researcher decided that this city would be site of analysis. While choosing this particular

research site was convenient, particularly in respect to the researcher's ability to recruit and do

snowball sampling, this was not the only consideration for choosing Kelowna. As the researcher

sought to use age as one of the main variables in the study, other factors such as geographical

location and gender needed to be controlled in order to retain homogeneity within the sample.

Additionally, the choice to select Kelowna as the research site was informed based on its unique

characteristics as a Canadian city, as outlined in the introduction, and based on linkages to the

theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study.

As discussed at the beginning of Chapter Three, the ontological approach of this study is

to understand the socially constructed realities of the participant group related to online dating,

thereby necessitating a specific culture, time period, and context to be selected. Additionally,

IPA research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of a small,

homogeneous group of participants, so selecting one specific geographic location from which to operate was appropriate.

Moreover, the 2011 census profile of Kelowna shows that 52 per cent of the CMA's total population over the age of 15 were female (Statistics Canada, 2012). Of these women, approximately 43 per cent were not married and not living with a common-law partner. This same census profile states that the median age of women in Kelowna is 45, while the percentage of women within various age groups is well distributed between the ages of 19 and 65. The results from the 2016 Census Program showed that the percentage of the total population over the age of 15 who were female remained at 52 per cent; however, the data for marital status has not yet been released and so comparisons to the 2011 data were not possible (Statistics Canada, 2017c). Therefore, Kelowna also provided access to an appropriate population of women, across the desired age groups, for the current study.

Research sample. Selecting a small, homogeneous sample of participants, who have considerable experience with the phenomenon of interest, is typical practice for IPA research (Boyd Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Symeonides & Childs, 2015; Milevsky, Shifra Niman, Raab, & Gross, 2011; Eatough & Smith, 2008; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A sample size consisting of 10 people or less is common in order to establish rich, detailed accounts from each participant; these accounts are then used to explore, analyze, and understand the phenomenon in question (Symeonides & Childs, 2015; Boyd Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Milevsky et al., 2011; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Upon approval from the Royal Roads University (RRU) Research Ethics Board (REB), the sample of women for this research project was selected purposively, focusing on women with

the relevant background and depth of experience needed (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012;

DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To that end, since communication technology and the

available ways of dating it enables change so quickly, the researcher recruited and selected

women who were currently dating by way of online sites or mobile applications, or who had

experience doing so within the previous 12 to 18 months of the selection process. In order to

compare women from various stages of life, quota sampling was employed alongside the

purposive sampling; quota samples can be determined based on what the researcher feels is

appropriate (Chao, 2010). In this case, the researcher selected 11 women representing a cross-

section of age groupings; the original goal was to recruit and select two women from each of the

following age ranges: 19-24, 25-30, 31-39, 40-49, 50-59, for a total of 10 participants. In the end,

the researcher met with two women from the 19-24, 25-30, and 50-59 age groups, three women

from the 30-39 age group, and one women from the 40-49 and the 60+ age group respectively.

The majority of the women were comfortable providing their exact age; however, two women

opted to select an age range. One of the participants resided in Vernon, B.C., which is

approximately 50 km north of Kelowna; although Vernon is a much smaller city than Kelowna,

with just over 40,000 residents (Statistics Canada, 2017d), the researcher chose to include the

participant in the sample because the cities are so close to each other and because many of the

men the participant matched with online were located in Kelowna.

Ten of the 11 women who participated in the study were of North American (non-

aboriginal), British Isles, or European ethnic origin; one of the women did not respond to the

follow up email requesting ethnic origin. Two of the women grew up in the Central Okanagan,

while eight of the women grew up in other parts of Canada, and one woman grew up in Seattle,

Washington. Three of the women were students, one was retired, and the remainder were

gainfully employed in a variety of fields. The three women above the age of 50 were divorced;

two were single and one had started a relationship five weeks earlier with someone she met

online. The other eight women, between the ages of 21 and 44, had never been married; while all

of them were single at the time of interview, five were in the early stages of a relationship with

men they had met online. Ten of the women were strictly pursuing relationships with men. The

eleventh woman had only been in serious relationships with men; however, she identified as bi-

sexual and at the time of interview was only active on a lesbian dating app called HER. The

participants had varied experience with digital dating; several women had only been dating

digitally for a few months, while other women had been dating digitally on-and-off for years.

Data collection. Initially, the researcher reached out to her existing network throughout

Alberta and British Columbia to source potential research participants in Kelowna. This was

done privately, either by speaking to people in person, or by contacting them via text message or

Facebook messenger. Two participants were sourced almost immediately through this method;

however, after that, it proved more challenging to find participants, particularly those with recent

experience and those in the older age groups. Many individuals within the researcher's network

knew of women in larger cities who were dating digitally but had no women to refer within

Kelowna. One acquaintance mentioned to the researcher that her friend would not be

comfortable participating in the project due to her profile within the community. The fact that

Kelowna is a small city, where people are often interconnected in their personal and business

lives, may have impacted the recruitment process. In order to find participants, the researcher

continued talking to people about the project, but also put up posters in coffee shops and at a

local, women's only gym (see Appendix A). The poster was also amended for social media and

shared publicly on Facebook and Instagram (see Appendix B). In the end, only two participants

were women the researcher knew directly, though neither of them were not close friends of the

researcher. Of the other nine women, three were referred by friends of the researcher, one met

the researcher at a community event, two responded after seeing the poster at the gym, and three

were part of a ladies group in Kelowna. This particular group of women was referred to the

project by a woman the researcher met on flight back to Calgary; after chatting throughout the

flight, the woman agreed to receive information regarding the research project and said she

would forward it to members of a ladies group she belonged to. Once potential participants were

identified, they were e-mailed a copy of the letter of invitation (see Appendix C), which provided

a full outline of the research. Once they agreed to participate, a copy of the consent form (see

Appendix D) was also emailed to them and an interview time was confirmed.

In order to collect the data, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with

each of the women. All interviews were conducted in person; the participants were given the

option of meeting in person or through Skype. One of the interviews was conducted in the

participant's home, at her request; all other interviews were conducted in a private meeting room

at one of two local coffee shops. The researcher included some information about her own

experience with digital dating at the beginning of the interview (see Appendix E), which was

expanded on at the beginning and throughout the interview, as it arose in conversation. The

interviews were conducted over an 11-week period, from January 31 to April 17, 2017. Each

interview lasted between 43:37 minutes and 137:43 minutes; only three of the 11 interviews were

less than an hour. This was in line with the interview length of between 45 minutes and two

hours typically associated with IPA research (Vandeweerd, Myers, Coulter, Yalcin & Corvin, 2016; Fileborn, Thorpe, Hawkes, Minichiello, & Pitts, 2015; Symeonides & Childs, 2015; McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Milevsky et al., 2011).

Gathering data by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to develop some initial questions to guide the interview, while allowing enough flexibility for the participant to direct the course of the interview based on her own particular experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2011). Using Lawson and Leck's (2006) interview questions as a guide, the researcher initially established the following interview questions: (a) describe your experiences with online dating sites and/or mobile apps, (b) tell me what surprised you the most during your experience, (c) what were your expectations when you started dating through online sites and/or mobile apps, (d) tell me what made you decide to pursue this form of dating, and (e) have you encountered similarities and/or differences between online dating and traditional dating. After revision of the first interview transcript, the researcher expanded the list of questions (see Appendix E) to have more prompts available and to ensure information relevant to the research questions was captured. This list of questions also allowed for more depth, ensuring the rich data required for analysis was acquired. Many of the women did not need to be prompted to describe their experiences, and some of the questions on the list were answered prior to the researcher having to ask them. Additionally, as many of the interviews felt conversational in nature, the flow and order of the questions changed based on each individual participant. Follow-up questions were added on a case-by-case basis, accommodating each woman's individual experiences and allowing enough room for each participant to dictate the way in which she told her own story.

Data Analysis

In accordance with Eatough and Smith's (2008) description of IPA analysis as "an iterative inductive process, beginning with several close detailed readings to provide holistic perspective, noting points of interest and significance," each interview transcript was read and re-read to create initial notes (p. 187). During this process, the researcher noted instances where participant statements needed to be clarified or expanded; in these cases, the participants were emailed and provided clarification as necessary. This stage of analysis allowed the researcher to identify her own feelings, reactions, or biases to the participants' accounts, providing transparency and guidance through the analysis process (Milevsky et al., 2011; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Storey, 2007). Along with the notes made on the transcripts themselves, the researcher also made notes in a journal during the analysis process to keep track of her own thoughts and perspectives (Dewinter, Van Parys, Vermeiren, & van Nieuwenhuizen, 2016).

Through the ongoing interpretation of the detailed interview transcripts during IPA's thematic approach to analysis, the researcher must "construct an account" of each participant's experiences "which is both (a) stimulated by and grounded in her own experience and sense making and (b) offering a deeper hermeneutic reading and indeed one which may be rather different from the one she might offer herself" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 191). In order to ensure that a participant's account of his or her experience stays true to its own "subjectivity," IPA typically avoids using "theoretical constructs in…analysis" (Storey, 2007, p. 55). In order to use theory effectively during the analysis portion of IPA, researchers should ensure they do not focus solely on "one particular theory" and should also "ensure that any theoretical interpretation arose clearly from the data" (p. 56).

Keeping this in mind when considering the analysis of the researcher's own data, themes were allowed to present themselves inductively from the initial close readings of the transcripts, but were also identified deductively, based on the theories mentioned earlier, to allow the researcher to answer the secondary research questions. The majority of the coding was done manually, though NVivo software was used to assist in organizing the data once the overall themes started to emerge from the close readings of the transcripts. Anything related to Kelowna specifically was noted. As the researcher was interested in gender, dating scripts, and the life course perspective as it relates to technological changes, the data was coded through the lens of all three theoretical perspectives in order to deduce relevant themes. In regards to script theory, any instances where the women talked about traditional dating scripts in the context of dating via online sites or mobile apps were identified; for example, mentioning that the man should be the one to ask the woman out, which is a traditional dating script (Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). The scripts took into account gender to an extent, though the researcher also sought to identify any instances where the women spoke about gender in relation to their experiences. In regards to the technology aspect, instances where the women specifically mentioned a way in which technology had positively or negatively impacted their experiences were identified. Using IPA, overarching categories of themes, known as "superordinate themes," were identified, with "sub-themes" being isolated within those categories (Storey, 2007, p. 58).

