ONLINE DATERSÍ PERCEPTION OF AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVES AND ITS IMPACT ON COMMITMENT

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By

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Abstract

Online Daters’ Perception of Available Alternatives and its Impact on Commitment

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The aim of this study was to examine if the comparison level of alternatives (CLalt), in addition to past experiences and intentions for utilizing online dating services, has an effect on online daters’ likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship. Data collected via online questionnaire from 72 online daters (58 females, 14 males) was analyzed using multiple regression. Results indicated that relationship status and intentions for using online dating services impact commitment to a relationship. In addition, a significant association among online daters’ sex and intentions for using online dating sites was found. Specifically, men were more likely to desire a short-term, less committed relationship than women. Due to the small sample size and underrepresentation of males, future research should investigate whether the number and quality of matches received on online dating sites is comparable to the CLalt. Furthermore, refined measurements of CLalt and likelihood to commit are needed specifically for online dating relationships.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Online dating has become a popular approach in today’s dating age due to numerous reasons. For instance, men and women are pursuing their educations longer, therefore turning towards a quicker and more convenient way for them to meet a large pool of potential partners. With an approximated 40 million visitors or users in 2012, the online dating industry is also one of the most profitable online markets, with annual revenue reaching nearly $2 billion (Romano, 2012). This is a profound increase from 2007 reported statistics, which had then approximated 20 million people who had visited or used an online dating site, with the industry making $900 million. In addition to the top two largest dating services eHarmony and Match.com (Online Dating Magazine, 2011), there are many online dating sites that have been created to meet individuals’ own lifestyle and preferences based on their race (e.g. Black Singles), religion (e.g. Christian Mingle), age (e.g. Senior People Meet), or sexual orientation (e.g. Same Sex Online) to name a few. In fact, Market Research (2012) estimates that there are 1,500 dating sites in the United States alone. As this trend becomes more prevalent, it steadily becomes a topic of interest to society as well as the media, with several motion pictures (e.g. the 1998 film “You’ve Got Mail” and the 2005 film “Must Love Dogs”) involving characters seeking to establish a relationship via email and online dating networks.

Researchers emphasizing in social and personal relationships have taken an interest in studying online dating-related topics, some of which have particularly assessed online mate selection and how the number of mate options available influences expectations of finding a soul mate (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Houran & Lange, 2004; Lenton, Fasolo, & Todd, 2008). The number of available potential partners has been examined using a social exchange approach, specifically as the comparison level of
alternatives (CLalt) component. The CLalt, as defined by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), is the lowest level of outcomes a person will accept from a relationship in light of available alternatives. Strictly speaking, these are the alternative partners a person perceives outside of a current relationship.

The concepts of the social exchange theory model, including but not limited to rewards, costs, satisfaction, comparison level, reciprocity, and CLalt, is projected to influence relationship commitment over time in already established relationships. Naturally, the literature out there concerning aspects of online dating has focused on individuals who have already formed relationships online (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rabby, 2007; Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009; Wright, 2004). What has not been studied is how online dating factors may impact the likelihood that online daters will to commit to a monogamous relationship. Specifically, there is no study to the researcher’s knowledge that has examined how the large number of potential partners that online daters can access, this awareness of available alternatives, results in consequences for commitment to a relationship.

The development of commitment is thought to be emerged by a reduction of attention to alternative relationships, which in turn leads to the development of pre-marital and marital relationships. There is evidence that the perception of available alternatives indeed influences commitment in traditional dating and intimate relationships (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1999; Crawford, Feng, Fischer, & Diana, 2003; DeWall, Maner, Deckman, & Rouby, 2011; Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Fitzsimons, & Naidoo, 2003; Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999; Miller, 1997; Miller & Simpson, 1990; Simpson, 1987). It is necessary to explore how
how this concept of social exchange theory plays a role in all relationships, including those developed online. Online relationships are a partially unexplored topic.

**Statement of the Problem**

Literature has focused on how the CLalt may impact commitment in already formed relationships rather than how it affects actually committing to a relationship. Moreover, this abundant amount of literature has studied this social exchange theory concept in traditional dating relationships compared to online dating relationships.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine if the CLalt has an effect on online daters’ likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship. Rabby (2007) expresses commitment as the key to maintaining successful relationships. Commitment is additionally said to build stability by increasing a person’s dependence on his or her relationship (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

**Definitions**

Online dating: the pattern of periodic communication between potential partners using the internet as a medium (Lawson & Leck, 2006); active online socialization with potential romantic partners (Houran & Lange, 2004).

Comparison level of alternatives (CLalt): the lowest level of outcomes a person will accept from a relationship in light of available alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959); the types of alternatives a person perceives outside of a current relationship (must consider the availability and desirability of alternatives).

Commitment: one’s desire to remain in a relationship (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990); psychological attachment to a partner, a long-term orientation to the relationship, and an intention to persist in the relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).
Potential matches: the number of eligible individuals that one can access through an online dating service; typically they are matched with the online daters’ preferences in a mate (based on numerous characteristics including demographics, leisure interests, etc.).

Romantic relationship: as defined by the researcher, a committed interpersonal relationship involving mutual physical and/or emotional intimacy.

Objectives

This study focused on a series of objectives, as follows:

1. To determine whether the perceived number of available, desirable alternatives (i.e., CLalt) has an impact on online daters’ likelihood to commit to a monogamous romantic relationship.

2. To study if the number and quality of potential matches is a representation of the CLalt component of social exchange theory.

3. To investigate if an individual’s past experiences with online dating services influence their perception of available partners, in turn impacting their likelihood to commit to a relationship.

4. To examine if there is an association between online daters’ sex and their intentions for utilizing online dating services.

5. To inquire if the intentions for using online dating services influence the likelihood of an online dater committing to a single romantic relationship.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, a series of research hypotheses were developed:
1. The greater the number of potential alternative partners that are perceived, the less likely an online dater will commit to a single relationship.

2. Online daters who perceive they have few potential matches are more likely to commit to an online relationship.

3. The number and quality of matches encountered from online dating services can serve as a representation for the CLalt component of social exchange theory.

4. Those with previous positive experiences with online dating are more likely to commit to a relationship than those with previous negative experiences with this activity (e.g., those who have been deceived).

5. Online daters who were successful in seeking potential partners in previous online dating experiences will perceive they will encounter a high number of desirable alternatives to select from in future experiences.

6. Men are more likely than women to utilize online dating services to seek short-term, non-committed relationships, and therefore are less likely to want to commit to a relationship.

7. Those using online dating sites as a means of finding short-term partners (i.e. one-night stands, hook-ups, or casual dates) are less likely to commit to a partner.

Assumptions

Prior to the study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Participants in this research are online daters and meet the requirements of the study.

2. Participants understand the information in this study exactly as the researcher intends it (e.g., definitions, instructions, etc.).
3. Participants can recall events accurately and will answer the questionnaire completely and honestly.

4. The measures used are appropriate for the subjects participating in the study.

5. That the number and quality of matches is a reflection of the CLalt.

Limitations

Much research that has examined various aspects of online dating has focused on individuals who have already formed relationships online, rather than how online dating dynamics may impact the likelihood to commit to a relationship. Additionally, an abundant amount of research has found evidence that the perception of available alternatives does influence commitment; however, this research has studied traditional dating relationships. The purpose of this study is to explore how the CLalt impacts online daters to commit to a monogamous relationship; nonetheless, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the use of self-report survey as a data collection method assumes that the participants can recall events accurately and only captures their perception of these events in retrospect. The sample consisted of an uneven male to female ratio (14 males, 58 females), which limits gender comparisons, as not enough data from males was collected. The small sample may not be representative of the entire population of online daters. Further, due to a small sample size in multivariate analyses, statistical errors are more likely to occur. In regards to the measurements, the researcher’s measure for the CLalt had a low reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .36), which does not prove to be an accurate and reliable measurement.
Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

In recent decades, online dating has become a popular trend. It has allowed individuals from busy workaholics, to those with shy anxious personalities to find a potential partner in an online environment they can control (Lawson & Leck, 2006). According to Online Dating Magazine (2011), it is estimated that over 20% of American singles have gone on a date with someone that had met over the internet, with nearly 300,000 individuals marrying a compatible partner they met through an online dating service. Experiences with online dating vary from person to person, as represented in a study by Alam, Yeow, and Loo (2011) where slightly over half (52.17%) of online dating participants reported their online dating experience as being both positive and negative, with a little over 30% reporting it firmly as a positive experience. Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, and Felt (2008) reported similar findings with out of the 11% of their total subjects that had used an online dating service, 37% reported it was a positive experience. A majority of respondents (70.3%) from Stephure et al.’s (2009) study revealed they had disclosed their involvement in online dating to family and friends, signifying that individuals may not be apprehensive by the online dating stigma that may have existed prior to becoming a prevalent form of dating.