When conducting IPA with more than eight participants, Smith (2011) suggests that a researcher should "give illustrations from at least three or four participants" of a given theme in order to support its identification and provide rigour to the study (p. 24). Additionally, he points out that in order to be considered effective IPA research, "both convergence and divergence"

should be present when interpreting and analysing the participants' experiences (p. 24). In other words, the analysis and results must effectively demonstrate the distinctiveness of each woman's experience while at the same time highlight parallels between the women's experiences as a whole. The double hermeneutic is central to establishing "a careful interpretative analysis of how participants manifest the same theme in particular and different ways" (p. 24), and therefore it was important to provide rich quotations from interview transcripts in order to honour the unique experience of each woman, while also identifying common themes.

Reflexivity is integral to IPA research; this was demonstrated through the involvement of outside reviewers to evaluate and validate identified themes (Milevsky et. al, 2011; Jones, Volker, Vinajeras, Butros, Fitchpatrick, & Rosetto, 2010). The researcher relied on the expertise of her thesis supervisor and committee to examine and validate the analysis; the research process was also documented for auditing purposes, in order to establish trustworthiness (Boyd Farmer & Byrd, 2015). One of the main goals during data collection and analysis was to fully understand each participant's story, telling it so that "the reader…has vicariously experienced the phenomenon under study," thereby "coming to similar conclusions about what it means" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376). Telling the participants' stories using their own words, through excerpts from the transcripts, is vital to effective IPA research; the researcher took care to ensure quotes were accurately presented during the narrative summary that follows (Storey, 2007, p. 60).

Ethics

Ethical considerations are paramount when conducting research with human subjects. The researcher was granted approval from the RRU Research Ethics Board to proceed with the

research and adhered to the highest standard of ethical conduct in order to preserve relationships

with all stakeholders, including RRU, her thesis supervisor and thesis committee, her external

examiner, the research participants, and readers of the completed thesis (Punch, 2016).

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how women residing in a small

Canadian city experienced digital dating and to examine if and how place influenced the

women's experiences. Additionally, the researcher was interested in investigating how age,

gender, and technology shaped the women's experiences. Having conducted in-depth interviews

with 11 participants, the researcher had a wealth of data from which many themes emerged.

While the researcher was dedicated to respecting the IPA methodology, she was also mindful of

focusing on the relevance of the findings to the research questions and outlined purpose. As

such, the focus remained on both the superordinate themes and sub-themes that related to the

research questions and those that arose inductively and seemed most prevalent in the women's

discussion of their experiences. To stay true to the purpose of IPA research, excerpts from

participant interviews were used throughout the findings and discussion section to highlight the

themes and sub-themes listed in Table 1 (Appendix F). As there was simply not room to provide

an in-depth look at each theme and sub-theme individually, the findings will be discussed and

only illustrative portions will be highlighted in order to best answer the research questions. Since

gaining an understanding of how Kelowna's size and characteristics impacted the women's

experiences was one of the main goals of the study, these findings will be addressed and

discussed first. Next, digital dating will be examined in the context of dating scripts and gender,

as well as in relation to age norms associated with the life course perspective. A brief overview

of the remaining findings regarding technology use, and general experiences, motivations, and expectations will then end this chapter.

Digital Dating in Kelowna

In discussing their experiences with digital dating, ten of the 11 women mentioned ways in which they felt Kelowna's characteristics, including its size, impacted their experiences.

Limited dating pool. Although all of the women noted the ability to access a dating pool to which they would not have access in their day-to-day lives as a positive impact of online dating, six of the women mentioned that the pool of potential partners online seemed limited in Kelowna at times. This was heightened for the women who were in niche dating markets. For instance, Kate, a 27-year-old who had been online dating on-and-off for approximately two years, found challenges with the prospects in Kelowna when trying out the faith-based site, Christian Mingle, where "it was like 10 people, you know, it was just like the pool was way too small." Similarly, Anastasia, a 33-year-old student who self-identified as bi-sexual and had been dating digitally intermittently over the past 10 years, also found a limited pool when first trying out the lesbian dating app, HER: "When I first set my parameters, there was literally 17 women…in terms of age range and distance, and I'm like "ok, really slim pickings on HER"." These findings were similar to those of Blackwell et al. (2015) in that a lower density of users resulted in limited search results. Further to this, three of the women mentioned that throughout their time dating digitally, they would come across the same men on different sites or at different times. When pursuing heterosexual relationships, Anastasia expressed her frustration with the dating pool upon returning to online dating after the dissolution of a long-term relationship:

…[after a break-up] I got right back on to PlentyofFish and right back on to Tinder, and

chatting with the guys, and…this guy seems so familiar and it happened a few times…and

then I started realizing I was talking to pretty much all the same guys…I signed out of my

PlentyofFish, I was like "that's it, I'm not dating until I move to another city because I've

literally dated every guy in Kelowna, or talked to them and decided not to date them,"

you know what I mean?

Carol, in her fifties, Jennifer, 31, Bridgette, 30, and Colleen, 44, all noted dissatisfaction upon

being matched with people from other communities due to the smaller pool in Kelowna. Even

though not all the women were specifically using LBRTD apps, these results are in-line with

those of Blackwell et al. (2015) and Toch and Levi (2013), in that diversity is minimized in a city

with a lower population density and search parameters are widened as needed to provide users

with matches. Conversely, two of the women were not deterred by the possibility of a long-

distance relationship. Having recently moved to Vernon from Calgary, Amanda, a 28-year-old

who had used LBRDT apps for several months during the previous year, was happy to be

matched with people from Kelowna "because it's a bigger city." She did not find the distance

between the two communities a hindrance since she was used to the urban sprawl of a large city.

Anastasia was open to widening her matching radius to offset the limited pool of potential

partners, particularly within the lesbian community she was beginning to explore. In following

up with Anastasia via email regarding her openness to pursuing a long-distance relationship, she

indicated that long-distance relationships are "highly practical in the lesbian community as it's

small/hard to meet LGBT in locally" and believes technology is able to "keep people connected

over great distances." She compared her experiences as part of the lesbian dating community in

the Okanagan with the community in Calgary, stating:

> *...in Calgary, it was easy to find them [lesbians], there was gay bars, or you go down*
>
> *17th Ave...until I moved to the Okanagan where there's no gay bars, there's no gay*
>
> *centre, there's no where to meet them...*

As Anastasia was the only bi-sexual woman in the study, there was not additional data to pull

from the group to fully explore the lesbian dating community within Kelowna, nor was this a

main focus of the study.

Neither of the women in the 19-24 age category mentioned the size of the dating pool in

Kelowna as something that affected their experiences; this could be due in part to the fact that

the highest usage rates for online dating sites and mobile apps are within the 18-24 age range,

allowing an inference that, even within a smaller city like Kelowna, the pool is still big enough

to satisfy young users (Smith, 2016). That being said, Tracy, a 21-year-old student who had used

digital dating technology since 2015, did mention widening her desired age range when she

moved to Kelowna from Vancouver. Although she noted Kelowna's decrease in population as

compared to Vancouver, she did not feel as though she ever "hit the end of Tinder" in the smaller

city. Rather, her reasoning for expanding the age range was due to the traits she found less

desirable in men her own age. She discussed how many of the men her own age in Kelowna had

not pursued post-secondary education, describing one particular man close to her age who "was a

really nice guy, he just felt like a high school boy to me." To offset this, Tracy decided to expand

her age range and indicated "if I'm going to be meeting anybody that hasn't gone to university,

I'd rather be meeting someone who is 24 or 25 and has a career and whatever." Tracy's

experience highlights the way in which women focus on socio-economic traits when selecting

matches (Abramova et al., 2016). In addition to the limitations within the dating pool highlighted

above, several of the women discussed the ways in which their existing social connections in

Kelowna affected their experiences.

Existing social connections within the pool. Being matched with people who had ties to

their existing social networks was mentioned by six of the participants. Tinder, for example, sets

up its profiles with the user's Facebook profile; as such, it suggests matches based on

connections between a user's Facebook friends and the pool of available matches on the app.

This caused some of those women using Tinder to be matched with Facebook friends, who were

at times close friends, or at other times past acquaintances. Samantha, a 23-year-old student who

started dating online when she was 21, grew up in Kelowna and found matching with people she

knew to be undesirable:

> *In such a small town like Kelowna, I do come across lots of people I know, so it's an*
>
> *automatic no. A few times I've accidentally said yes and they're like "I remember you*
>
> *from high school." I'm like, "that's great, text me later but I'm deleting you off this app*
>
> *so you don't get any ideas."*

Jennifer, a 31-year-old woman who started dating digitally when she was 25, mentioned feeling

discouraged by the fact that she had been matched several times with people who she already had

some sort of connection with offline, including a match who was friends with someone she had

dated previously. Additionally, she found it difficult to find potential partners in Kelowna who

were not already connected to her social network, stating that "it seems like everyone knows

someone one way or another;" she had hoped "to get outside of that by using the apps and dating

sites…but it hasn't really changed.*"* Similar to previous studies, the lack of diversity within the

dating pool due to Kelowna's lower population density meant that the women were unable to

break out of their existing networks as much as they would have liked (Toch & Levi, 2013;

Blackwell et al., 2015). This finding was also interesting since meeting potential partners who

were connected to one's existing social circle has traditionally been viewed as an appealing and

common way to meet (Ansari, 2015), and thus provides a contrasting perspective on that view.

On the other hand, Anastasia and Bridgette, also in their thirties, found being matched

with people who had ties to their existing social network could be viewed positively or

negatively, depending on the situation. In the positive instance, both women felt that matching

with people who were connected to one's existing social circle provided an opportunity to vet the

person with people they trusted. On the other hand, both expressed negative aspects relating to

matching with people who were already connected to their social circles. For example, Bridgette,

a 30-year-old who had mainly used Tinder over the course of the previous four years, talked

about being matched with people who knew her ex-boyfriend: "…[he] has been in Kelowna

many years and a lot of people know him…so that's hindered some of my dating for sure, is that

people know him and are a bit scared of him." Though not linked to academic research, this

comment was reinforced by a recent local news article titled "7 Truths if you're single in

Kelowna," which stated that singles in Kelowna "know that nearly every new dating prospect is

somehow connected to your ex" (Hill, 2017). Similarly, Anastasia had no interest in matching

with people connected to her ex, and also noted how existing connections could be a "double-

edged sword" depending on how the person was connected to her; if the person was associated

with her "party friends" there was less interest on her part than if they were associated with

"good people that you go to volunteer things with." Kelowna's smaller size meant that

individuals within the women's social networks were often closely connected. This was viewed

as both a benefit and a hindrance when dating digitally; the women could scrutinize matches but

also ran the risk of matching with individuals who had undesirable connections within their

networks.

The possibility for having an existing connection with an online match extended beyond

one's circle of friends, adding to the intricacies of dating in a small city. As a working

professional living in Vernon, an even smaller city than Kelowna, Amanda worried about

matching with her clients online; she was happy to be matched with people from Kelowna to

avoid these potential social connections and to avoid running "into anyone after a date that didn't

go very well." In addition, several of the women mentioned seeing people in public whom they

had matched with online; though these were not necessarily existing social connections, it was

described as an awkward side effect of digital dating in a smaller city. Kate described her

experience as follows:

> *…I've had some of those interactions where, you know, the guy at the MEC counter*
>
> *recognized me from my profile and he swiped yes and we matched and then I was buying*
>
> *snowshoes and then I was like "but I don't know what to do in this situation, but you*
>
> *didn't message me so"… it is weird… when I started using the app I became so self-*
>
> *aware…I was like, people notice me, I think, I felt like they were smiling at me or being*
>
> *like "hey, I know you!" but I'm sure it was all in my head but I still just felt like my face*
>
> *was on some billboard being like "Kate's on Tinder!"*

These experiences demonstrate how closely connected individuals can be within a smaller community like Kelowna; it also shows that these women were uncomfortable with the thought of others knowing they were online, indicating continued stigma around digital dating. These findings also highlight the way in which the focus on geolocation within many of today's online dating tools blends online and offline space and "co-situates" individuals within existing social structures (Blackwell et al., 2015). Even though Kelowna is an urban centre, its lower population density somewhat limited its diversity within the dating pool across age groups, though this was heightened for those women over the age of 25, as evidenced above. Along with these experiences related to the limited dating pool and to their existing social networks, the women also discussed how they experienced a transient dating pool on the dating sites and apps in Kelowna.

Transient dating pool. When discussing her dating experiences in general, Judy, one of the women in her fifties, who had only been dating online for approximately four months, described Kelowna as being "in some kind of bubble cause everybody comes to party, for vacation;" she felt her experience with the dating pool in Kelowna was "completely different" to her experience while single in Ontario, noting "there's a lot more sleaziness [in Kelowna] than there is in other cities." Judy's comment was further supported by Anastasia's assertion that "they're [men] all just looking for boat hoes, Kelowna's very, at least in the summertime, very like Kelowna-fornia, big boobs, big lips, small bikinis…"

Although these comments were not directly related to the digital dating experience, they do provide some insight into aspects of Kelowna that exist for these women in the dating pool. Though not mentioned by as many of the women as the first two sub-themes, there were three

women who brought up the fact that they were often matched with men who were passing

through Kelowna. Both Jennifer, 31, and Kate, 27, noted being matched with men who seemed

to be looking for short-term relationships, implied to be of a sexual nature, while in town for

limited periods of time, such as weekend getaways to the local ski hill or for bachelor parties.

Kate stated this was "a reality check of some of the people that are here, or like vacationers that,

you know, no inhibitions." Carol, one of the women in her fifties, who had been dating online for

approximately three years, described her experiences matching with men who were only in

Kelowna for short period of time:

> *…but then if you say Kelowna you get these men from Calgary, men who are coming*
>
> *through town for whatever reason, like oh, I have a boat and I'm coming into town for*
>
> *three weeks, it's almost like they are just looking for a temporary hookup kind of thing, or*
>
> *they're men who come here for business maybe once a month…*

Interestingly, Carol herself mentioned that she had "used it quite, cause I travel a lot…I've used

it to meet people all over Canada;" she was strictly looking for short-term relationships where

she could "come and go," enjoying the "freedom and anonymity" involved in the relationships

she cultivated. The women's impression that men were using the apps and sites to connect with

women while traveling for vacation and/or work are in-line with Ranzini and Lutz's (2017)

findings that men were motivated to use Tinder for casual sex and while traveling. Though she

was not using Tinder specifically, Carol's motivations while online dating, as indicated above,

were not in-line with Ranzini and Lutz's findings that women were more motivated by

"friendship and self-validation" (p. 91). Rather, Carol's motivations were more similar to those

of men in the previous study, pointing to a possible blurring of gendered expectations regarding

casual sex. Though this sub-theme related to Kelowna's transient dating pool and individual

culture was not as prevalent among the women as some of the other sub-themes, it did offer a

unique perspective on some of the challenges faced by women dating in the small, tourist-

friendly city.

Digital Dating and Gender

Traditional dating scripts and gender roles did affect the women's experiences with

online dating, though these varied among the women. Though Lawson and Leck's (2006)

findings that Internet dating enabled users to break away from traditional gender expectations did

hold true for some of the women, who had no problem initiating the initial conversation or

initiating the first date, other women were more comfortable adhering to traditional first-date

scripts, whereby the man should ask the woman out (Lamont, 2014). Samantha and Tracy, both

in the 19-24 age range, were indifferent about who should initiate the initial conversation, with

Tracy saying: "I think it's equally valid for either person to message first and I'm not that

concerned with who did what first." Ingrid, a divorced woman in her sixties, had tried online

dating years prior when she lived in Langley and had decided to reactivate her profile towards

the end of 2016, after she had retired and moved to Kelowna. Ingrid indicated she often initiated

conversations online but expressed a preference for allowing the man to make the first more in

order to prove he was serious and to avoid feeling like she was "looking desperate or whatever."

Similarly, Kate and Bridgette, aged 27 and 30 respectively, expressed a preference for waiting

for the man to initiate the conversation, as evidenced by the following excerpt from Kate's

interview:

...if a guy sends me a message then, then yeah, I'm like "he's into me" or "he wants to

connect" and then rightly or wrongly so, I also think, this is the type of guy he is, like

he's gonna take initiative and you know, and be a leader, or take on maybe more of that

role...it's probably something to do with gender roles right where, you know, there's

something that seems more masculine or manly or attractive when the guy makes the first

move ... I don't want to message first cause I don't want to come across as being that, I

don't know, domineering woman kind of thing, I don't know.

This preference to wait for the man to make the first move was in line with Frohlick and

Migliardi's (2011) earlier findings, whereby women would be "waiting for and enticing men to

contact them," which the researchers concluded was "one way in which normative gender

discourses regulate women's sexuality" (p. 79). That being said, other women in the current

study simply expressed a preference for the man to initiate the first contact due to a lack of

confidence or a lack of knowledge on how to start the conversation; though this was not

specifically tied to gender roles, it could be a side effect of women not having the experiences or

the instructions on how to do this, since this was historically viewed as the man's role (Ansari,

2015). These experiences were similar to the researcher's own experiences with online dating, as

she also preferred to wait for men to contact her, both due to a lack of confidence and a desire to

have the man prove his interest. Anastasia's experience on the lesbian dating app showed an

interesting aspect of traditional gender roles, as she found all the women were waiting for each

other to initiate the first contact, further pointing to the ways in which normative female gender

roles as they relate to dating are engrained in North American women.

The script for who should initiate the first offline meeting also varied amongst the women, with no indication of age being a factor in this regard. Although Samantha was indifferent to who should start the initial conversation, when asked who should initiate the first meeting she replied: "I usually wait for the guy to do it, I'm a little old-fashioned that way still…but, if I am feeling bold or am like "I need to lock this down now" I'll say, 'let's go for coffee.'" When asked who initiated meeting up offline, Tracy indicated that "…for the most part it's the guys that do that, especially if I was the one who initiated the first message" to which she added: "if you give a guy enough and you give him enough validation, he'll eventually have the confidence to say "actually, I do want to meet up with you, let's do it"." Neither Amanda, 28, nor Anastasia, 31, expressed any apprehension with being the one to suggest the first date, while Judy and Carol, both in their fifties, said they were typically the ones who initiated the offline meetings, mainly because they did not want to waste time. Kate, 27, however, said she "will never initiate" the first meeting, as she "needs to know that they're interested before I actually invest time." Bridgette also preferred to let the man ask her out for the first date, but had no problem initiating further dates if the first meeting was a success.

In contrast to Lamont's (2014) findings, several of the women in the current study spoke of a preference of paying for their own portion of a date, breaking from traditional dating scripts. Tracy, 21, preferred to take turns paying for dates to ensure equality. She also expressed an assumption that women in the younger generations would be more open to "lots of equality" as compared to older women who would likely think "the guy has to message first because I don't want to seem like I'm running around chasing guys…and he has to pay to prove that he likes me." Bridgette, 31, echoed two other women when she stated: "...if we're going just for a drink

or two, I think their paying for it is a good idea;" however, prior to this, she indicated a preference "to pay for myself for the first couple of dates" in order to avoid sexual expectations from the man and to avoid the stigma that as a woman, she was simply going on dates to receive free things. Samantha, 23, and Judy, 51, both mentioned arriving early to dates in order to ensure they were able to pay for themselves, with Samantha saying:

> *I always make a point of actually paying for myself on dates…so that there's no pressure, cause I've come across that where as if, you meet up for a coffee date, you let the guy pay, like they expect something and it's so weird, like "you paid $3 for my cup of coffee" …if you were buying a prostitute you'd pay at least $300 like, I don't know…. almost always I'll go in early and buy my own thing just to avoid that awkwardness. Second, third date, like if they have a second or third date, I'll let them pay for me if they offer, just because they've passed that other barrier so it's going well and chances are things might happen by then anyways, so, by my own accord of course.*

As evidenced by the statements above, both equality and power dynamics were at play when it came time for the first date; the women preferred to pay their own way as a way to display financial equality in the relationship or to assert their agency, particular as it related to sexual expectations. These findings signal a further push towards financial independence and equality within dating relationships and away from sex role and sexual expectations as they relate to dating.