Although online dating has typically been associated with individuals who are seeking a long-term, committed relationship, this is not always the case. Reasons people choose to date online can range anywhere from finding a soul mate, looking for fun or sex, relaxation, to ease boredom, or simply because it is an easy way to meet people, as some individuals have trouble meeting others due to a busy work schedule, not being able to go out because of children, or because they are new to a city (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). Gender differences in online dating have been seen, with men reporting using
online dating sites with the intention to find casual relationships more than women, and women stating they were looking for long-term and romantic relationships more than men (Alam et al., 2011). Online dating relationships, friendly or romantic, have been reported to last, as McKenna et al. (2002) found that 71% of romantic relationships and 79% of friendships that were formed online were still intact after a two-year period.

As online dating becomes a growing craze in today’s society, it increasingly becomes a topic of interest for researchers in fields such as family studies, psychology, sociology, and communication. Research in the last decade has studied a range of online dating-related topics, including but not limited to online mate selection (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008); expectations of finding a soul mate online (Houran & Lange, 2004); how the number of mate options available online influences expectations of the mate selected (Lenton et al., 2008); commitment to dates arranged online (Coleman, 2009); associations between online dating and age (Stephure et al., 2009); relational maintenance and the influence of commitment in online relationships (Rabby, 2007); and self-disclosure and the use of uncertainty reducing strategies online (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011). What has not been thoroughly examined is the association between the formation of online relationships and the specific factors that influence online dater’s likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship—the aim of the present study.

**Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory, although built upon behaviorism and economics principles, has been extended to understand how human social relationships are formed, maintained, and dissolved through the assumptions that individuals seek relationships that are beneficial to them, negotiate to make exchanges with others at the lowest cost to themselves, and are rational beings constrained by their choices (Smith, Hamon,
Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). The exchange model proposes that exchanges in a relationship are characterized by interdependence, meaning that in order to profit from others, one must also provide others with rewards (any element in a relationship with a positive value). As individuals continually exchange rewards with one another, reciprocal obligations begin to emerge. This results in the individuals trusting each other, which in turn influences them to continue facilitating further exchanges amongst themselves (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). These social exchanges are regulated by norms of fairness and reciprocity, implying that people should help those who have helped them.

In contrast to rewards, there is the concept of costs: anything an individual does not find pleasurable or gratifying. One classification of costs is investment costs, the time and energy a person puts into a relationship. The amount of time one invests into arranging an online date may impact a person’s decision to continue with the date or not. Coleman (2009) studied how the sunk cost effect, a greater tendency to commit to something after investment (time, money, etc.) is put into it, may influence people to continue with their date arranged online. Coleman hypothesized that commitment to a date arranged online would increase as the amount of investments put into the date increased. After assessing prior investment, participants then used a computer simulation that incorporated the steps that an individual may follow when arranging an online date. Coleman found evidence to support his hypothesis: commitment to an arranged online date did increase as prior investments rose (i.e., more time and effort put into arranging the date). Although online dating has been alleged to involve a great deal of investment and time, Merkle and Richardson (2000) suggest that this invested time and energy contributes to stronger commitment in an online relationship.
Individuals’ satisfaction in a relationship is formed from their outcomes that are available in that particular relationship (i.e., when the amount of rewards are greater than the number of costs), as well as the comparison level (CL), the average outcome expected for relationships based on what individuals feel they deserve (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). Satisfaction is an important factor in predicting commitment to a relationship, as supported by literature finding that individuals who overall reported satisfied in their relationship were more likely to be committed (Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008; Simpson, 1987). Love has also been positively related to commitment (Crawford et al., 2003), which could result of the feelings of satisfaction one feels in their current relationship. Another concept in social exchange theory is equity. Crawford and colleagues (2003) report commitment was positively associated with relationship equity, meaning that couples were more committed to their relationship the more they perceived balance existed. Sprecher’s (2001) study examining equity and social exchange variables in predicting satisfaction, commitment, and stability, revealed that satisfaction and commitment were negatively associated with under-benefitting inequity. Similarly, in a series of two studies, Floyd and Wasner (1994) observed, in their second study, a significant, indirect effect of inequity on relationship commitment, primarily through its association with relationship satisfaction. Crawford et al. (2003) concluded that in addition to satisfaction, a combination of internal factors (e.g. love and equity) and external factors (e.g. alternatives) best predicts commitment to continuing a relationship.

When studying factors that contribute to ending intimate relationships, Felmlee et al. (1990) discovered prior duration in the relationship, hours spent together, comparison level of alternatives, dissimilarity in race, and perceived support of the relationship from
family and friends to be significant predictors. Therefore, it may be concluded that couples who are highly committed to a lasting relationship spend more hours together, perceive they have few alternatives and/or do not desire alternatives that are available, are the same race, and feel that their friends and family support their relationship. Simpson (1987) also found evidence that the length of a couple’s relationship and poor alternatives are predictors of relationship stability in premarital romantic relationships. Other factors that he found to predict relationship stability include satisfaction, sexual nature of relationship, exclusivity of the relationship, and orientation to sexual relations.

All of these concepts—trust, reciprocity, fairness, rewards, costs, investments, satisfaction, and equity along with attraction, CLalt, and dependence, are proposed to influence relationship stability over time and therefore have been used in past and current research to assess relationship stability and commitment in primarily existing relationships (Crawford et al., 2003; Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009; Miller, 1997; Miller & Simpson, 1990; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012; Rydell, McConnell, & Bringle, 2004; Simpson, 1987; Sprecher, 2001). However, because social exchange theory emphasizes on established relationships, much of the research out there regarding characteristics of online dating has focused on those who have already formed either an online dating relationship or an exclusively online relationship (i.e., a relationship primarily maintained online, romantic or not) (McKenna et al., 2001; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rabby, 2007; Stephure et al., 2009; Wright, 2004). Other research has explored how individuals use the internet as a means to maintain their current relationship formed offline (Craig & Wright, 2012; Rabby, 2007; Sidelinger et al., 2008). While Lawson and Leck (2006) examined the motivations for becoming involved
in online dating, styles of courtship, and the development of trust, concentrating on romantic dating relationships that could result in commitment, their study was not expanded to include how these dynamics may specifically have an impact on these online daters’ likelihood to commit to a relationship they have formed online. The present study aims to study how social exchange concepts and other additional factors influence online daters to form and commit to a monogamous relationship.

**Attentiveness to Alternatives and its Effect on Commitment**

One key construct of social exchange theory and the primary emphasis in the present study is the CLalt which is defined by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) as the lowest level of outcomes a person will accept from a relationship in light of available alternatives; in other words, the types of alternatives a person perceives outside of a current relationship. The CLalt is a subjective assessment, in which individuals develop perceptions of alternatives through judgments about the quality of the best and currently available alternatives to the present relationship. This construct may be used to partially explain why individuals remain in or leave a relationship and has been used in an abundant amount of research over the last two decades to examine how attentiveness to available alternatives influences equity, commitment, and satisfaction in current dating and intimate relationships (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1999; Crawford et al., 2003; DeWall et al., 2011; Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon et al., 1999; Lydon et al., 1999; Lydon et al., 2003; Maner et al., 2009; Miller, 1997; Miller & Simpson, 1990; Simpson, 1987). More specifically, the CLalt implies that the perception that desirable alternative partners are available has an effect on satisfaction with the current relationship and can predict the future of one’s relationship (Miller & Simpson, 1990). Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) extend this implication with The Investment Model, suggesting
that people become dependent on their relationships based on the quality of alternatives, satisfaction level, and investments attached to the relationship, all of which influences the level of commitment to persist in a relationship. Furthermore, the CLalt has been observed to be the strongest predictor of the rate of relationship breakup (Felmlee et al., 1990), with women’s perceptions of alternatives being a consistent predictor (Sprecher, 2001). Simpson (1987) may argue that there are other factors that are involved with the prediction of relationship dissolution, including those characterized by low satisfaction and low intrinsic investments.