In accordance with Vanderweerd et al.'s (2016) study with women over the age of 50, dealing with unwanted interactions and messages of a sexual nature was a common negative experience among the women. According to Pew Research, 42 per cent of women "have been

contacted by someone through an online dating site or app in a way that made them feel harassed or uncomfortable;" this is a stark contrast to the 17 per cent of men who have had the same experience (Smith & Duggan, 2013). All but a couple of the women spoke of receiving overtly sexual messages, to some degree or another, at times as the first message or early on in a conversation. These messages sometimes included "dick pics" or other sexually suggestive material. Gender played into these interactions, as some of the women indicated an expectation from the men that they would reciprocate sexual advances and if they did not, it could reflect poorly on them. Carol, for instance, found that when she responded to a man's "very visceral sex talk" with "the same raunchy vulgarities," they would question if she was a man or a woman, since the expectation was that a woman would not speak in such a fashion. Colleen, a 44-year-old woman who had only been online dating for a few months, noted "if they start off going 'hey sexy'" she would simply ignore the emails, though she noted this was something she had to learn was okay, as her job had conditioned her "to reply to people and deal with all this stuff." The ability to not respond to every message was noted as a difficulty for some of the other women too. In reflecting on her own experiences with online dating, the researcher noted: "I found the high incidence of sexually forward, even harassing messages to be shocking, as I really don't recall having any of those experiences when I was dating digitally." The sexual expectation that presented itself in the online sphere is similar to the traditional first date script, though the economic exchange aspect is missing, since the majority of women were using free sites so the men would not have paid to use the sites (Emmers-Sommer, 2010; Bailey, 2004). Further to the gendered dating scripts discussed above, age norms were also a factor in the women's digital dating experiences.

Digital Dating and Age Norms

In addition to gendered expectations, there were also age norms that were discussed by the women in relation to their online dating experiences. For the women in their twenties and thirties, these age norms involved establishing a stable relationship and pursuing marriage. For instance, Tracy, 23, "grew up in a fairly traditional home" and always imagined that she would meet her "future husband in college or at work after college" and would get married in her "mid or late twenties." Now in her early twenties, she noted that although marrying young "would be nice," she had "no real concept of when I might marry…with how easy online dating makes it to meet so many new people, dating more than one person at once is very easy." Similarly, Amanda, 27, expected to be "married at 26 or 27" based on her parents' milestones, but had broken up with her boyfriend of six years a year earlier, which made her "re-evaluate everything." Though she was at a point where she felt like she was "never getting married," online dating allowed her "let go of a lot of my expectations of when I was going to be married" and also allowed her to meet a potential partner which made her feel like she could "achieve those milestones again."

After growing up in an extremely conservative Christian community where marrying one's high school sweetheart was common, Kate, 27, discussed how the internet provided her the opportunity to read "articles or [listen to] podcasts about women power and independence and being okay being single" adding that "… having access to podcasts and hearing about other people's experiences being single in their later twenties, or thirties, or forties…has helped me accept that this is normal, it's not weird." On the other hand, she felt social media, such as Facebook, kept her "tied to home" and provided "a constant reminder…there are kind of two

different types of people when it comes to relationships, there's people who get married young and have families, and there's people who wait and get married later in life, or there are people who don't get married." Conversely, Jennifer, 31, found that seeing other people's lives on Facebook, which included divorce and single parenting, made her feel "validated" for waiting to get married later in life, as she was "seeing that it doesn't always last."

Although she had been dating digitally on and off for ten years, Anastasia, 33, had been able to use dating apps and online sites to pursue various aspects of her bisexuality after a break-up a year and a half prior to her interview. Although she always "expected to get married," her recent "journey of self discovery," influenced both by her online experiences and by her advancing age, resulted in her feeling less "pressure to bend to society's expectations" and opened up her thoughts on traditional partnerships. On the other hand, Jennifer mentioned that her parents were "worried at this point" since she was 31, stating further: "Both sisters are married off and had already been at my age, so, they're kind of like "what's the matter with you?" sort of thing." Further to this, Bridgette stated:

> *Now that I'm getting older, now that I'm 30 years old, the chance of me having children*
> *is almost off the table…now it's almost just finding somebody is a struggle enough. But*
> *yeah, definitely did not see me being this age and…but again, that's my choice, because*
> *I've been in two long-term relationships and I've ended both of them.*

Moreover, when it was mentioned that women in their fifties would be participating in the project, Jennifer added: "That's terrifying! If I'm still there, you can write a whole new paper on me, just me!" This was echoed by Carol, who jokingly said at the end of her interview:

"Hopefully you're not like me when you get old. It's fun, but like I said, you quickly get exhausted, like, I cannot deal with this."

While the women under the age of 25 seemed to have no real concerns regarding age norms related to dating and marriage, the women in their mid- to late-twenties and thirties seemed torn between adhering to the traditional expectations laid out by society and pursing their own educational and/or career aspirations. There was also the underlying implication, as evidenced by Jennifer's comment above, that being 'old' and single was undesirable, which is further supported by Carol's comment. Three of the four women in the over-40 age cohorts seemed to be less positive about their single lives and online dating experiences. Though two of them expressed looking for relationships that were fun and commitment free, there was some uneasiness since the experiences they were having were not as positive as they had hoped. These findings highlight the ways in which North American age norms direct women's behaviour and influence their thinking; as Frohlick and Migliardi (2011) assert, "women across 30-, 40-, 50-, and 60-something age brackets are not comparable as far as how society perceives them as sexual subjects or as 'older' women" (p. 83).

For the women who were pursuing casual sex or non-monogamous relationships, those in the 19-24 age range and those in the 50-59 age range, there seemed to be a tension in balancing their needs and goals with traditional gender expectations. For Tracy, 21, the "ease of unattached hookups" was something she wondered about, stating:

> *...I'm very scrupulous when I'm on a date that seems destined for a relationship, and often don't pursue more than one date cause something wasn't quite right about the person I went out with, in terms of long term commitment. On the other hand, I've noticed*

I'm willing to deal with a fair amount of shit and flaws from people I'm just hooking up with. It makes me think that the combination of "casual" mentality, and the dangling promise that someone better is just a swipe or an encounter away, causes this dichotomous mentality.

For the older women in their forties and fifties in both the current study and in Frohlick and Migliardi's (2011) study, online dating was viewed as the best way to find a partner but also consumed a fair amount of time and was exhausting at times. Furthermore, and also in-line with Frohlick and Migliardi's findings, three of the four women over 40 were frequently contacted by younger men. Although Judy stated a preference for younger men, she also mentioned that she did not want to date anyone too young as they would be too close in age to her son, who was in his twenties. Carol, also in her fifties, had no interest in the advances of younger men, stating: "I'm not interested in someone who's my son's age, like no, that's creepy." These statements underline the challenge of pursuing satisfying sexual relationships while adhering to societal age norms, particularly for the older women.

Although many of the younger women were concerned with establishing their own lives and career, traditional age norms associated with dating and marriage persisted. Place did seem to matter in this regard only to the dating experience of Kate, who grew of up in a very small, conservative town in Ontario; she seemed to be more concerned by the departure from these traditional age norms than some of the women who had grown up in bigger centers. That being said, traditional North American ideals of women in relation to dating and marriage persisted across all age groups. The current study supported Frohlick and Migliardi's (2011) findings in that the women in Kelowna also had their own needs and desires "(associated with

heteronormative procreative sex)…[that] played out in complicated ways in women's searches

for love online" (p. 84). Further to the ways in which age norms impacted the women's digital

dating experiences, the intersection of the internet, communication technology, and digital dating

within the participant group will now be briefly outlined.

The Internet, Communication Technology, and Digital Dating

Though the introduction of the internet and smartphones was a historical force acting on

the various cohorts in this research project, there did not appear to be any major indication that

digital natives were better equipped than digital immigrants to pursue online dating. The

introduction of the internet and its increased presence over time had a clear impact on the

women's lives, particularly as it related to their independence, career pursuits, and relationships.

All of the women expressed a general ease in using the technology, aside from a few minor

inconveniences. This corresponds with Sundaram's (2013) assertion that the binary of digital

native and digital immigrant is limiting and does not account for all the factors that would

encompass an individual's technological capabilities.

Across all the age groups, the smartphone was a key driver in the digital dating

experience, as it was the main form of technology the women used to access their accounts. This

meant that most of the women were using the mobile app version of whichever digital dating tool

they preferred. In this case, the most frequently used tool for those under 40 was Tinder, while

for those over 40 it was PlentyofFish. Some of the other sites or apps used or discussed were:

Bumble; Zoosk; OkCupid; Match; eHarmony; LaveLife; Christian Mingle; and HER. For the

women in the 20- and 30-something age groups, Tinder's stated purpose of hooking up was not a

main motivation, though the two women in the 19-24 range did use the app to pursue these types

of relationships at given times; these findings were consistent with Sumter et al.'s (2017). A few

of the women in their late twenties and early thirties did speak of using Tinder for "self-

validation," which was supported by similar results in Ranzini and Lutz's 2017 study. Three of

the women who had used Tinder (two in their thirties and one in her fifties) did feel that most of

the men on Tinder were focused on finding sexual partners. Free sites were most popular among

the women, regardless of age, and there seemed to be little appeal in paying to use a dating site

or app. Depending on algorithms to find prospective matches was not really mentioned by the

women in this study; this was likely due to the main platforms being used, neither of which are

marketed with or based on profile-based algorithms. Ease of use, accessibility, and the ability to

control one's own personal information seemed to be important when using the sites and/or apps.