Based on social exchange theory, it is assumed that when an individual perceives they have better alternatives, they will be less committed to their relationship, while those who believe they have poor or no alternatives will be highly committed to their relationship. Johnson and Rusbult’s (1989) research supports this statement. Using a series of three studies, the researchers found evidence that the tendency to devalue alternative partners was strongly linked to commitment, where those who were more committed in their relationship negatively evaluated the alternative, reporting lower attraction to the alternative, lower desire to date them, and a lower interest in approaching them. Lydon et al. (2003) reported similar findings in their own study, determining that the more committed one was in their current relationship, the lower attraction ratings were towards the available target. The results of these two studies conclude that level of commitment to a relationship is indeed related to the devaluation of attractive alternative partners. Relatedly, it has been suggested that although highly committed individuals are less likely to attend to attractive alternatives, they are not oblivious to them either (Rydell et al., 2004); yet, Miller and Simpson (1990) concluded from their own study that individuals may be committed to their current relationship not only because alternatives
may not be attractive, but because these individuals may be inattentive to the alternatives that do exist.

In contrast, Bazzini and Shaffer's (1999) study, which expanded on Johnson and Rusbult's (1989), revealed a contradicting result from the latter authors' 1989 research. Through conducting two experiments to test whether nonexclusive daters (those not currently dating or in a relationship) will more positively evaluate attractive alternatives than more committed, exclusive daters (those dating or in a relationship), these researchers discovered in the second experiment that exclusive daters in a high-threat/high-opportunity condition (where the target alternative was portrayed as being someone romantically available and interested in the participant who expressed desire to meet the participant) reported less satisfaction with their current relationship after learning that they would be interacting with the alternative. This finding demonstrates that these participants devalued their feelings of investment to their current relationship rather than devaluing the attractive target person.

One possible explanation for this incidence is that individuals may desire alternatives simply because they are in situations (e.g. relationships) that limit their ability to attend these forbidden alternatives, a hypothesis DeWall et al. (2011) call The forbidden fruit. To test this hypothesis, the authors had participants engage in three experiments, this first involving a visual discrimination task, with participants assigned to either the attention-limiting condition, with the goal to get participants to look away from the attractive stimulus once it appeared, or a control condition. Participants then completed a questionnaire measuring commitment and satisfaction with their current relationship. DeWall et al.'s major finding of their first experiment was that individuals in the attention-limiting condition reported less satisfaction and commitment to their
current relationship partner than those in the control condition, concluding that discreetly limiting one’s attention to attractive alternative partners does pose negative consequences for relationship well-being. Another proposition is that an individual’s prior reported level of commitment to their relationship impacts their attentiveness to available partners. When Lydon and colleagues (1999) compared individuals who were single, married, and in low or moderately committed relationships to assess their differences in devaluing attractive alternatives, they discovered that when low and moderately committed individuals were told they were “matched” with an attractive target, these individuals did not devalue this alternative person. Those in high committed relationships, however, did devalue the target.

While relational maintenance and commitment theories have been used to assess commitment in internet-based relationships (Rabby, 2007; Wright, 2004), and although Merkle and Richardson (2000) predicted that individuals in computer-mediated relationships (CMR) are more likely to have quick, ready access to desirable alternatives in cyberspace, no study to the researcher’s knowledge has used the CLalt component of social exchange theory in online dating relationships and how access to multiple available partners may present consequences for commitment to a monogamous relationship. Qualitative evidence suggests that online daters are free from commitment, having an increased freedom of choice due to the larger pool of potential partners that can be found via the internet (Lawson & Leck, 2006).

**Mate Selection in the Online Dating Environment**

**Filtering profiles.** One common area of research that social exchange theory has been applied to is the concept of the “marriage market,” or making decisions about choosing a mate. An individual may enter the marriage market seeking someone with
particular values and/or demographic characteristics and they will evaluate exchanges or rewards that this person has to offer. On most online dating sites, users are able to search for potential partners based on a variety of characteristics, such as location, demographics, interests, and hobbies. Both men and women have been found to narrow their field of potential partners through a method Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs (2010) would describe as "relationshopping": filtering through a list of available individuals via desired characteristics or demographic descriptors provided by one’s online dating profile. Some attributes that have been reported to be desirable in a potential partner include warmth and kindness, expressiveness/openness, a sense of humor (Sprecher & Regan, 2002), religious, athletic, affectionate, loyal, fun (Frost, Chance, Norton, & Ariely, 2008), outgoing, pleasant/relaxed, truthful/realistic, and interesting (Rosen et al., 2008). In their own examination of partner preferences in romantic relationships and friendships, Sprecher and Regan (2002) also found that social status and physical attractiveness traits were also perceived to be desirable in a romantic or sexual partner.

**Gender differences.** All of Couch and Liamputtong’s (2008) participants expressed that they had some methods of filtering people on online dating sites. A common filtering method of potential partners that seems to occur even outside the online dating world is a simple assessment of attractiveness (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008), as other studies have found this is to be a highly desirable trait in a potential partner (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2006; Fletcher, Tither, O’Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004; Frost et al., 2008; Li & Kenrick, 2006). While both men and women have reported to desire an attractive partner, men seem to report to value physical attractiveness more than females (Fisman et al., 2006; Fletcher et al., 2004; Li & Kenrick, 2006). Women, on the other hand, have reported to prefer a partner with high
intelligence, status, and resources (Fisman et al., 2006; Li & Kenrick, 2006). These findings support those of Sprecher and Reganís (2002), in which they discovered that physical attractiveness and intelligence were the features valued the highest among males and females. Additional characteristics that women valued more than men were warmth and trustworthiness (Fletcher et al., 2004). Rosen et al. (2008) also found that photographs were more important to males than they were to females, coinciding with the studies that illustrate the idea that men find physical attractiveness a highly important factor when seeking a partner (Fisman et al., 2006; Fletcher et al., 2004; Li & Kenrick, 2006).

**Type of relationship.** What characteristics a person desires in a mate has been found to depend on the type of relationship one is seeking. Studies have shown that specific traits are desirable for long-term and short-term partners including casual dates, one-night stands, or affair partners (Fletcher et al., 2004; Li & Kenrick, 2006). When presented with two separate scenarios, an attractive but cold partner or an unattractive but warm partner, men and women in Fletcher et al.Ís (2004) study reported that for casual dates or flings, they would prefer the attractive but cold partner. However, for a long-term relationship, they preferred having the warm, unattractive person. Regardless of the type of relationship, these men and women indicated desiring positive levels of warmth/trustworthiness. However, they were more likely to overall choose attractiveness/vitality as opposed to these traits in short-term relationships, but not in long-term relationships. Men especially desired high levels of attractiveness/vitality to a greater extent than women, for both flings and long-term relationships. Warmth/trustworthiness and status/resources were reported as being less important in short-term relationships, with attractiveness/vitality as the most important. Li and
Kenrick (2006) used a series of five studies to examine the priorities and preferences men and women have for short- and long-term relationships. In their first study, participants designed a one-night stand partner on computers by using "mate dollars" to purchase a percentile level on a number of characteristics they desired. Similar to Fletcher et al. (2004), for short-term relationships, women "spent" more on physical attractiveness and less on social level and kindness, while men spent more on attractiveness and less on social level, creativity, and kindness, revealing that physical attractiveness was not only the most preferred characteristic in a short-term mate, but also a "necessity." Their second study in the series asked participants to prioritize a second set of characteristics for a marriage partner, one-night stand, and an extramarital affair partner. Once again, men and women prioritized physical attractiveness more for short-term than long-term mates. Attractiveness was also rated as a necessity for affair partners by both sexes. Women ranked social status as a "luxury" for affair partners. For long-term mates, women prioritized social status more than men, whom, again, prioritized attraction and considered social status as only a luxury. Through their own investigation on how the number of available and appropriate partners (the "field of eligibles") within a social environment is associated with partner preferences in romantic relationships, Sprecher and Regan (2002) discovered that men's preferences in a partner were associated with their perceptions about the number of available potential partners in a dating environment, therefore holding higher standards for a potential dating partner. This was not true for women, which could be due to the fact that women perceive desirable alternatives are less accessible to them than men do (Floyd & Wasner, 1994).