Various technological platforms were well integrated into the women's experiences

thanks to the smartphone and this technology created a whole level of infrastructure that

conditioned the choices the women made. Social media sites, like Facebook and Instagram, were

used to create a user's profile on many of the mobile-based dating apps. Along with messaging

directly in the apps, the women also mentioned using Facetime, Snapchat, instant messaging

apps like Whatsapp and Kik, emailing, and texting as part of their dating experience. Speaking

on the phone still occurred occasionally, though was only mentioned by a few of the women; it

seemed to hold a nostalgic quality and provided the women with a way to gain a better sense of

the person they were "talking" to. A lack of knowledge regarding technology put a potential

suitor at a disadvantage and could take him out of the running as a potential match. On the other

hand, if a man was too technologically savvy, it could signal a lack of social skills in real life. At

the same time, expectations that someone who is compatible online will also be compatible

offline were often violated. Since the women had no non-verbal cues to assess their potential

suitors, these qualities, along with those in their pictures and profile, became determining factors

in the success of the match, even if it had little to do with the potential long-term success of the

relationship (Finkel et al., 2012).

The dating pool itself was defined by the availability of potential dates on sites and apps,

as the women found limited possibilities in their day-to-day lives. Regardless of age, all of the

women felt it was difficult to meet suitable men. Though many of the women spoke of an

abundance of initial messages and did not have a sense that they would run out of matches, they

also talked about the limited dating pool in Kelowna, as discussed previously. This juxtaposition

may imply that although there were many men online, in accordance with both Smith (2016) and

Brym and Lenton (2001), they were not necessarily men that appealed to the women. As there

was a wealth of data present in the current study, an overview of the general experiences,

motivations, and expectations of the women will now be summarized.

General Experiences, Motivations, and Expectations

In order to provide a robust picture of the women's lived experiences, it was important to

touch on some of the general experiences, motivations, and expectations that the women

discussed during their interviews. This includes a discussion regarding the benefits and

drawbacks of digital dating; the women's expectations and motivations, as well as their goals

while online dating; and finally, the ways in which the women exerted their agency and control

during the process. Where it is relevant, how location influences or is affected by these

dimensions of online dating experience is also discussed.

Benefits, drawbacks, and expectations. Regardless of age or city size, the ability to

access a dating pool to which they would not have access in their day-to-day lives was a positive

impact of technology on the women's dating experiences. Digital dating platforms were a

widely-used resource to both simultaneously expand and narrow the dating pool, depending on

individual needs, thereby providing convenience to women who were leading busy lives and

looking for potential partners. For Carol, who travelled frequently for work and was looking

strictly for short-term relationships, online dating allowed her to meet men across the country

noting: "it's nice that you can meet all sorts of people in other parts of the country and there are

lots of people out there." She found it interesting, however, that women would be "online dating

as a young person because…that's the time you're going to meet people [in University], like

minded and…chart your course together kind." For Samantha, who was focused on "having a

career and being independent" and who always saw herself "going to University," online dating

was something she could fit into her "schedule easier than finding time to go to the campus bar

or campus events." During her interview, she remarked:

> *…I would not know how to start dating within traditional methods now…I'm very*
>
> *outgoing but there's not a lot of chance to meet men, I guess. Especially men…I'm very*
>
> *picky about the demographic I date, so it's…I think online dating, I can just "drop-down*
>
> *menu…yep, that's what I want" so. It's a lot easier…The process of elimination is done*
>
> *for me on online dating. So, I like that.*

Though the women still talked of the stigma surrounding online dating, there was consensus that

it was now considered the most common form of dating (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011). A number

of the women, both from the younger and older cohorts, had limited experience with

"traditional" dating. Furthermore, they did not really pursue traditional dating at all, unless they

happened upon someone in their day-to-day lives with whom they had a connection. This transition is likely attributed to the growing reliance on computer-mediated technology and the rapid increase of social media use.

Another commonality discussed by quite a few of the women was the fact that with online dating, for the most part, everyone's intentions and availability were clear; there was no guesswork involved in wondering if the person was in fact looking for a relationship. Although Kate was not certain she would meet "Mr. Right" online, she articulated the advantages this form of dating offered: "…we don't walk around with stamps on our forehead saying SINGLE AND LOOKING…if you have an app that's like "these are single people who are looking for relationships," it already pre-selects the pool for you, right, that's a bonus." This aspect was not, however, viewed positively by all of the women. Though she felt meeting people online was successful, Tracy also expressed that the back-and-forth typically found in starting a relationship offline, full of questions and uncertainty about a potential partner's interest or attraction to her, was "so much more exciting." Bridgette acknowledged that it did not really matter how you met a partner if they were a good person, but expressed her dislike for "all this weird, techy stuff" as it took away the romance and the "story" involved with traditional dating. Jennifer expressed similar feelings about the process of online dating:

> *…I really miss, how kind of like "boy meets girl" you know, like the whole story, I miss that, a lot...I mean, You've Got Mail was a great movie but it's not the same …you still have that first meeting, no matter what, you're still going to get those same feelings, you know, like those, the butterflies or everything, it's the whole process, just feeling more naturally, not feeling so like "are we going to do this or not?" Especially at our age, like*

in our thirties, sometimes people are like, it's almost like an interview, like what we're

doing right now, kind of. Sit down, you ask your series of questions, and then you break…

While the courtship process in digital dating offered benefits, such as easy access to those people

looking for a relationship, it also had its drawbacks, taking away some of the excitement and

romance typically found in the beginning of a relationship.

The overall sense from the women was that having fewer, or more realistic, expectations

was better when pursuing digital dating. This included keeping an open-mind about the

experience, using it as an opportunity to get out and meet people, and, for those women in the

younger age groups who were open to marriage, not expecting to meet one's future husband. As

Kate expressed:

…it's almost similar to, you know, I go out to the bar to have a fun time but I don't ever

go to the bar thinking I'm going to meet my husband… I still go and I have fun and I, you

know, interact with people, but it's not where, yeah, gonna meet Mr. Right.

Regardless of their age, the women generally thought it wise to not hold high expectations of

online dating or any one site or app.

Diversity of motivations for using online dating tools. Loneliness, failed relationships,

or a lack of suitable single men in their lives, or a combination of the three, were the most

common motivations for pursuing digital dating among the group of women. For Carol, Judy,

and Ingrid, who were all over 50 and divorced, finding someone to have fun with was a common

motivation; this was also an initial motivation for Bridgette, 30. Three of the women, in their late

twenties and early thirties, mentioned using digital dating as a way to improve their self-

confidence. Overall, all the women were financially independent and career-oriented; none of

them were seeking a man to take care of them. Even Kate and Bridgette, who expressed wanting

a man to adhere to many of the traditional dating scripts and to display heteronormative

masculine qualities in a relationship, still had a strong focus on their careers and their

independence. Bridgette, for instance, stated: "this isn't the 60s anymore where I need a man to

make the money and I'm going to stay at home and have babies, you know, I have a good job, I

work a lot, I make good money, I'm 100% self-sufficient." Kate, on the other hand, expressed

mixed feelings on the subject:

> *…I struggle with thinking of myself as a feminist, and woman power, and especially in my*
>
> *career I find I'm ambitious and pursuing certain things and so I value that but then when*
>
> *it comes to relationships, I totally want to find a guy who would take care of me, not that*
>
> *I want to be a stay-at-home mom and be taken care of and have him be the bread winner,*
>
> *but yet, I still want him to have financial security and I want him to be a leader in the*
>
> *household and take on that typical male role, even though I'm saying that I value female*
>
> *independence…it's just a contradiction, but it's like traditional versus not…I think if I*
>
> *actually did meet a guy and he wanted to be a stay at home dad, I would really struggle*
>
> *with that, like, respecting them…*

Significantly, this expectation for the man to be financially secure was common amongst all the

women, primarily so there would be equality in the relationship in terms of finances, not

necessarily because the women wanted someone with money to take care of them. Potential

matches were expected to be career-oriented and of a certain intellect level, in order to appeal to

the women; however, men who were overly focused on material goods were not appealing.

The heightened focus on socio-economic characteristics when considering potential matches was consistent with the findings from Abramova et al.'s (2016) online dating literature review. Chemistry and physical attraction did come into play as well; however, the women expected more from the men than simply a pleasing physical appearance or satisfying sex. On the other hand, several of the women felt that their own physical attributes and appearance were something the men were focused on. Though all the women seemed self-assured in most aspects of their lives, several of those in the over-25 cohorts conveyed doubts about their own appearance and, at times, were not confident that the images in their dating profiles would be positively perceived by the opposite sex. This may have been tied into the women's own confidence issues or may have been impacted by the fact that those in their mid-twenties and beyond are "perceived to be past the sexually formative years," as Frohlick and Migliardi (2011) so eloquently stated. The researcher had first hand experience with this; she often felt out-of-place as a single woman in her late twenties and early thirties, since the majority of her friends were married or in long-term relationships.

Nine of the 11 women spoke of involvement and input from their family and friends as part of their decision to pursue digital dating. For three of the four women in the over 40 age groups, their social circle and close friends were the catalysts for their pursuit of digital dating. Three of these women actually belonged to the same local ladies group and spoke of having frequent conversations about their experiences within this group. Receiving advice and talking about their experiences was not only common among this group of women, but also the younger women as well. Bridgette and Anastasia both talked about having invited matches to meet them for the first time in group settings, where the presence of their friends would alleviate some of

the pressure; Kate, too, mentioned a friend who often brought first-time Tinder dates to group

activities. Anastasia, however, said "we actually have a rule in our friends' circle…that we're not

allowed to bring first time Tinder dates anymore" because one of the dates she had invited to a

group dinner was previously involved with another one of the dinner guests.

Although the women spoke of the influence of family and friends on their decisions to

pursue digital dating, feelings were mixed when asked how they felt about telling others that they

were online dating, and in some ways these differences correlated with age. The women in their

twenties and thirties used words like "embarrassed," "hesitant," and "nervous" to describe how

they felt about telling people and some were worried about judgment from others. Ingrid, who

was in her sixties, was apprehensive about telling her family, including her kids, and even

considered lying about where she and her partner met so that her sister would not be worried.