**Online Dating Factors that May Potentially Affect Commitment**

Online dating differs from traditional dating as online daters have control over
how much information they want to disclose about themselves. Whitty (2008) notes that people may be more emotionally honest and open about their personal information, for the fact that having greater anonymity may make them feel freer doing so. However, just as it is easy to openly express yourself, it is as easy to lie as well. One potential problem online daters may encounter in their online dating experience is the issue of trust: is the person they are communicating with via the internet really who they present themselves to be? Online daters seem to be aware that self-presentation problems do exist, as they have expressed that the worst thing about online dating was the lies, such as people using fake profiles or misleading pictures (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008), in which individuals may use to exaggerate their looks (Whitty, 2008) as well as lying about their age, appearance, and economic status (Lawson & Leck, 2006). In fact, online dating users may develop their own uncertainty-reducing strategies to verify the personal information of those they meet on the internet, including gathering information from online and offline domains, such as conducting a Google search or checking public records (Gibbs et al., 2011) or avoiding profiles without a photo, with few photos, or a blurry photo (Heino et al., 2010). Whitty (2008) also proposes that online daters, especially those who are strategic with their self-presentations, can unintentionally create a false or exaggerated depiction of who they really are, which in turn may create a fantasy for others on the opposite end. In Lawson and Leck’s (2006) qualitative study, one subject expressed that her and her internet partner did not necessarily represent [them]selves 100% [on the internet], which may have been a contributor to their short relationship (p. 198). Based on these facts, one factor that may influence online daters’ likelihood to commit to a relationship is not just the perception of available alternatives, but their previous experience with online dating services. This research will examine if an individual’s past
experiences with online dating sites influence their perception of the availability of desirable alternatives as well as if these experiences with online dating sites influence their likelihood to commit to a relationship.

With the number of potential partners that online daters receive when browsing, one may be curious when an online dater stops looking for potential partners and actually commits to a monogamous relationship. One participant in Couch and Liamputtong’s (2008) study expressed closing her online dating membership when she found enough people interested in her; but what exactly is considered “enough”? An emergent theme in Lawson and Leck’s (2006) study was that online interaction is free from commitment. Subjects expressed that it is easy to move on if they do not click or get along with their internet partner in person. The authors noted that these internet daters have an increased freedom of choice among partners as they are able to reach a larger pool of potential partners at one time. Rosen et al. (2008) found support that online daters, compared to traditional daters, do indeed tend to contact more than one person at a time, implying that they may potentially have more alternatives. One participant in Lawson and Leck’s (2006) study reported having a fantasy that his online partner was only communicating with him; when his partner accidently called him by another name it suggested that his partner was talking to multiple people online instantaneously. Seeing as it is easier to contact other individuals, another issue that arises is a new meaning of infidelity and relationship betrayal. Merkle and Richardson (2000) suggest that the availability of pornography, exotic chat rooms, and contacting other individuals on the internet may be included in this new meaning of infidelity and therefore have an impact relationship commitment. The number of matches an individual obtains, though, may pose difficulties for selecting a mate. In 2008, Lenton and partners conducted two experimental studies to
determine how the number of mate options available to a person may influence their expectations and experience of the choice situation and option selected. When presenting the participants with 10 different option set-sizes (the number of potential mates, ranging from as low as 1 to as high as 5000), they reported that as the set-size increased, they imagined they would experience greater choice difficulty. Women perceived a set of 20 potential mates as being near to their ideal option size whereas men stated this was somewhat still too small of a number for them. Online daters in Heino et al.Ís (2010) study expressed this difficulty in selecting a mate, with one participant stating that searching becomes more Êclinical,Êas evaluations occur more than actually meeting someone (p. 437). While some participants expressed the large pool of potential partners is a beneficial way to increase the odds of establishing a long-term relationship, others expressed that this large number encourages them to sift through as many profiles as they can in a short period of time, resulting them to filter ÊoutÊrather than ÊinÊ(439). Heino et al.Ís (2010) participants also voiced that when they select only perfect profiles of individuals that meet their desired characteristics, they realize they are eliminating other possible ideal matches. Based on the presented literature, this study will also aim to examine if online daters are less likely to commit to a monogamous relationship due to the number and quality of matches (available alternatives/pool of partners) they encounter from online dating websites.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the present study aims to examine if the CLalt, the perception that available and desirable alternatives exist, has an effect on online datersÍ likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship. Regardless of whether a person is new to online dating, a general research question is tested:
RQ1: Are online daters who perceive they have access to a greater number of available, desirable matches (i.e., CLalt) less likely to commit to a monogamous relationship as compared with those who perceive access to fewer matches?

Those who are new to online dating and are using this service to seek long-term committed relationships may or may not have realistic expectations on finding a "perfect" compatible partner, as they may have the idea that online dating is an effective way to find a soul mate seeing as they have the opportunity to be "matched" with millions of eligible partners. Houran and Lange (2004) studied how this perception of the likelihood of finding a soul mate online may contribute to a person’s commitment to an online dating partner. While there was no evidence that those with intentions to use online dating services have expectations characterized by positive distortions, suggesting that individuals may have realistic expectations when it comes to mate selection on the internet, this finding cannot be generalized to the entire online dating population. Based on this finding, the first hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The greater the number and quality of alternative partners (matches) that are perceived, the less likely an online dater will commit to a single relationship.

H2: Online daters who perceive they have few potential matches are more likely to commit to an online relationship.

In this research, the researcher also makes the assumption that the number and quality of matches is a reflection to the CLalt. A second research question is proposed:

RQ2: Is the number of "good" potential matches, defined as people that a person would actually consider dating, associated with the CLalt component of social exchange theory?
Based on the origination of this component, the researcher has good assumption that:

\[ H_3: \text{The number and quality of matches encountered from online dating services can serve as a representation for the CLalt component of social exchange theory.} \]

Online dating may be successful with some individuals and not others possibly due to their own personal experiences they had with this activity. There are numerous factors that online daters have to be conscious of that traditional daters do not, including self-presentation issues such as the use of fake profiles and misleading pictures (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). Furthermore, the number of potential matches that an online dater has received in the past may influence their expectations of future uses. Online daters may or may not be presented with a large pool of potential partners, giving them the option of selecting potential mates based on someone’s online dating profile, which may list their leisure interests, social characteristics such as age, race, education, income, and religion, and the degree of homogamy to the person seeking the relationship. Using these ideas, a third research question is posed:

\[ \text{RQ}_3: \text{Does an individual’s past experience with online dating services, which may influence their perception of available alternatives, impact their likelihood to commit to a relationship?} \]

A person’s experience with any activity is likely to impact their overall outlook on the activity in future circumstances. In this instance, those who had positive experiences with online dating may be more likely to attempt online dating again sometime in their future with a positive, optimistic approach, whereas those who had negative experiences, if they do not totally stray away from the activity, may approach online dating with hesitation and doubt. Moreover, those who previously used online dating services and had great
success with finding potential partners may perceive that they will have a high availability of desirable matches again. To address the third research question, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H₄: Those with previous positive experiences with online dating are more likely to commit to a relationship than those with previous negative experiences with this activity (e.g., those who have been deceived).

H₅: Online daters who were successful in seeking potential partners in previous online dating experiences will perceive they will encounter a high number of desirable alternatives to select from in future experiences.