This apprehension seemed to carry over for the younger women when having to tell their parents.

Two of the older women, Colleen and Judy, were both comfortable and open in discussing their

digital dating experiences; Judy said she was even open with her son, who was in his twenties.

However, Carol, who was in her fifties, said "I don't speak to anyone that I use it. I think it's

probably my age….I don't admit it to anybody" and felt that there was still stigma around digital

dating because "it's not a tool that we [older adults] grew up with." The other women who

mentioned stigma, however, felt that it was diminishing.

Dating goals. Pursuing digital dating with the mindset of just getting out to meet people,

who may or may not turn out to be suitable partners, was a common shift in the women's

motivations over the course of their experiences. Five of the women spoke specifically about

their initial goal being the establishment of a serious relationship; however, after going through

various dating and life experiences, some of which occurred over the course of many years, they were now more open-minded and viewed digital dating as an opportunity to simply get out and meet people. Of the seven women in their twenties and thirties, six discussed marriage specifically as an ultimate goal in their dating lives, while the seventh referred to wanting to find "a partner," though marriage specifically was not mentioned. That being said, most of the women stated that "finding a husband" was not a primary focus of being online. Jennifer, for instance, had been in her first relationship for "four or five years" and declined her boyfriend's proposal as she was "not ready for this at all." Now that she was seeing friends get married, she said:

> *…I don't feel like I'm missing out and I don't feel rushed…that being said, I do watch hours and hours of Say Yes to the Dress!...So, I think it's still there, it's a fantasy…if it happens, it happens, if it doesn't…I've never felt like I've needed to have kids, and I know that is a huge thing for a lot of women.*

This reference to marriage being a fantasy provides insight into the motivations of the younger women; even though the majority expressed a long-term interest in marriage, it was not a primary motivation in their online dating pursuits and there was no definitive timeline given for when they thought marriage would occur.

For the four women over 40, marriage was not something that was mentioned as an end goal; in fact, the women in their fifties and sixties, who were all divorced, stated that they had no interest in remarrying. Ingrid, who was in her sixties, was not looking to remarry but was not focused on a highly-physical relationship; her motivation was to find "…somebody to go out to the movies, or to dinner, you know…just more somebody to spend time with…I still like to

maintain my independence." However, for Carol and Judy, both in their fifties, the relationships

they were seeking were focused primarily on physical connections and sex. Carol said she had "a

clear goal…to meet men with a certain profile;" she was looking strictly for short-term

relationships. Interestingly, both women in the 19-24 age group were also open to pursuing less

traditional relationships and were more open to casual sexual relationships. These findings were

similar with Brym and Lenton's (2001) findings that older women and younger women, in their

case those women over 59 and under 25, were "mostly like to use online dating to find sexual

partners" (p. 20). In the current study, these women did seem to want some level of intellectual

or emotional connection with the person, even if they did not want to pursue a committed,

monogamous relationship with them. Furthermore, overtly sexual messages were not well

received, even if the end goal was the pursuit of a predominantly physical relationship. Tracy

described a current relationship that highlighted her overall approach: "…we're not committed

and we're not exclusive but…it's still not just a casual relationship where we hook up

sometimes." On the other hand, she also expressed that it felt "so weird" to be at ease with

pursuing multiple, non-monogamous relationships, stating that if she ever found herself

"thinking about marrying" one of her partners in particular, it would signal a need to shift her

current approach. One other outcome that arose for eight of the women, which several of them

expressed as their most positive experience or as the experience that surprised them the most,

was the formation of close friendships with men that they met online. A few of these friendships

had never progressed offline, but the women still kept in frequent touch with the men.

In accordance with Lawson and Leck's (2006) findings, issues of "trust, self-presentation,

and compatibility" did arise as part of the women's online dating experiences, just as they would

have with traditional dating. To limit unsatisfying experiences, and in accordance with

Vandeweerd et al.'s (2016) findings that "meeting was essential" to determine chemistry, most

of the women in the current study preferred to meet men in person as soon as possible (p. 268).

This finding contrasted with Lawson and Leck's (2006) research, which found that participants

"liked spending a lot of time online getting to know each other" (p. 197). The instances where

the women noted gross misrepresentation from the men they were matching with were limited,

highlighting Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs' (2006) assertion that people will try to present an

essentially true version of themselves since they will eventually have to meet face-to-face if they

want to pursue a relationship.

      Women's agency and control. As stated by Rudder (2014), upon studying users of his

OkCupid website, pictures were more important than the text in the profile and this proved true

to an extent in the current study, particularly among the younger women who had a variety of

processes and rules laid out to assign characteristics to a potential match based on the photos in

his profile. This systematization of gauging suitor suitability was one aspect of an overall

strategy that seemed to exist for the women, as was a strategy to counteract the perceived

dangers of online dating.

      Safety and protection was another part of the strategy, as evidenced by the variety of

protocols and rules the women put into place related to this. The strategy was almost akin to

being a detective, as the women used Google, Facebook, and other online platforms to learn

more about a match and verify information they had provided. These findings were consistent

with Vandeweerd et al.'s 2016 study, which highlighted control as a positive aspect of online

dating, with similarly noted strategies having been employed by the women in that study. The

women had mixed opinions in regards to the perceived dangers of meeting people online versus meeting them offline. Colleen, for one, said:

> *...you're more likely going to encounter it [danger] meeting someone online, than offline, but it depends where you meet them... at a sporting event they're less likely going to be dangerous than if you meet them at a bar, especially if it's a sketchier type of bar, so it depends on how you meet them, and where you meet them, and if you're smart about things.*

Some of the other women could not fathom a circumstance where they would meet a potential suitor offline who was not somehow already connected to their life or social circle; this meant the perceived danger offline was low, since the person would already be known to them. In contrast to Colleen's statement above, Carol felt that the risks were the same online or offline:

> *I think it's [digital dating] a good way, as long as...you have your wiles about you electronically...once you start telling people who you are, they can find out who you are very quickly...even if they're intention firstly is fine, but you piss them off, I mean, they can do whatever...and that's a numbers game. One day you're going to run into someone like that, just like traditional dating...you're going to have to bear the cost of that.... It's tough, it's a risk as a woman for sure...men can lie, people lie all the time, they can lie, I mean, I don't see any difference between traditional dating and electronic dating, people can lie.*

Whether accurate or not, the perception that online dating posed more dangers than traditional dating was prominent. Carol's statement above presents a pragmatic view whereby the associated risks are not necessarily higher than in traditional dating. The fact that the majority of

the women did not directly experience dangerous or unsafe situations while digital dating further supports Carol's assertion. Deception, however, was something that most of the women had encountered to varying degrees.

To deal with the perceived safety issues, the women had safety plans in place for offline meetings. A common rule was to meet in a public place for the first date. Samantha noted that she would not meet somewhere private or secluded, saying: "…not on a first meet-up with someone I met online. I still keep my wits about me in that respect." A few of the women spoke of men wanting them to come over to their houses for first meetings; Carol, for instance, stated: "…some of these men say, "…I'm in Armstrong, I have a farm" well, red light! … I'm not driving out to your farm so what, I can be...put in the composter? No thank you, so." This comment highlights one way in which place seemed to affect this particular aspect of digital dating, as women in the older age ranges were often matched with men outside of Kelowna. This resulted in propositions to meet at homes or other places where the women did not feel comfortable. For her part, Judy mentioned declining one such proposition because the man would not provide her with the extensive details she wanted to pass along to her friends to ensure she would be safe. Staying in control of one's actions, suggesting where to go for the date, and paying for one's own portion of the date were all part of the strategy so the women could control the expectations and have the relationship progress on their own terms.

The "detective" strategy was important not only for selecting appropriate matches and safety, but also so that the women did not waste time. Regardless of age, the majority of the women wanted to meet quickly, as they did not want to waste time talking to someone only to find out there was no connection offline. An overarching sense of learning and improving the

strategy over time, both based on one's own experience and on the advice of others, was present; this was similar to findings from Lawson and Leck's 2006 study, whereby "dating online…necessitated the development of new strategies based on keystrokes, codes interpreting online photographs, and reading user profiles to develop trust and confirm compatibility" (p. 205). The propagation of advice and rules was not only through discussion with friends, but also through reading articles online and through the sites themselves, which would provide tips for success, though this was noted as a possible marketing strategy, rather than actual fact. The findings outlined in this section substantiated the existing online dating research. Furthermore, place did not appear to have any significant impacts on the particular facets of women's online dating experiences as summarized above.

Summary

This phenomenological study, focused on the digital dating experiences of 11 women residing in the Kelowna and its surrounding communities, found that many of the women's experiences were similar to those of women in previous online dating studies; however, Kelowna's small size did highlight particular challenges, including limitations in the dating pool, matches who were connected to their existing networks, and, for a small number of the women, a more transient dating pool, due to the fact that Kelowna is a well-known vacation destination. Traditional dating scripts, gender roles, and age norms did impact the women's experiences, though adherence to these scripts and roles had less to do with age and more to do with personal choices and preferences. Digital dating was seen as the primary way to date and although it provided a multitude of benefits, there was still some uneasiness among the women, particularly for those over the age of 30, in having to use the technology. Age itself was not a factor in the

women's ability to understand or use the technology, nor did age seem to affect the women's

overall success. Furthermore, women at various stages of life do share many similar experiences

and motivations. In particular, the women in their early twenties and the women in their fifties,

who were not as focused on marriage, shared a motivation for casual relationships, while the

women in their late twenties, early thirties, and forties were still focused on finding a more

traditional, monogamous partnership.

Conclusion

Through in-depth interviews, this study found that online dating was the primary form of

dating used by 11 women, ranging in age from 21 to 60+, who resided in the Kelowna CMA.

Though many of the women's experiences were similar to those found in existing research,

Kelowna's size and characteristics presented its own unique challenges. Several of the women

commented that the dating pool was at times limited, while it also included people with whom

they were already connected offline, as well as matches who were simply visiting Kelowna and

looking for short-term relationships. Gendered dating scripts and age norms caused traditional

dating practices to come into play within the digital dating experience, even as women deftly

used the technologies and offline meet up strategies to ensure they remained in control. Women

across age groups exhibited both similar and divergent experiences with online dating.

This study provides an understanding of how a select group of women from Kelowna

have experienced online dating. The findings from this study support existing academic

knowledge that exists in relation to online dating and add to this knowledge by presenting

research with a Canadian perspective. The current study highlights why location matters, finding

that the culture, economy, and size of a location may impact online dating experiences. While the

internet offers global reach, and can provide single people with a seemingly endless pool of potential partners, this study shows that not everyone is receptive to a globalized search for sex and/or love. In choosing to study the experiences of women in a relatively small, Canadian city, this study provides further insight regarding the ways in which different populations use a particular technology, as this is certainly culturally specific and dependent on the ways in which dating and intimacy are constructed within a particular place, or even within a particular group of people in a place. Scholars could benefit from considering this variable more closely when conducting future research within this field, as there may be unique differences between participants in different centres. As the percentage of individuals who use online dating increases and as digital dating technology becomes more focused on geolocation, those within the online dating industry may be interested in the current findings, since it provides a look at the way in which users in smaller cities may experience the technology. The findings might be beneficial to those who are creating the digital dating tools; if they recognize the ways in which a particular location may impact the user experience, they could tailor the product to be more appealing and potentially capture a larger user base. This study also provides the women who participated with the opportunity to reflect on their individual experiences and see how their experiences relate to others in their community, which may benefit each of them personally. The findings from this study may resonate with other women who are pursuing digital dating and may provide them with knowledge on this ever-evolving technological pursuit. This project also provided the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on her own experiences and to gain insight and understanding of other women's experiences alongside her own.

The most common limitation identified in qualitative research is that the findings are not generalizable since they only apply within a particular context and the sample size used to conduct the research is generally small (Boyd Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Petty et al., 2012; Milevsky et al., 2011; Watson & Stelle, 2011). It is clearly difficult to represent a wide array of women by way of the particular research design used in this study, so the findings are not generalizable to all women who date by way of online dating sites or mobile applications. Due to research design, this particular study required a homogeneous sample of participants, which resulted in a lack of diversity within the study. As men were not included in the study and the research sample was comprised primarily of heterosexual women in Kelowna, with the main variant being age, the results found while investigating the experiences of this group of 11 women in Kelowna may not be similar to the experiences of men in Kelowna, or women in other urban centres, or of diverse ethnicities, gender identities, sexualities, and socioeconomic background. The lack of diverse ethnicities is of particular note since the Kelowna CMA includes Westbank First Nation and is in a region that is unceded territory of the Okanagan First Nations (Syilx) peoples. As Kelowna has its own dynamic, in part due to its desirability as a destination for both tourists and for retirees, it cannot be seen as representative of small cities in general; however, the results from the current study do provide insight into pressures online daters in smaller centres face. While the researcher was able to learn about each woman's history to a limited extent during the interview process, the design of this study did not allow the researcher to fully understand how the complex life history of each participant might have shaped their online dating experiences. To do this would have required taking a massive oral history from each participant and was simply not possible within the current study.

While these limitations exist, it is important to recognize that they occur due to the nature of qualitative inquiry and by design within the study. In order to secure the rich data required to understand the experiences of women who were dating digitally, a small, relatively homogeneous sample was required. Future studies could overcome these limitations by conducting a mixed methods study, whereby both quantitative and qualitative research could be used to offer generalizable data. Participants could also be selected from more than one site and there could be more variation within the sample, such as including diversity as it relates to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. For example, the ways in which the First Nations peoples, immigrants, or non-heterosexual individuals experience digital dating in Kelowna may be different to the experiences of the participant group in the current study; this would provide another avenue to explore how place impacts digital dating experiences, and could be an important and significant way to build on the current study.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Have you used online dating sites or mobile dating apps?

Would you like to share your individual experience?

Study: Examining how Women, at Various Stages of Life,
Experience Digital Dating in a Small, Canadian City

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences women, at various stages of life, have while pursuing and/or establishing intimate relationships through digital means, such as Internet dating sites and/or mobile-phone apps. This research study is focused strictly on the experiences of women in Kelowna and its surrounding communities. Each participant will be asked to share her own experience during a one-on-one interview.

This thesis project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Professional Communication, at Royal Roads University (RRU). Ethical approval to conduct this project has been obtained from RRU's Research Ethics Board.

Benefits

⇒ Take the opportunity to explore, reflect upon, and interpret your own unique experience with digital dating.

⇒ Share your story anonymously; it may resonate with other women who read the final paper.

⇒ Help inform others about the digital dating experiences of women in Kelowna and its surrounding communities.

Eligibility

⇒ You are a woman residing in the Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (CMA); this area includes Kelowna, West Kelowna, Westbank First Nations, Lake Country, and Peachland.

→ You currently use online dating sites and/or mobile dating apps, **OR** have used online dating sites and/or mobile dating apps in the past 12-18 months, to pursue or establish intimate relationships in Kelowna CMA.

⇒ You belong to one of the following age groups:

19-24   25-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60+

The time commitment to participate in this project will range from 45 minutes to two hours, depending on the individual experiences each participant may want to speak about.

To participate or for more information, please contact

Melissa McCluskey at

Phone number and email redacted

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The protection of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of each participant is a priority in this study, as per the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy and Research Ethics Board. Participants may withdraw, without prejudice, at any point before analysis of individual interview data begins.
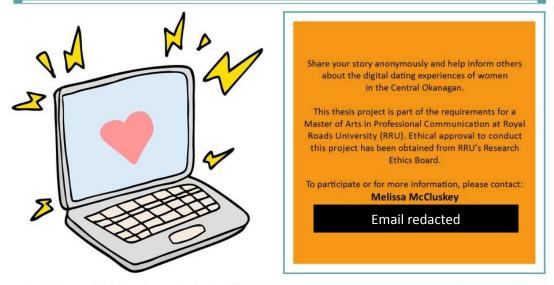
Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment Posters

Examining how Women Experience Digital Dating in a Small, Canadian City

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The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences women have while using Internet dating sites or mobile-phone dating apps.

If you are a woman residing in Kelowna or one of its surrounding communities and currently use online dating sites or mobile dating apps, or have used them in the past 12-18 months, you are eligible to participate in this study.

To incorporate the experiences of participants at various stages of life, women between the ages of 25 and 60+ can take this opportunity to share, reflect upon, and interpret their own unique experience with digital dating. Each participant will be asked to share her own experience during a one-on-one interview.

Share your story anonymously and help inform others about the digital dating experiences of women in the Central Okanagan.

This thesis project is part of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Professional Communication at Royal Roads University (RRU). Ethical approval to conduct this project has been obtained from RRU's Research Ethics Board.

To participate or for more information, please contact:
Melissa McCluskey

Email redacted

The protection of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of each participant is a priority in this study, as per the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy and Research Ethics Board. Participants may withdraw, without prejudice, at any point before analysis of the individual interview data begins.

Have you used online dating sites or mobile dating apps?

Would you like to share your unique experience?

Study: Examining how Women, at Various Stages of Life,
Experience Digital Dating in a Small, Canadian City

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences women, at various stages of life, have while pursuing and/or establishing intimate relationships through digital means, such as Internet dating sites and/or mobile-phone apps. This research study is focused strictly on the experiences of women in Kelowna and its surrounding communities. Each participant will be asked to share her own experience during a one-on-one interview.

This thesis project is part of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Professional Communication, at Royal Roads University (RRU). Ethical approval to conduct this project has been obtained from RRU's Research Ethics Board.

Benefits

⇒   Take the opportunity to explore, reflect upon, and interpret your own unique experience with digital dating.
⇒   Share your story anonymously; it may resonate with other women who read the final paper.
⇒   Help inform others about the digital dating experiences of women in Kelowna and its surrounding communities.

Eligibility

⇒   You are a woman residing in the Kelowna Census Metropolitan Area (CMA); this area includes Kelowna, West Kelowna, Westbank First Nations, Lake Country, and Peachland.
⇒   You currently use online dating sites and/or mobile dating apps, **OR** have used online dating sites and/or mobile dating apps in the past 12-18 months, to pursue or establish intimate relationships in Kelowna CMA.
⇒   You belong to one of the following age groups:

         19-24   25-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60+

Time commitment will range from 45 minutes to two hours, depending on the individual experiences each participant wants to speak about.

To participate or for more information, please contact

Phone number and email redacted

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The protection of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of each participant is a priority in this study, as per the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy and Research Ethics Board. Participants may withdraw, without prejudice, at any point before analysis of individual interview data begins.

Appendix C: Electronic Letter of Invitation

[Date here]

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Professional Communication, at Royal Roads University (RRU). My name is Melissa McCluskey and my credentials with RRU can be established by calling Dr. Virginia McKendry, Program Head, MA in Professional Communication, at [redacted]. I have already obtained ethical approval from RRU's Ethics Office for the project I am inviting you to participate in.

The objective of my study is to document, interpret, and analyze the experiences women, at various stages of life, have while pursuing and/or establishing intimate relationships through digital means, such as Internet dating sites and mobile phone dating applications. My research is focused strictly on the experiences of women in Kelowna, B.C. In addition to my main objective, I am also seeking to answer the following questions: Do women at different stages of life share similar experiences and motivations? How do their experiences and motivations differ according to their place in life? What traditional societal expectations related to gender and dating, if any, affect the experiences of women while dating digitally? My final report will be submitted to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

My research project will consist of in-depth interviews. The interviews will be conducted one-on-one, between myself and each individual participant. These in-depth interviews will occur either in person or via Skype. The interview will consist of several open-ended questions and will not be fully structured, allowing each participant the opportunity to direct the course of the interview based on her own experience. Each interview is foreseen to last between 45 and 120 minutes. The foreseen questions will include (a) describe your experiences with online dating sites and/or mobile apps, (b) tell me what surprised you the most during your experience, (c) what were your expectations when you started dating through online sites and/or mobile apps, (d) tell me what made you decide to pursue this form of dating, and (e) have you encountered similarities and/or differences between online dating and traditional dating.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because of your current or recent (within the past 12-18 months) experience using online sites and/or mobile applications to pursue dating relationships. [If applicable, reference the friend, colleague, or acquaintance that referred me to the participant, with their permission]

Information will be recorded in audio format. Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews, it is not possible to offer participants complete anonymity; however, I will ensure participants are not traceable and will use pseudonyms for individual descriptions within the research results. Where

appropriate, the data will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. If and before I choose to pursue publication with a journal, further consent will be sought from you.