Studies have supported the idea that there are gender differences related to attentiveness to alternatives and, in turn, commitment to a relationship. Lenton et al. (2008) found that the men in their study were more likely to desire a short-term, less committed relationship. Results of Miller's 1997 study revealed that casual daters were more attentive to alternatives than exclusive daters or married/cohabitating respondents. When presented with slides of available opposite-sex targets, those who were less satisfied in their relationship were more attentive to these targets and believed they had a greater number of alternatives that could easily be obtained. It was men who examined these slides longer than women, which may be a reflection on the discoveries that men almost always value physical attractiveness in a mate (Fisman et al., 2006; Fletcher et al., 2004; Li & Kenrick, 2006). Additionally, the particular reason for participating in an online dating network may influence an individual's likelihood to committing to a monogamous relationship. Online daters have agreed that using online dating services can extend the number of people one can engage with on sexual terms (Couch &
Liamputtong, 2008); individuals seeking this purpose may not be looking for commitment. Each of these findings on gender and the type of relationship desired generate the following research questions:

RQ4: Is there an association among online daters’ gender and whether they utilize online dating networks to seek long-term, committed relationships versus short-term, “hook-ups” with other online daters?

RQ5: Do the intentions for using an online dating service influence the likelihood of a person committing to a monogamous romantic relationship?

Based on the provided evidence, the following hypotheses are projected:

H6: Men are more likely than women to utilize online dating services to seek short-term, non-committed relationships, and therefore are less likely to want to commit to a relationship.

H7: Those using online dating sites as a means of finding short-term partners (i.e. one-night stands, hook-ups, or casual dates) are less likely to commit to a partner.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a multivariate cross-sectional design was used, as the study involves gathering information among a population of online daters at one point in time. A cross-sectional design is appropriate to describe any associations between the factors involved in committing to a monogamous relationship in online dating users.

Sampling Plan

The human subjects protocol for the present study was approved as exempt (see Appendix A). To be eligible for the study, participants must have used an online dating service for at least one month within the past one year of when the study took place. Participants were recruited via undergraduate as well as graduate students in all Family and Consumer Sciences courses at a Southern California University. Using a snowball sampling method, these targeted students were given a flyer (see Appendix B) to invite any online daters they know to participate in the study. As older individuals have been found more likely to respond to personal ads and meeting someone in person from the internet than younger individuals, as well as use the internet to seek marital and sexual partners (Stephure et al., 2009), this study only targeted those between the ages of 25 and 45 years old. Only heterosexual individuals were considered eligible for this study.

Sample Characteristics

Seventy-six participants met the requirements for the present study. Of these individuals, 72 completed the survey in its entirety, resulting in a 94.7% completion rate. The data analyses were conducted using data from this sample of 72 online daters. Gender breakdown was widely disproportionate with females making up 80.6% of the sample and males making up 19.4%. Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old (M = 30.75) and were predominately Caucasian/non-Hispanic (72.2%). Most indicated
their religion as Christian (33.3%), Atheist/Agnostic (30.6%) or Catholic (16%). Forty individuals (55.6%) reported their occupation as professional, while 22 individuals (30.6%) indicated “other,” which was primarily specified as “student” (graduate or doctoral). Of participants, many reported attaining higher education with 25 (34.7%) completing a Bachelor’s degree, 19 (26.4%) a Master’s degree, and 13 (18.1%) a Doctorate degree. Complete demographic data are presented in Table 1.

Fifteen (20.8%) of the participants reported previous marriages. Of those previously married, majority (80%) indicated being legally married once while 20% of them reported being married twice. Roughly 32% of the sample identified themselves as currently being in a romantic relationship, with the average duration being 8.23 months (SD = 7.90; range 1-31), and majority (73.9%) reporting meeting their partner online. The mean number of people participants were currently dating was 1.07 (SD = 1.03; range 0-6). A complete summary of relationship and online dating services history variables and frequencies is presented in Table 2.

Data Collection Procedures

An online questionnaire was utilized for the study using Qualtrics, an online data collection and analysis tool. Initially, participants were presented with a consent page with details of the current study and were asked to electronically agree to participate. Participants were then taken to a second page where they were asked to electronically agree that they meet the eligibility requirements to participate in the study. Primarily, this page inquired the participants’ age, sexual orientation, how long (in months) they have been using an online dating service, and if they have used this service within the past one year.

Eligible individuals were presented with the Online Dating Relationships
Questionnaire (see appendix C) adapted by the researcher. A brief and general explanation of the study was provided and detailed instructions for completing the online questionnaire. All respondents remained anonymous and responses were kept confidential. After completion of the survey, participants were linked to a separate survey where they had the opportunity to provide their email address to be entered in a lottery for a chance to win one of two Amazon.com gift cards for $50. This information was not linked to their completed survey to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity.

Instrument Development

Information regarding online dating and commitment to relationships was identified through literature reviews. These data was utilized in the formation of the 38-item Online Dating Relationships Questionnaire, with original items created by the researcher herself in addition to adapted items from Moody (2001), Rosen et al. (2008), and Rusbult et al. (1998). These researchers' instruments have provided evidence to be valid and reliable scales for assessing online dating history and behaviors, attentiveness to alternatives, and commitment.

Measures

Relationship history. A series of questions created by the researcher were used to assess one’s relationship history, inquiring if participants have ever been married, how many legal marriages they have had if applicable, if they are currently in a romantic relationship, how long they have been in this relationship, how they met this person, and how many people they are currently dating. Dating was defined by the researcher as “exploring whether you and a person are compatible; assessing the other’s suitability as a partner in an intimate relationship or as a spouse.”

Online dating history, intentions, and experiences. Several questions created
by the researcher evaluated participants’ online dating history, investigating if they are currently a member of an online dating service, which services they are members of, how many people they have met online that they have gone on dates with, and how recently they have used an online dating service. Three items from Rosen et al. (2008) were adapted to measure when participants started using an online dating service, how long they have been actively using it, and how many profiles they read on average in a typical session (a consecutive period of time browsing through profiles on the website). One item from Moody (2001) was modified to assess how many romantic relationships have been developed online. In addition, three more items from Rosen et al.’s (2008) study assessing history with online dating were used, including, “When you first started online dating, how many people did you attempt to contact at the same time?”

To measure participants’ goals and intentions for online dating, four items were created, one of which asked participants to select all of the reasons for using an online dating service, including too busy to traditionally date, to meet new people in the area, to ease boredom, or to seek alternative partners to the current relationship. Another revised item developed by Rosen et al. (2008) probed what kind of relationship participants are looking for (e.g. long-term dating, marriage, casual dating, one-night stand, or friendship). Participants were asked the extent to which they agree with a series of statements, including “I want to find someone with whom I can have a serious and committed relationship,” “I am not interested in dating or looking for a partner to commit,” and “I am interested in one night stands or affairs.” These three items were used to create a scale for intentions, with the latter two items recoded. The internal consistency reliability (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha) was .68.

To determine the quality of one’s online dating experiences, several items from
the researcher, such as “Overall, how would you rate your online dating experiences?” and “Of the people you have contacted/met on an online dating service, how many have been deceitful? (i.e., lied about their age, appearance, economic status; used a fake photo, etc.)” were used.

**Number and quality of matches.** To determine the number and quality of matches an online dater receives, three items were created inquiring if the online dating services participants are using them up with other online dating users; how many matches they receive on an average day; and what percentage of these matches received do they consider to be “good” matches (people that they would actually consider dating).

**Comparison level of alternatives.** Two global items from Rusbult et al.’s (1998) Quality of Alternatives scale were adapted to fit the present study’s purpose. Rusbult and colleagues’ measures in their original three studies provided evidence of good reliability and validity, with the original four global items having a Cronbach’s alpha of .82, .85, and .88 respectively. However, the present study’s internal consistency of reliability (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha) for CLalt scale was only .36.

**Commitment.** Two items formed by the researcher, “How likely are you to commit to a romantic relationship (an interpersonal relationship involving mutual physical and/or emotional intimacy) with one person within the next year?” and “How likely are you to remain committed to this romantic relationship with one person for a long-term period?” assessed participants’ likelihood to commit to a monogamous romantic relationship. The internal consistency reliability (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha) for this commitment scale was .82.

**Demographics.** Demographics that were measured in addition to age include sex, race/ethnicity, religion, highest level of education completed, and occupation. Some
demographics were selected based on findings from previous studies. For example, Rosen et al. (2008) found that age was important to daters who had "some college" education background. In another case, women in Fisman et al.'s (2006) study reported they were not willing to date someone who was outside of their own race. Felmlee et al. (1990) also reported dissimilarity in race to be a great predictor of relationship breakup, implying that interracial couples have higher rates of breakups and possibly divorce rates.

**Research Design and Data Analysis**

A multivariate cross-sectional design was used. To examine the linear combination of the predictor variables in relation to the dependent variables, multiple regression analyses were conducted. A total of five models were tested (one per research question). Independent variables included CLalt, number and quality of matches, online dating experience, sex, and intentions for utilizing online dating services. Dependent variables included CLalt, intentions, and commitment. One control variable, relationship status, was controlled in three of the models. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0).
Chapter 4 – Results

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 20.0. The results of these analyses are presented in this chapter.

Descriptive Statistics for Uses of Online Dating Services

Thirty-eight participants (51.7% of females and 57.1% of males) reported being a current member of an online dating service. When asked how long participants have actively used online dating services, the mean was 18.1 months (SD = 27.30), with a range from 1 month to 12 years. Nearly 95% of the participants specified that these online dating services match them up with other online dating users. The average number of matches received daily was 7.18 (SD = 8.91; range 0-60). The most common response (20.6%) for the number of matches received per day was three matches, with the majority (79.4%) expressing that they consider less than 25% of their matches to be "good." Descriptive statistics for study variables are displayed in Table 3.

Table 4 displays frequencies of online dating services that participants were current or past members of. Participants were asked to indicate which online dating services they have been a previous member of or are a current member of. The top three online dating services were Match.com, Okcupid.com, and eHarmony.com (48.6%, 37.5%, and 34.7% of cases respectively).

Participants were asked to select from a list the reasons for using an online dating service. Commonly reported responses for online dating included to meet new people in the area, being too busy to traditionally date, and to ease boredom (73.6%, 58.3%, and 22.2% of cases respectively). Also identified were the types of relationships participants were seeking online, which commonly included long-term dating, marriage, and casual dating (81.9%, 63.9%, and 37.5% of cases respectively). See Table 5 for a complete
summary of reasons for online dating and type of relationship seeking frequencies.

When inquired about the number of profiles read in an average online dating session, the mean number was 9.36 (SD = 13.65; range 1-100). The mean number of people participants attempted to contact at the same time was 3.60 (SD = 3.33; range 0-20). Fifty percent reported waiting 1-2 weeks from the time they first contact someone to meeting them in person. When asked how many people respondents have met online that they went on first dates with in the past year, majority (81.9%) indicated 1-5 people.

When asked to select all the reasons for not pursuing a second date with someone, commonly reported responses included “no connection or chemistry” and “person was not as I expected” (see Table 6 for complete list). Participants were asked to specify in ranges how many people they have contacted/met online that were deceitful; most (58.3%) indicated zero, while 34.7% reported 1-5 people.

Participants were asked to specify how many romantic relationships they have developed online. The mean was 1.35 (SD = 1.75; range 0-10). In addition, participants specified how many people they have contacted/met online that they would consider potential, long-term romantic partners. The mean was 1.14 (SD = 1.29) with a range 0-6.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Table 7 shows the results for the hierarchical linear regressions testing the five research questions of this study. The first research question inquired whether the CLalt (i.e., the number of perceived available, desirable matches available) impacts likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship, controlling for relationship status. The model was not significant. Only the control variable, relationship status, (B = -.34, p < .01) was significantly related to commitment to a relationship. Specifically, those who are in relationships reported they were more likely to commit to a relationship. However, the
CLalt was not significantly associated with the likelihood to commit to a relationship.

The second research question, and a primary purpose of this study, asked if the number of good potential matches is associated with the CLalt component of social exchange theory. While controlling relationship status, this question examined both the number and quality of matches received and whether participants agreed if they found their dating alternatives (other potential partners) attractive. No support was found for this research question; therefore there is no evidence that the number of matches received, or the quality of those matches, on online dating services can be a reflection of the CLalt.

The third research question examined if an individual’s past experiences with online dating services impact their likelihood to commit to a relationship. The results were not significant. Once more, when examining the beta coefficients, the control variable, relationship status, \( (B = -0.34, p < .01) \) was significant in relation to commitment to a relationship. Yet, past experiences with online dating services were not significantly associated with likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship.

The fourth research question assessed whether there was an association among participants’ sex and intentions for online dating. The model was significant, sex explained 7% of the variance of intentions for utilizing online dating services, \( F(1, 70) = 5.19, p < .05 \). Specifically, it was found that there is an association among online daters’ sex and their intentions for using online dating services (\( B = 0.26, p < .05 \)), with men having a mean score of 7.47 and women 8.32 on a scale from 1-9 (in which a higher score represented a higher indication participants are looking for a serious and committed relationship). Precisely, these findings imply that women were more likely to have intentions to want a more serious and committed relationship as compared to men.
Finally, the fifth research question investigated if the intentions for utilizing online dating services influenced commitment to a monogamous relationship, with relationship status held constant. As hypothesized the model was significant, intentions for using online dating sites explained 19% of the variance of the commitment measure \( F(1,69) = 18.88, p < .001 \). When examining the beta coefficients, both intentions (\( \beta = -.44, p < .001 \)) and relationship status (\( \beta = -.40, p < .001 \)) significantly predicted commitment to a monogamous relationship. Those with intentions to develop a more serious and committed relationship were more likely to commit to a relationship than those searching for less serious relationships (i.e, casual dating, one-night stands, hook-ups, friendships, or affairs). See Table 7 for a summary of hierarchical regression analysis for outcomes variables.
Chapter 5 – Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine if the CLalt, that is, the perceived number of potential available, desirable partners, has an effect on online daters’ likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship. Given the lack of research on online relationships, specifically how various online dating factors (such as a large pool of potential partners and intentions for online dating) results in consequences for commitment, this study purposed to add to the body of literature on online dating relationships. While researchers have studied various online dating-related topics, such as online mate selection and how the number of mate options available influences expectations of finding a soul mate (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Houran & Lange, 2004; Lenton et al., 2008), no study to the researcher’s knowledge examined how the number of available potential partners, using the CLalt component of social exchange theory, affects online daters to commit to a relationship. Rather, the literature regarding aspects of online dating has focused on those who have already established relationships online (McKenna et al., 2002; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rabby, 2007; Stephure et al., 2009; Wright, 2004). Moreover, the CLalt has commonly been studied in traditional dating and intimate relationships (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1999; Crawford et al., 2003; DeWall et al., 2011; Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon et al., 1999; Lydon et al., 2003; Miller, 1997; Miller & Simpson, 1990; Simpson, 1987).

For the first research question, no support was found on whether online daters who perceive they have access to a greater number of alternative partners are less likely to commit to a monogamous relationship compared with those who perceive access to fewer alternatives. Only relationship status, the control variable, was significantly related to commitment to a relationship, implying that those who are in relationships are more
likely to commit to a relationship.

Secondly, when examining both the number and quality of matches received and whether participants agreed if they found their dating alternatives (other potential partners) attractive, no evidence was found. Therefore, it is concluded that the number and quality of matches received via online dating services cannot serve as a representation of the CLalt, as the participants may not necessarily perceive their matches as desirable.

With regards to if an individual’s past experiences impacts their likelihood to commit to a relationship (research question three), results were not significant. Similar to research question one, only the control variable was significant.

Regarding the fourth research question, online daters’ sex was significantly related to intentions for using online dating services. The hypothesis of this study was supported by the multiple regression analysis of the data. Women’s intentions for a serious and committed relationship were greater than men’s, implying that men are more likely than women to utilize online dating services to seek short-term, non-committed relationships.