While no conflicts of interest have been identified prior to the commencement of this research project, you will be informed in writing (via email) should any conflicts of interest arise during the recruitment, selection, or research process. If you feel these conflicts affect your ability to participate in the research, you are free to withdraw from the research project. You may also inform me in writing (via email) if a conflict of interest arises from your end.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw, without prejudice, up until the time that I begin analysis of the individual interview data that has been collected. You will be notified in writing (via email) when the analysis process is set to occur so you can decide if you want to withdraw from the study. If you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please reply to this email or feel free to contact me by phone or text at [redacted].

Additionally, please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

Sincerely,

Melissa McCluskey

Appendix D: Research Consent Form

My name is Melissa McCluskey and this project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Professional Communication with Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Virginia McKendry, Program Head, MA in Professional Communication, at [redacted]. Alternatively, she can be contacted at [redacted]. For additional inquiries about the research, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Walinga, Director of the School of Communication and Culture, at [redacted]. The Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board can be contacted via Colleen Hoppins at [redacted] or [redacted].

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project. The objective of my study is to document, interpret, and analyze the experiences women, at various stages of life, have while pursuing and/or establishing intimate relationships through digital means, such as Internet dating sites and mobile phone dating applications. My research is focused strictly on the experiences of women in Kelowna, B.C. In addition to my main objective, I am also seeking to answer the following questions: Do women at different stages of life share similar experiences and motivations? How do their experiences and motivations differ according to their place in life? What traditional societal expectations related to gender and dating, if any, affect the experiences of women while dating digitally?

In order to effectively document your unique experience, the study will consist of an in-depth, one-on-one interview. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions relating to your experience with digital dating. Your answers to these questions may lead me to ask follow-up questions, or may prompt you to bring up related aspects of your experience. Your direction and guidance during the interview process is important, as one of the benefits to participating in this research is that it will provide you with an opportunity to reflect upon, and interpret, your own experiences with digital dating. As the topic of dating in general, and some of your experiences specifically, may be of a sensitive nature, please also be aware that you are in control of what questions you want to answer or what topics you want to abandon should you feel uncomfortable during the process. This consent form seeks your consent to be included in the study and to participate in a one-on-one interview.

The interview will last between 45 and 120 minutes and will be recorded in audio format. Due to the in-depth nature of the study, and to the personal information that may be shared during the interview process, it is important to provide you with as much anonymity as possible. I will ensure you are not traceable within the data and will use a pseudonym for individual descriptions within the research results. Where appropriate, the data from all participants will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. All data and documentation will be kept strictly confidential; physical items, such as audio recordings and digital storage devices, will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure room. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to any data that includes identifying information. As per standard hold time, raw data will be kept for 24 months' post-graduation (anticipated to be July 2019). After such time, the raw data will be destroyed.

While there is no foreseeable harm to taking part in this study, the in-depth nature of the interviews used to document the experiences of a small group of women from Kelowna may allow individuals you know to identify your experience should they come across the final research results, even with the use of pseudonyms. This may be a potential drawback to participating in the study if you require assurance of complete anonymity.

While no conflicts of interest have been identified prior to the commencement of this research project, you will be informed in writing (via email) should any conflicts of interest arise during the recruitment, selection, or research process. If you feel these conflicts affect your ability to participate in the research, you are free to withdraw from the research project. You may also inform me in writing (via email) if a conflict of interest arises from your end.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. If and before I choose to pursue publication with a journal, further consent will be sought from you. Upon email request, I will send you an electronic copy of my completed thesis once it is available through the online portal, which is anticipated to be in the late summer or early fall of 2017.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw, without prejudice, up until the time that I begin analysis of the individual interview data that has been collected. You will be notified in writing (via email) when the analysis process is set to occur so you can decide if you want to withdraw from the study. If you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. Any costs associated with participating, such as parking fees at the interview location, will be reimbursed. Light refreshments will be provided during the interview.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to be included in this project. Please retain a copy of this document for your reference.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Introductory statement (to be read to the participant): [Insert appropriate salutation and participant's name] First of all, I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. My name is Melissa McCluskey and this project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Professional Communication with Royal Roads University. Please let me know if you would like the name and contact information for a person at Royal Roads University who can verify the authenticity of this research project. **[If requested, provide sheet with contact info for RRU]**

The objective of my study is to document, interpret, and analyze the experiences women, at various stages of life, have while pursuing and/or establishing intimate relationships through digital means, such as Internet dating sites and mobile phone dating applications. My research is focused strictly on the experiences of women in Kelowna, B.C.

As a woman who was single for a substantial period of time during my late twenties and early thirties, I have firsthand experience of dating digitally. I also have many female friends and family members of all ages who have used technology in their quests to find a partner. Knowing my own story, and hearing the stories from women around me, was what initially motivated me to pursue this area of study. An important part of my purpose is to explore how a woman's understanding of technology may hinder or facilitate success in the formation of intimate relationships, which typically occupies a large part of our lives in one way or another. Additionally, I am also trying to gain an understanding of what is happening to women's sense of what it means to date, and to explore how dating and gender may intersect in our digital age. One thing that interests me is how and if online dating is changing women's idea of what the "life script" looks like for a woman.

As mentioned in the invitation letter and consent form, this interview will last between 45 and 120 minutes, and will be audio recorded. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions relating to your experience with digital dating. The goal of this interview is for us to explore your individual experience using online dating sites and/or mobile dating apps. Your answers to my initial questions may lead me to ask follow-up questions, or may prompt you to bring up related aspects of your experience. Your direction and guidance during the interview process is important, as one of the benefits to participating in this research is that it will provide you with an opportunity to reflect upon, and interpret, your own experiences with digital dating. In exploring your own unique experience through this study, you have the benefit of anonymously sharing your story, which may resonate with others who read the final thesis paper. As the topic of dating in general, and some of your experiences specifically, may be of a sensitive nature, please remember that you are in control of what questions you want to answer; if you are uncomfortable at any time during the interview, please let me know.

Due to the in-depth nature of the study, and to the personal information that may be shared during the interview process, it is important to provide you with as much anonymity as possible.

I will ensure you are not traceable within the data. You may choose a pseudonym, or allow me to choose one for you; this will be used for any individual descriptions within the research results related to today's interview. Where appropriate, the data from all participants will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. All data and documentation will be kept strictly confidential; physical items, such as audio recordings and digital storage devices, will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure room. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to any data that includes identifying information. As per standard hold time, raw data will be kept for 24 months' post-graduation (anticipated to be July 2019). After such time, the raw data will be destroyed.

While there is no foreseeable harm to taking part in this study, the in-depth nature of the interviews I am using to document the experiences of a small group of women from Kelowna may allow individuals you know to identify your experience should they come across the final research results, even with the use of pseudonyms. This may be a potential drawback to participating in the study if you require assurance of complete anonymity.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. If and before I choose to pursue publication with a journal, further consent will be sought from you. Upon email request, I will send you an electronic copy of my completed thesis once it is available through the online portal, which is anticipated to be in the late summer or early fall of 2017.

While no conflicts of interest have been identified up until this point, I will inform in writing, via email, should any conflicts of interest arise beyond this point in the process. You may also inform me in writing (via email) if a conflict of interest arises from your end. You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw, without prejudice, up until the time that I begin analysis of the individual interview data that has been collected. I will notify you in writing, via email, when the analysis process is set to occur so you can decide if you want to withdraw from the study.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Interview Questions:

- Are you from Kelowna originally?
  - Expand based on answer
- Aside from dating, can you tell me a bit about your life up until this point?
- When you reflect back to your late teens or early twenties, how did you think the major milestones of your life would go, and where did dating fit into that path?
- How did that path, or script, change as you grew into your life?
- Has the Internet had anything to do with that change?
- What was your dating history prior to trying dating sites or apps?

- What had you heard about online dating sites or mobile dating apps prior to pursuing them?
- What made you decide to pursue digital dating?
- What were your expectations when you started?
- What sites or apps have you used?
- Did you have different expectations or motivations for different sites or different apps?
- Did you have to pay for the sites or apps?
- What was the actual user experience of the site(s) or app(s)?
- Did you have any challenges in using the site(s) or app(s)?
- What type of device(s) do you use to access the site(s) or app(s)?
- How long have you been dating digitally?
- What were your experiences with online dating sites and/or mobile apps?
- How long have you been dating digitally?
- How did you feel about dating digitally?
- How did you feel about telling others that you were dating digitally?
- Have you noticed any changes with your experiences over time?
- What was your most positive experience?
- What was your least positive experience?
- How did your online relationships move offline? Who initiated?
- How long did you communicate online prior to meeting in person?
- After meeting offline, did you communicate again through the online site or app?
- Tell me what surprised you the most during your experience.
- Have you encountered similarities between online dating and traditional dating? What about differences?
- Do you have a preference for how you meet potential partners?
- What advice would you give to other women looking to try digital dating?

Appendix F: Themes and Sub-Themes

Table 1

Themes and Sub-Themes of Women's Experiences with Digital Dating

Theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme
1. The conversation surrounding digital dating	Expectations vs. reality	Involvement of family and friends	Motivations for using online dating
2. The influence of gender and dating scripts	Making the first move	Expectations and norms related to gender	
3. Technology's influence	Changes through the life course	Impact on the experience of dating	
4. Processes, rules, and protocols for online dating	Understanding and selecting matches	Managing time	Staying safe and handling unwanted interactions
5. Impact of Kelowna's characteristics on the dating pool	Limited dating pool	Existing social connections within the pool	Transient dating pool