Finally, an association among intentions for using online dating services and commitment to a relationship was found. As hypothesized for this research question, intentions (along with the control variable, relationship status) significantly predicted commitment to a monogamous relationship, meaning that those with intentions to develop a more long-term relationship were more likely to commit to a partner than those searching for short-term relationships (i.e., casual dating, one-night stands, hook-ups, or affairs).
Discussion and Implications

One possible explanation for why research questions one, two, and three were not supported is that either participants have not been successful with the number of matches received or that the number of matches received in their online dating experience thus far are not desirable partners. While the average number of matches received a day was 7.18, the majority of participants expressed that they consider less than 25% of their matches to be “good,” implying that the matches received do not match their image of a potential partner. It is possible that participants’ preferences in a partner may have an impact on their perceptions about the number potential dating partners available, influencing them to hold higher standards for their received matches, as found by Sprecher and Regan (2002).

Moreover, as Lawson and Leck (2006) suggested from their qualitative study, because internet daters have an increased freedom of choice among partners, as they are able to reach a larger pool of potential partners at one time, it is possible that participants feel free from commitment because they can easily move on if they do not get along with one of their matches.

Upon examining the number and quality of matches received and whether participants agreed if they found their dating alternatives attractive (research question two), no support was found. It is concluded that the number and quality of matches received via online dating services is not comparable to the CLalt for the reason that participants may not necessarily perceive their matches as desirable. However, due to the small sample size of this study, additional research needs to be done to further examine this proposal. As Rosen et al. (2008) discovered, online daters do in fact contact more than one person at a time, implying that they may potentially have more alternatives.
Clearly though, if the matches received by the participants are limited and/or not considered dateable partners, participants would not indicate their dating alternatives are attractive.

Additionally, because the researcher adapted her own CLalt measures, which resulted in a low reliability, there is a need for a more refined CLalt measurement specifically for online dating relationships. Likewise, while the researcher’s measure for commitment produced high reliability, these items were also modified for the present study to measure likelihood to commit, as previous commitment items have assessed commitment in already established relationships (Rusbult et al., 1998; Sprecher, 2001). The likeliness of committing to a relationship is a topic worth exploring. What should be studied in particular is why individuals may not have intentions to commit to a long-term relationship (e.g. due to commitment phobia, the fear of lost options or making decisions).

When asked to rate their overall online dating experience in research question three, participants only considered their online dating experience to be somewhat positive. Closer examination revealed that nearly half (49.9%) of participants rated their online dating experience as a positive one. These findings are congruent to Alam et al.’s (2011) study, in which 52.17% of their online dating participants reported their online dating experience as being both positive and negative, with a little over 30% reporting it strictly as a positive experience. This rating of participants’ experiences with online dating services could be a reflection of the matches that they receive.

In research questions one and three, relationship status, the control variable, was significantly related to commitment to a relationship. These findings indicate that those who are in relationships are more likely to commit to a relationship. It can be assumed
that participants rated their commitment level based on their present relationship, which majority (73.9%) stated they developed online. Further research is needed to assess if these online dating relationships will last, however, based on the findings of McKenna et al. (2002), who found that 71% of romantic relationships that were formed online were still intact after a two-year period, it could be suggested that these relationships will remain successful. Future research could elaborate more on how online dating relationships are formed and the decision-making process on which matches to pursue a committed relationship with. Further, research could inquire how successful online dating services are in providing users with accurate matches based on their ideal potential partners.

For the fourth research question, a significant relationship was found regarding participants’ sex and intentions for using online dating services. As hypothesized, women’s intentions for a serious and committed relationship were greater than men’s, implying that men are more likely than women to utilize online dating services to seek short-term, non-committed relationships. This is similar to the findings of Lenton et al. (2008), who reported that men were more likely to desire a short-term, less committed relationship, and Alam et al. (2011), in which men indicated using online dating sites with the intention to find casual relationships more than women, and women stating they were looking for long-term and romantic relationships more than men. However, there was an overlap with the mean scores, with men being only slightly lower than women, suggesting that the intentions within the sexes varies. Future research from different theoretical perspectives (such as evolutionary or feminist standpoints) should closely examine why there is a difference between the two sexes’ intentions for various types of relationships and what repercussions it carries for relationship formation.
Last of all, research question five found significance in that intentions for utilizing online dating services predicted commitment to a monogamous relationship. As perceptibly hypothesized, those with intentions to develop a more long-term relationship were more likely to commit to a partner than those searching for short-term relationships such as casual dating, one-night stands, hook-ups, or affairs. Future investigation should be conducted on the various online dating services and whether relationship intentions vary by website. One step further, this research could compare the difference in commitment intentions based on online daters’ gender, as this information could possibly vary by online dating sites as well.

**Conclusion**

Much of the research that has examined aspects of online dating has focused on individuals who have already formed relationships online, rather than how online dating dynamics may impact the likelihood to commit to a relationship. Furthermore, an ample amount of research has found support that the perception of available alternatives does influence commitment; yet, this research has studied traditional dating relationships. This study examined how the CLalt, as well as past experiences and intentions, impacts online daters to commit to a monogamous relationship. The findings in this research highlight that relationship status and intentions for using online dating services impact commitment, and that gender differences still exist in the types of relationships they are seeking to develop online. Those who are in relationships were found more likely to commit to a relationship than those who were not. It can be generalized that they rated their commitment levels to their current relationship. Those who reported seeking more long-term, committed relationships were admittedly also more likely to commit to a monogamous relationship. Further, men were more likely to desire a short-term, less
committed relationship than women, which is consistent with previous studies (Alam et al., 2011; Lenton et al., 2008).

Given the small number of participants in this study, and the disproportionate sample of men and women, more research should be conducted to examine whether the number and quality of matches received on online dating sites is comparable to the CLalt component of social exchange theory, whether there is a distinguishable difference among online daters’ sex and likelihood to commit to a monogamous relationship, and if relationship intentions vary by online dating sites. There is need for more refined measurements of CLalt and likelihood to commit specifically designed for online dating relationships, for less is known about online daters and their likelihood to commit to a relationship.
References


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<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Table 2

_Summary of Relationship and Online Dating Services History Variables (n = 72)_

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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in romantic relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current member of online dating service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First started using online dating</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Within past 6 months</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months to 1 year ago</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2 years ago</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 years ago</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
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Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (n = 72)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<td>People Currently Dating</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>1.07</td>
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<td>0-60</td>
<td>7.18</td>
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<td>Actively Online Dating (in Months)</td>
<td>1-144</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>27.30</td>
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<td>Profiles Read in Typical Session</td>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>9.36</td>
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<td>People Contacted at the Same Time</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>3.60</td>
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<td>Relationships Developed Online</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.75</td>
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<td>Potential Romantic Partners (of those Contacted/Met Online)</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rating of Online Dating Experience</td>
<td>0-8</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.93</td>
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Table 4

Summary of Online Dating Services Frequencies (n = 72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online dating services current/previous members of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match.com</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Okcupid.com</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eHarmony.com</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PlentyofFish (POF.com)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoosk.com</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matchmaker.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry.com</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Total                                         | 130       | 100              | 180.6

*Note:* Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.
Table 5

*Summary of Reasons for Online Dating and Type of Relationship Seeking Frequencies (n = 72)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
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<tr>
<td>To meet new people in the area</td>
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<td>39.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too busy to traditionally date</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ease boredom</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek alternative partners to current</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of relationship looking for online</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term dating</td>
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<td>39.1</td>
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<td>Marriage</td>
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<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Casual dating</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
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<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-night stand/hook-ups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100</td>
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*Note:* Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.
Table 6

*Summary of Reasons Why to Not Pursue a Second Date Frequencies (n = 72)*

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<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No connection or chemistry</td>
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<td>34.1</td>
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<td>Person was not as I expected</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not match personality in profile</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met someone new</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person did not match picture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person lived too far away</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person lied about something they told</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me or I read</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not match personality in emails</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100</td>
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*Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.*
### Table 7

**Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Outcome Variables**

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<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>-1.15 **</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F for $\Delta R^2$</td>
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<td>.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>F for $\Delta R^2$</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td><strong>Commitment (RQ3)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
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<td><strong>Intentions (RQ4)</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.37</td>
<td>-1.03 **</td>
<td>.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intentions</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F for $\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>9.26 **</td>
<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Appendix A – Human Subjects Protocol Approval Letter

California State University
Northridge

Office of the Associate Vice President
Research and Sponsored Projects

October 18, 2012

Lacey Smith
10331 Lindley Ave #266
Northridge, CA 91325

Re: “Online Daters’ Perception of Available Alternatives and its Impact on Commitment to a Relationship” Research Protocol

Dear Ms. Smith:

Enclosed for your records is a copy of the cover sheet of your approved Human Subjects Protocol Form. Please note that your project has been approved as exempt. If there are any changes to your protocol, you must contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects to ensure your project is still within the exempt guidelines.

If you have any questions, call this office at (818) 677-2901.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Selken, Compliance Officer
On Behalf of
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

enclosure
Appendix B – Study Recruitment Flyer

ONLINE DATES WANTED!

Have you, or someone you know, used online dating services in the past year?

Are you between the ages of 25-45 and date members of the opposite sex?

If so, you may be eligible to participate in a study conducted by FCS Family Studies graduate student, Lacey Smith, B.S.

Data will be collected via an online questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. Results of the study will contribute to academic research on online dating.

**Incentive!**

You will be entered in a lottery for a chance to win one of two $50 gift cards to Amazon.com.

To access the questionnaire, please go to the following link:

https://atrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bOe6pnqyTUNwHiJ

For more information about the study, please contact Lacey Smith at lacey.smith.10@my.csun.edu or 760-977-5432.
Appendix C – Online Dating Relationships Questionnaire

This survey is designed to examine online dating relationships and to assess experiences with online dating services. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please read all directions carefully and fully complete the questionnaire with honest responses. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Please check or fill in the appropriate response.

1. Age

2. Sex
   [ ] Male
   [ ] Female
   [ ] Other (please specify) ________________

3. Race/Ethnicity
   [ ] African-American
   [ ] American Indian or Alaskan Native
   [ ] Asian
   [ ] Filipino
   [ ] Pacific Islander
   [ ] Indian, Pakistan
   [ ] Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
   [ ] Latino/a
   [ ] Other (please specify) ________________

4. Religion
   [ ] Atheist/Agnostic
   [ ] Christian
   [ ] Catholic
   [ ] Muslim
   [ ] Hinduism
   [ ] Buddhism
   [ ] Judaism
   [ ] Other (please specify) ________________

5. Occupation
   [ ] Homemaker
   [ ] Professional
   [ ] Proprietor or manager
   [ ] Clerical worker
   [ ] Skilled worker
   [ ] Other (please specify) ________________
6. What is your highest level of education completed?
   [ ] High school
   [ ] Some college
   [ ] Associate's degree
   [ ] Bachelor's degree
   [ ] Master's degree
   [ ] Doctorate degree
   [ ] Technical/trade school
   [ ] Other (please specify) _________________________

7. Have you ever been married?
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No

8. How many legal marriages have you had? ______
   If no, SurveyMonkey will skip participants to question 9.

9. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No

10. How long have you been in your current relationship? _____ years _____ months
    If no, SurveyMonkey will skip participants to question 12.

11. How did you meet this person?
    [ ] Through a friend
    [ ] School or workplace
    [ ] Public setting
    [ ] Online
    [ ] Other (please specify): ______________________________

12. How many people are you currently dating? (i.e., exploring whether you and a person are compatible; assessing the other's suitability as a partner in an intimate relationship or as a spouse). ______
The following questions pertain to online dating services.

13. Are you currently a member of an online dating service?
    [ ] Yes
    [ ] No

14. Please specify all of the following online dating services you are a member of or have previously been a member of.
    [ ] Match.com
    [ ] eHarmony.com
    [ ] Chemistry.com
    [ ] Matchmaker.com
    [ ] Zoosk.com
    [ ] Okcupid.com
    [ ] PlentyofFish (POF.com)
    [ ] Datehookup.com
    [ ] Other (please specify):_____________________________________

15. Do/did these dating sites match you up with other online dating users?
    [ ] Yes
    [ ] No

16. If yes, how many matches on average do/did you typically receive per day? ______
    If no, SurveyMonkey will skip participants to question 18.

17. Out of the number of matches you typically receive(d) per day, what percentage do you consider to be "good" matches? (People that you would actually consider dating).
    [ ] Less than 25%
    [ ] 25%-50%
    [ ] 51%-75%
    [ ] 75%-100%

18. When did you first start using online dating services?
    [ ] Within past 6 months
    [ ] 6 months to 1 year ago
    [ ] 1-2 years ago
    [ ] More than 2 years ago

19. How long have you actively used online dating services? ____years ____months
20. How recently have you used an online dating service?
   [ ] Within the past 1 month
   [ ] Within the past 2-3 months
   [ ] Within the past 4-6 months
   [ ] Within the past 7-9 months
   [ ] Within the past 10-12 months
   [ ] More than one year ago

21. What are your reasons for using an online dating service? Check all that apply.
   [ ] Too busy to traditionally date (due to work, children, etc.)
   [ ] To meet new people in the area
   [ ] To ease boredom
   [ ] Seek alternative partners to current relationship
   [ ] Other (please specify): ________________________________

22. What kind of relationship are you looking for online? Check all that apply.
   [ ] Long-term dating
   [ ] Marriage
   [ ] Casual dating
   [ ] One-night stand/hook-ups
   [ ] Friendship
   [ ] Other (please specify): ________________________________

23. In a typical online dating session, how many profiles, on average, do you read? ______

24. When you first started online dating, how many people, on average, did you attempt to contact at the same time? ______

25. How long do you typically wait from the time you first contact someone to deciding to meet them?
   [ ] Less than a week
   [ ] 1-2 weeks
   [ ] 2 weeks to 1 month
   [ ] 1-2 months
   [ ] More than 2 months
   [ ] I have never met someone in person that I met online
26. How many people have you met online that you went on first dates with in the past year?

- [ ] 0
- [ ] 1-5
- [ ] 6-10
- [ ] 11-20
- [ ] 21-30
- [ ] 31-40
- [ ] 41-50
- [ ] More than 50

27. If you only had one date with someone why did you choose to not pursue a second date? Check all that apply.

- [ ] No connection or chemistry
- [ ] Met someone new
- [ ] Person did not match the personality in their profile
- [ ] Person did not match their picture
- [ ] Person lied about something they told me or I read
- [ ] The person was not as I expected
- [ ] The person lived too far away
- [ ] Person did not match personality in their emails
- [ ] I wanted a one-night stand and the person did not
- [ ] Other (please specify): ____________________________

28. How many romantic relationships (i.e., committed interpersonal relationships involving mutual physical and/or emotional intimacy) have you developed online? _____

29. Of the people you have contacted/met on an online dating service, how many would you consider potential, long-term romantic partners? (i.e., someone you share an intimate relationship with that you perceive as a potential marriage partner) _____

30. Of the people you have contacted/met on an online dating service, how many have been deceitful? (i.e., lied about their age, appearance, economic status; used a fake photo, etc.).

- [ ] 0
- [ ] 1-5
- [ ] 6-10
- [ ] 11-20
- [ ] 21-30
- [ ] 31-40
- [ ] 41-50
- [ ] More than 50
31. Overall, how would you rate your online dating experience? Please select the appropriate response. 0 = Very Negative, 4 = Somewhat Positive, 8 = Very Positive

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<td>Very Positive</td>
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To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please select the appropriate response. 0 = Do Not Agree At All, 4 = Agree Somewhat, 8 = Agree Completely

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32. I want to find someone with whom I can have a serious and committed relationship.

33. I am not interested in dating or looking for a partner to commit to.

34. I am interested in one night stands or affairs.

35. If my relationship with one person doesn’t work out, I would be fine; I am aware that there are plenty of more fish in the sea.

36. My dating alternatives (other potential partners) are attractive to me.

Please answer the following questions based on your likelihood to do the following. Please select the appropriate response. 0 = Not Likely At All, 4 = Somewhat Likely 8 = Very Likely

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37. How likely are you to commit to a romantic relationship (an interpersonal relationship involving mutual physical and/or emotional intimacy) with one person within the next year?

38. How likely are you to remain committed to this romantic relationship with one person for a long-term period?

Thank you for your time.